

## THE STRATEGY OF THE LITHUANIAN NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS 2021-2025

By representing students of all study cycles and forms, the Lithuanian National Union of Students (hereafter called the LSS) continually aims to improve the quality of studies and the situation of students. Being aware of the different positions held by concerned parties, as well as constantly seeking to listen to the voice of students, the LSS is always open to discussions. The LSS strives for a breakthrough in higher education by collaborating with institutions that form higher education policy and, if need be, courageously standing up for the relevant interests of students in a fight of principles.

In fulfilling the main purpose of its activities, the LSS aims to foster the culture of an ever-improving and united organization, in which every member has all of the necessary tools to develop themselves and others, as well as feels as part of the community, meaning: they are heard, can freely express their thoughts and propose ideas. Different insights provided by the vast diversity of opinions and personalities of our members is and always will be our strength, which aids us in making the best of decisions and fulfilling our obligations with the utmost quality.

### Mission

Successful studies in the eyes of students

### Vision

A community of self-governing student bodies at the forefront of advancement in Lithuanian higher education

### Values

**Responsibility** – to ourselves, when undertaking commitments; to the organization, in pursuit of its constant improvement; and, most importantly, to the students, when initiating and implementing changes for their good.

**Competence** – continuous improvement and promotion of progress among the united members, which is necessary for the successful fulfillment of the mission of the LSS.

**Freedom** – the ability to express one's opinion freely, choose the direction, model and measures of one's work.

**Continuity** – consistency in organization's activities based on, but not limited by the organization's institutional memory, while including current and past members.

**Studenthood** – courage and openness to non-standard methods of activity and youthful maximalism.

## **BREAKTHROUGH OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

*Representing legitimate expectations of students is an essential goal of the Lithuanian National Union of Students. In the pursuit of this goal, the LSS, as an equivalent interested party, takes part in the process of forming the direction of higher education policy, ensuring the improvement of the legal framework. The goal of the LSS is for the changes to the legal framework to create conditions that would allow for actual betterment of the situation that students find themselves in, and would initiate change in higher education institutions, while the active study process and the study environment being developed would correspond with the needs and legitimate expectations of students.*

### **Removal of discriminatory provisions in the higher education system**

#### **Description of the objective**

The LSS states that discriminatory provisions still exist within the higher education system. Unequal conditions are created in the stages of admission to a higher education institution and the study process. In order to remove these discriminatory provisions in the higher education system, changes encompassing the requirements of admission to higher education institutions, the ensuring of social benefits of students, as well as uniform implementation of provisions outlined in the Law of Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania across higher education institutions.

#### **Factors critical for success:**

1. The participation of the Lithuanian National Union of Students in legislation processes;
2. Implementation of legislation initiatives.

#### **Tasks:**

1. Equalize the requirements for applying to state-funded and non-state funded study slots;
2. Seek to achieve for at least one alternative method of admission to a higher education institution to be put into law;
3. Ensure that providing students with social benefits would not be tied to their form of study;
4. Ensure that academic debts be regulated uniformly across all higher education institutions;
5. Ensure that the circle of recipients of financial support for disabled persons, outlined in legislature, be widened.

## **Enabling tools for controlling student dropout rates in higher education institutions**

### **Description of the objective**

The problem of students dropping out is relevant to all higher education institutions in Lithuania. By seeking to increase the number of students who successfully complete their studies, the LSS will perform a review of study process monitoring systems currently used by Lithuanian higher education institutions, and form a set of criteria, based on which improvement and deployment of such systems ought to be initialized. Enabled systems will aid higher education institutions in identifying psychological and academic challenges that students face in early stages, providing them with the necessary and timely help, as well as increase the likelihood of students graduating.

### **Factors critical for success:**

1. Higher education institutions have enabled tools for controlling student dropout rates;
2. Student self-governing bodies, united by the LSS, actively become involved in the process of implementing tools for controlling student dropout rates.

### **Tasks:**

1. Perform an analysis of measures for controlling student dropout rates currently used by higher education institutions;
2. Based on the performed analysis, prepare purpose-oriented criteria for tools of controlling student dropout rates;
3. Based on the prepared criteria, seek to either deploy or improve tools for controlling student dropout rates in higher education institutions.

