

Student participation in Spain

Trajectory and context

The Spanish university students were especially active and decisive in the recovery of democracy in Spain, especially from 1964 onwards, being the forerunner of what later became known internationally as "May 68". Likewise, it played a leading role in the Spanish transition and in the democratization of the university, influencing a large part of the articles of Organic Law 11/83, of August 25, on University Reform (LRU), which remained in force until on January 13, 2002. The LRU established, for the first time, a student representation by university centers.

At present, the participation of the different political actors in the governance of the Spanish university system is configured on three separate axes: the General Conference on University Policy, the Council of Universities and the Council of State University Students.

The Autonomous Communities, which exercise powers in higher education, are the protagonists of the [General Conference on University Policy](#), the coordinating body between the Ministry of Universities and the Governing Councils of the Autonomous Communities. This forum allows multilevel coordination of the university system, largely decentralized in the Spanish case.

On the other hand, there is the Council of Universities, regulated in [Royal Decree 1677/2009](#), which serves as a space for coordination and cooperation between the Ministry of Universities and Spanish universities, represented in the figure of their rectors and rectors. Finally, and more recently, the participation of the student body was configured around the Council of University Students of the State (CEUNE), which annually brings together the Ministry of Universities, the maximum student representation of each public and private university, as well as the students representing the regional advisory bodies where they exist.

With a long tradition in Spain, the student movement has taken various formal expressions, such as those represented in this and other participation bodies, as well as informal ones, through associations and groups (more liquid), mostly independent. Although, while it is true, there has also been a small partisan fraction within the movement.

The participation model that exists in the different levels of governance present in Spain is detailed below.

Spanish State

Student participation at the state level is regulated in the [Organic Law of Modification of the Organic Law of Universities](#) (LOMLOU), of 2007, which provides for the elaboration of a Statute of the university student and the creation of the Council of university students, in order to to articulate the necessary participation of students in the university system.

The aforementioned Council of State University Students (CEUNE) was created in 2011 from the publication of the [University Student Statute](#). This Council is the body for deliberation, consultation and participation of university students, before the Ministry of Universities. It is made up of the following people:

- a) A student representing each of the Spanish, public and private universities.

- b) A representative, a university student, from each of the confederations and federations of student associations with a presence in the State School Council.
 - c) A representative, a university student, from each of the Autonomous Student Councils that are constituted or that will be constituted in the future.
 - d) Three representatives, university students, belonging to confederations, federations and student associations that pursue general interests and are not represented by way of point b) above, at the rate of one representative per entity.
 - e) Five members appointed by its President, among renowned personalities in the field of higher education who are, or have been, members of the Governing Councils of universities or student associations or organizations.
 - f) In addition, the following will be ex officio members of the State University Student Council:
 - i. The Minister of Universities, who will act as President.
 - ii. The Secretary General of Universities, who will act as First Vice President.
 - iii. The head of the General Directorate of University Training and Guidance, who will act as Secretary.
2. Of the student representatives and, elected by the Plenary, one will be Second Vice President.

The following functions of the State University Student Council are recognized in the regulation:

- a) Inform the criteria of the Government's political proposals in the matter of university students and in those subjects for which a report from the State University Student Council is required.
- b) Be an interlocutor with the Ministry of Education, in matters that concern students.
- c) Actively contribute to the defense of students' rights, cooperating with Student Associations and student representation bodies.
- d) To ensure the adequate performance of the governing bodies of the universities with regard to the rights and duties of the students established in the Statutes of each one of them.
- e) Receive and, where appropriate, channel complaints made by university students.
- f) Collaborate with the University Defenders, in guarantee of the rights of the students of the Spanish universities.
- g) Establish relationships with other institutions and entities for the promotion and development of their institutional purposes.
- h) Submit proposals to the Government in matters related to its competence.
- i) To pronounce, when deemed appropriate, on any matter for which it is required by the Minister of Education, the Secretary General of Universities or by any other instance that requests it.
- j) Know the reports related to the degree map.
- k) To be represented and participate in the setting of criteria for the granting of scholarships and other aid for students, within the scope of the State's competence.

- l) Encourage student associations and student participation in university life.
- m) Make pronouncements on their own initiative and act as an interlocutor for the students before the Administration, the media and society, within the scope of the State's competence.
- n) Ensure and promote equality between women and men in the university environment.
- o) Ensure compliance with this Statute
- p) Any other functions assigned to them by the University Student Statute, its development regulations and current legislation.