## **An effective system for funding studies and supporting students**

### **Description of the objective**

The LSS would like to bring to attention the fact that the current policy regarding the funding of studies forces higher education institutions to focus on maintaining a high number of students. Because of this reason, worrisome problems can be observed, such as the realistically non-existent rotation of students: holding onto underperforming persons and, at the same time, taking away the opportunity from highly motivated students to apply to state-funded study slots. In addition, an unhealthy level of competition is observed among higher education institutions, which manifests in allocating copious amounts of funds for marketing purposes in order to attract as many students as possible, when those funds could instead be used for improving the quality of services or developing an assistance system that would meet the needs of students.

An effective system for funding studies, in which part of the funds would be allocated to higher education institutions in exchange for reaching set qualitative indicators, would create conditions for higher education institutions to accept the most motivated and well-prepared of students, routinely carry out student rotation, thus no longer discriminating students' right to change the type of financing of their studies, and no longer having any interest in keeping underperforming students. The LSS would like to emphasize that with the change to the financing system of higher education institutions, it is imperative to not forget that the student support system is an integral part of it. A support system that would meet the needs of students would allow them to dedicate the majority of their time to studying, rather than work, in order to satisfy their minimal living needs and not lose the opportunity to seek higher education.

An effective system of funding studies and supporting students would allow focusing on improvements to the quality of studies and the possibility to compete internationally.

### **Factors critical for success:**

1. Operations pertaining to studies in higher education institutions are carried out by applying the new model;
2. Increased state funding per student.

### **Tasks:**

1. To seek that the new funding model would reflect the proposals outlined in the position of the Lithuanian National Union of Students "Regarding the mandatory changes to education in order to reach a breakthrough in higher education";
2. Ensure that students do not suffer from unforeseen additional expenses pertaining to the fulfillment of the study process;
3. Improve the system of state-backed loans for students;
4. Ensure that all students, who meet the criteria outlined in legislature for receiving social scholarships, receive financial support.

## **Creating and maintaining a platform for students to obtain competencies non-formally or independently**

### **Description of the objective**

Upon noticing that higher education institutions devote too little of their attention to developing students' competencies not directly related to their studies, the Lithuanian National Union of Students saw the need to create opportunities for students to develop non-formal competencies in the fields of finance, law and mental health, as well as other fields relevant to students.

### **Factors critical for success:**

1. Contents of the platform for developing competencies based on the requirements of students;
2. Attractive and accessible platform for developing competencies.

### **Tasks:**

1. Perform an analysis regarding the needs of students, meant to determine the lack in competencies;
2. Prepare the content for the platform for developing competencies in collaboration with social partners and interested parties;
3. Ensure a way to deliver the content to students in a widely accessible and user-friendly platform.

## **CREATION OF MEASURES THAT FORM AN INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY AND THE ORGANIZATION OF PROCESSES**

*In seeking to include its members in its activities, the Lithuanian National Union of Students faces substantial challenges – rapid rotation of members, limited resources and generating added value. Wishing to combat these challenges, the organization seeks to optimize the processes related to developing competencies, thus saving on resources but maintaining the quality of the process. In addition, the organization seeks to create measures that would form an institutional memory, which would generate greater added value for LSS members and would reduce the effects of member rotation.*

### **Deploying and maintaining a system for remote learning**

#### **Description of the objective**

Due to the rapid rotation of members within the Lithuanian National Union of Students, shared competencies of student self-governing bodies are highly dynamic and their transfer is not ensured. In seeking to create an institutional memory and reduce the amount of resources used for the development of competencies, the LSS will create a remote learning system, which will enable members of student self-governing bodies to develop basic competencies, allow ensuring a more rapid integration of new members and provide the members with the opportunity to learn independently.

#### **Factors critical for success:**

1. Remote learning courses created for all levels of competence;
2. The content of the courses is presented in an attractive and widely accessible platform.

#### **Tasks:**

1. Prepare the content for the learning platform in collaboration with the LSS community and outside partners;
2. Create special incentives meant to promote the use of the remote learning system to educate new members;
3. Ensure regular updates of remote learning materials.



## **Deploying and populating in information storage platform**

### **Description of the objective**

The Lithuanian National Union of Students is currently comprised of 29 student self-governing bodies, which accomplish goals, carry out projects and initiatives every year. Despite the fact that we have such a large network of experiences and information, the intellectual property generated by all these self-governing bodies and the LSS office is stored across different platforms, not accessible to all interest student representatives and, because of their rotation – is lost. In seeking to increase the added value of membership in the LSS, the Union will promote learning from one another. For this purpose, a multifunctional information storage system will be created, which will store the entirety of the LSS institutional memory and good practices.

### **Factors critical for success:**

1. A convenient easily accessible multifunctional information storage platform;
2. Office members use a single document storage platform when communicating with self-governing bodies.

### **Tasks:**

1. Deploy a convenient and easily accessible information storage platform;
2. Upload the entirety of the current LSS institutional memory and update it regularly;
3. Create an automated information sharing system, where members of self-governing bodies can access information relevant to their needs;
4. Perform yearly reviews regarding the effectiveness of the database;
5. Create a program that would encourage members of self-governing bodies to update the database with new content.

## **AN EVERGROWING AND IMPROVING COMMUNITY OF STUDENT SELF-GOVERNING BODIES**

*The vision of the Lithuanian National Union of Students is to have a community of student self-governing bodies, which makes progress in the area of Lithuanian higher education. In seeking to strengthen student self-governing bodies, so that they could make progress in the area of higher education, as well as create and foster the feeling of belonging to a community within the organization, the Union shall provide the self-governing bodies with the tools necessary for combatting challenges, and raising the level of competence, alongside of introducing initiatives promoting communality and the sharing of experience.*

### **Analysis of student self-governing bodies and providing them with assistance measures**

#### **Description of the objective:**

In the Lithuanian National Union of Students, we have many different self-governing bodies with unique needs, problems, strengths and weaknesses. In seeking that self-governing bodies could look at their organizations strategically, introduce long-term initiatives to improve the operations of the organization, grow and improve more rapidly, the Union shall perform analyses of student self-governing bodies, based on which individual and joint assistance measures will be initiated to combat reoccurring problems.

#### **Factors critical for success:**

1. An objective tool, intended for performing an analysis of a self-governing body;
2. Self-governing bodies implement at least some of the recommendations for improving their operation, given by the office, yearly.

#### **Tasks:**

1. Prepare a tool for analysis that would meet everyone's needs;
2. Carry out yearly self-assessments in every self-governing body with a Full Member status;
3. Seek implementation of recommendations across all self-governing bodies with a Full Member status;
4. Ensure that all self-governing bodies with a Full Member status would educate newly joined organization members by introducing them to current results, goals and progress;
5. Create initiatives that would encourage solving commonly occurring problems across different self-governing bodies.



## **Fostering communality and sharing good practices of self-governing bodies**

### **Description of the objective:**

Even though the Lithuanian National Union of Students unites a large number of members, relatively little involvement in the activities of the LSS is observed. In seeking to foster the feeling of belonging to a community, the LSS shall create spaces, meant for sharing the good practices of self-governing bodies, educating one another and communication among different fields.

### **Factors critical for success:**

1. Initiatives meant for promoting communality among self-governing bodies of the organization;
2. An environment that encourages self-governing bodies to share good practices.

### **Tasks:**

1. Organize initiatives meant to promote communality within the LSS;
2. Ensure a regular sharing of experiences among committee members within domains coordinated by the LSS;
3. Create a motivational system, dedicated to sharing experiences among student self-governing bodies;
4. Deploy an LSS mentorship program.

## **Development of competencies necessary for carrying out targeted activities**

### **Description of the objective:**

In order to fulfill the strategy of the LSS, purposeful education of its members is essential. With the aim to reduce the consequences of rotation, include a larger number of student representatives, and act based on the latest information during the period of strategy implementation, a methodology for developing competencies shall be created, which will foresee the necessary competencies, education time-frames, target groups, means used etc. Student representatives will be educated for pursuing the goals of the Union in accordance with this methodology.

### **Factors critical for success:**

1. A methodology encompassing all competencies necessary for carrying out targeted activities.

### **Tasks:**

1. Clearly outline competencies, necessary for carrying out targeted activities;
2. Create and implement a methodology for developing competencies within target groups, one that is oriented towards reaching strategic goals;
3. Deploy a system for evaluating competencies.

## EXTERNAL FUNDING ACTIVITIES

### **Sustainable management of external funding of the Lithuanian National Union of Students**

#### **Description of the objective:**

Activity that would ensure the financial stability of the LSS, independent representation of student interests, while reducing reliance on revenue generated from Lithuanian student IDs.