In addition to this structure of coordination and cooperation with the Government of Spain, the Spanish student body has its own forums for participation, exclusively for students.

In this sense, the most representative student organization in Spain is the [Coordinator of Student Representatives of Public Universities](#) (CREUP), which brings together the student councils or delegations of 33 public universities, representing more than 1,000,000 university students.

Autonomous communities

At the regional level, there is a reality of student participation as diverse as the 17 autonomous communities that exercise higher education competencies. The most widespread formula is participation in regional student councils, which are advisory bodies for the dialogue between the student body and the governments of the autonomous communities. But these bodies are still a minority and are only made up of a third of the autonomies.

On the other hand, there are also examples of a greater possibility of student participation in the highest university body at the regional level, as is the case in Andalusia, where the [Andalusian Council of Universities](#) brings together the competent Ministry of Universities, the rectors and rectors of Andalusia, the presidents of the Social Councils, a representation of the Parliament of Andalusia, and, for the first time, since 2012, two student representatives emanating from the regional student council.

In turn, as at the state level, in various autonomous communities there are associations and reference forums that bring together only university students, to debate the policies and situations that affect them independently.

Universities

At the local level, in each university, is where the greatest student participation occurs in its various forms: government and management; academic and quality; social, cultural and sports. In addition, it is at the local level where there is greater diversity and complementarity between formal and informal participation, coexisting, on the one hand, the highest student representation bodies (MORE), with associations and grassroots organizations.

These MOREs are as diverse as the rules of each university, which in addition to belonging to different autonomous communities, with different laws, develop their own statutes (internal rules). The majority model is the Student Council, indirectly elected in most universities, and in some by universal student suffrage.

Spanish legislation provides for different guarantees and safeguards so that student participation is effective in all universities. In this sense, the LOMLOU recognizes in its article 46) i. "it already regulates that the student body can "obtain academic recognition for their participation in cultural, sports, student representation, solidarity and cooperation university activities".

On the other hand, the University Student Statute contemplates in its article 7 the following rights common to all students:

"r) To freedom of expression, assembly and association in the university environment, free from all direct and indirect discrimination, as an expression of co-responsibility in educational management and proactive respect for people and the university institution.

s) To have an active and participatory representation, within the framework of collective responsibility, in the governing and representative bodies of the University, in the terms established in this Statute and in the respective Statutes or university organization and functioning regulations.

t) To participate in the election of the governing bodies of the university where they carry out their academic activity under the terms provided in their respective Statutes.

u) To be informed and to participate in a co-responsible way in the establishment and operation of the university permanence regulations approved by the Social Council of the same. "

Finally, it is worth highlighting the initiative of some universities to develop comprehensive plans to promote student participation, the extraordinary presence of some student representatives on Boards of Directors of various universities (very exceptional cases in the history of Spanish universities), or the creation of own student infrastructures endowed autonomously.

In this sense, the culture of Spanish student participation is characterized by its enormous diversity throughout the territory, coexisting in Spain student realities as diverse as the country, with very strong student movements in some territories, and weak student participation institutional in others.

Equality and inclusion

At the state level, equality and inclusion are promoted and ensured through the following regulation. The LOMLOU in its article 46 provides:

"B) Equal opportunities and non-discrimination for reasons of sex, race, religion or disability or any other personal or social condition or circumstance in access to the university, admission to the centers, permanence in the university and exercise of their rights academics.

j) Receive non-sexist treatment.

k) Care that facilitates combining studies with work activity. "

This article is developed in greater depth in the University Student Statute as follows in its article 4 on non-discrimination:

"All university students, regardless of their origin, have the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of birth, racial or ethnic origin, sex, religion, conviction or opinion, age, disability, nationality, illness, sexual orientation and identity. gender, socioeconomic, idiomatic or linguistic condition, or political and union affinity, or for reasons of appearance, overweight or obesity, or for any other

personal or social condition or circumstance, with the sole requirement of acceptance of democratic norms and respect for citizens, the constitutional basis of Spanish society ”.

In its article 7:

"W) To receive non-sexist treatment and equal opportunities between women and men in accordance with the principles established in Organic Law 3/2007, of March 22, for the effective equality of women and men."

In its article 38:

"5. The administrations with competence in university matters and the universities, will allocate in their budgets the corresponding items, which allow subsidizing the management of these associations and the participation in them of the students respecting the principle of equality and non-discrimination based on age, sex, race, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, or any other personal or social circumstance ”.

While it is true that effective equality and inclusion still has a long way to go to reach satisfactory levels in Spanish universities, especially at the level of student participation.