#### **Factors critical for success:**

1. Ensured expansion of external funding sources.

#### **Tasks:**

1. Become involved in the procedures of providing public services;
2. Leverage the currently available infrastructure to attract additional funding.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE LITHUANIAN STUDENT IDENTITY CARD

### **Development of an innovative and attractive Lithuanian student Identity Card (LSIC).**

#### **Description of the objective:**

Lithuanian student Identity Card (conforming to ISO 7810 standard) is a product developed by the Lithuanian National Union of Students. The goal of the Union is to increase the attractiveness of the Lithuanian student Identity Card to students and higher education institutions by developing the product. Note: the development of the LSIC is not tied to increasing generated revenue.

#### **Factors critical for success:**

1. Meeting the needs of students and higher education institutions in real time;
2. Ensuring an environment for developing the LSIC infrastructure.

#### **Tasks:**

1. Optimize the system of LSIC administration;
2. Promote the integration of LSIC within higher education institutions;
3. Digitalize the Lithuanian student Identity Card;
4. Prepare for the integration of the European eCard (EU Student eCard initiative) into the Lithuanian student Identity Card.

## Annex 1. Indicators of strategy objectives.

### **BREAKTHROUGH OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

#### **Eliminating discriminatory provisions within the higher education system**

1. A passed amendment to legislature that regulates the admission to higher education institutions and implements the recommendations made by the LSS.
2. A passed amendment to legislature that ensures improved accessibility to social security and implements the recommendations made by the LSS.

#### **Enabling tools for controlling student dropout rates in higher education institutions**

1. In at least 15\* higher education institutions psychological help to students should be provided in no longer than a week from student contacting them.
2. At least 15\* higher education institutions have functioning tools for controlling student dropout rates, which meet the criteria set by the LSS.

*\*The Lithuanian National Union of Students unites 29 student self-governing bodies across Lithuania, 15 of which have a Full Member status and voting rights in the collegial governing body – the Council, which makes decisions regarding changes initiated by the LSS, oriented towards the internal processes of higher education institutions. Taking into account the fact that the success of implementing the objectives is tied to the active involvement and groundwork regarding this problem done by the student self-governing bodies within higher education institutions, the indicator was set to a minimal limit of 15 higher education institutions, while tying it to the number of Full Members.*

#### **An effective system of funding studies and supporting students**

1. In Lithuania, state funding per student is equal to 75% of the EU average.
2. A passed amendment to legislature, which ensures that paying back state-backed student loans would only begin once the graduate's compensation meets or exceeds the national average.
3. At least 5% of first and second cycle\* students must receive motivational scholarships, given for academic achievements, which would be sizeable enough to at least cover minimal needs of students.

*\*First and second cycle studies were selected for the indicator because, based on the government ruling "Guidance regarding the provision of support to doctorate students", which regulates the support of doctorate students, all full-time doctorate students of sciences and arts, whose doctorate studies are financed by the state, doctorate scholarships, which exceed coverage of minimal needs, are paid as a form of state support.*

## **Creating and maintaining a platform for students to obtain competencies non-formally or independently**

1. A functioning platform that is easily accessible by students is launched.
2. Regular updating of the platform's content, based on the needs of students, done at least every six months.

## **CREATION OF MEASURES FORMING INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY AND ORGANIZATION OF PROCESSES**

### **Deploying and maintaining a system for remote learning**

1. At least 80%\* of Full Members of the LSS, area coordinators have reviewed at least 80%\* of remote learning content pertaining to their area.

*\*Once year (if possible – with the help of IT, if not – by conducting an investigation) coordinators of all areas of central offices of LSS Full Members are reviewed. The percentage for successful fulfillment of the objective was set in February of 2021, after conducting a survey of LSS human resources coordinators.*

2. All LSS Full Members inform newly joined members about the remote learning possibilities within the first three months.

### **Deploying and populating in information storage platform**

1. At least 80%\* of LSS Full Members have used the database.

*\* The percentage for successful fulfillment of the objective was set in February of 2021, after conducting a survey of LSS human resources coordinators. To measure the objective, web analysis tools are used, which track the number of members that log in. The analysis will be performed annually.*

2. Members of LSS self-governing bodies\* receive personalized information about the possibilities of developing competencies at least once a quarter.

*\*Members of self-governing bodies are: presidents, area managers, members of the Supervisory Committee, members of a collegial governing body. If needed -- members of other governing or enforcement bodies.*

3. At least 5 self-governing bodies have shared remote learning content, podcasts, web shows or documents of their creation, which could be relevant to other members of the organization.

## AN EVERGROWING AND IMPROVING COMMUNITY OF STUDENT SELF-GOVERNING BODIES

### Analysis of student self-governing bodies and providing them with assistance measures

1. 50%\* of self-governing bodies that have completed self-analysis, implement priority recommendations.

*\*The percentage for successful fulfillment of the objective was set in February of 2021, after conducting a survey of LSS human resources coordinators.*

2. Self-analysis of LSS Full Members is carried out at least once a year.

### Fostering communality and sharing good practices of self-governing bodies

1. At least 3\* initiatives meant to foster communality within the LSS are organized a year.

*\*Currently the Lithuanian National Union of Students organizes 3 initiatives meant to foster communality within the LSS: the LSS Assembly; the LSS Rally; the LSS Christmas thanksgiving evening. Even though the initiatives themselves can change, the goal is for their number to not decrease.*

2. 90%\* of self-governing bodies from Full Members participate in LSS initiatives meant for fostering communality within the LSS.

*\*Participation in initiatives meant for fostering communality within the LSS of 2020: The Assembly – 93.75%; the LSS Christmas thanksgiving evening – 80%; the LSS Rally – 81.25% of self-governing bodies.*

3. Coordinated areas, as appropriate, organize at least 4 meetings for sharing news and activities, as well as initiate at least 2 work groups or other types of activities meant for working together in a year.

*\*Main coordinated areas of the LSS office (Committee for social and academic matters, Human Resources Coordinator, Projects, Communication) at least once a quarter have meetings of these areas, meant for discussing the news of self-governing bodies and the LSS. At least 2 work groups or similar activities are created meant for working together. If at least one part of these indicators is not fulfilled in at least one of the aforementioned areas, the indicator is considered not fulfilled.*

4. At least two international experience sharing events are organized. \*

*\*Within the four years of implementing the strategy, it is the goal of the LSS to organize at least 2 international experience sharing events, having in mind that in the upcoming 4 years the LSS will organize the Baltic Organizational Meeting (BOM).*

5. At least 50%\* of people who have participated in the mentorship program have stated that the program has helped them improve in how they carry out activities.

*\*The percentage for successful fulfillment of the objective was set in February of 2021, after conducting a survey of LSS human resources coordinators.*

6. The LSS at least partially funds no less than 3 initiatives for developing competencies, the goal of which is to share the experience of student self-governing bodies with one another.



## **Development of competencies necessary for carrying out targeted activities**

1. All LSS Full Members are included in implementing the methodology for developing competencies.
2. All measures outlined in the methodology that are necessary for the development of competencies are implemented each year.

## **EXTERNAL FUNDING ACTIVITIES**

### **Sustainable management of external funding of the Lithuanian National Union of Students**

1. From 2023, at least two permanent external funding sources are secured.
2. From 2025, at least 20% of revenue has to come from external sources – public and infrastructure related services\*.

*\*Main sources of LSS external funding (2018-2020 data):*

- 80% of the entire budget of the LSS comes from revenue generated from the Lithuania student Identity Card;
- 15% of the entire budget of the LSS comes from revenue generated through projects. In the context of reaching the objective, this revenue is not considered as external funding;
- 5% of the entire budget of the LSS comes from the LSIC partnership program.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF THE LITHUANIAN STUDENT IDENTITY CARD**

### **Development of an innovative and attractive Lithuanian student Identity Card (LSIC).**

1. At least 15 higher education institutions use the LSIC as an integral tool in the infrastructure of the institution\*.

*\*The Lithuanian National Union of Students unites 29 student self-governing bodies across Lithuania, 15 of which have a Full Member status and voting rights in the collegial governing body – the Council, which makes decisions regarding changes initiated by the LSS, oriented towards the internal processes of higher education institutions. Taking into account the fact that the success of implementing the objectives is tied to the active involvement and groundwork regarding this problem done by the student self-governing bodies within higher education institutions, the indicator was set to a minimal limit of 15 higher education institutions, while tying it to the number of Full Members.*

2. At least 75%\*\* of full-time students purchase either a physical or a digital copy of the Lithuanian student Identity Card.

*\*\*Number of full-time students who ordered an LSIC: 2018 – 62%, 2019 – 67%, 2020 – ~67%.*

3. A digital alternative to a physical LSIC is created: a mobile app.
4. Optimized blank initialization and personalization process, reducing the time per blank from 96 to 67 seconds.