

ELIA Students Working Group

Strategic Playbook

Preamble: Student Engagement within ELIA

Students have long been an active part of ELIA's community, with different levels and stages of engagement. What started as participation in selected projects and events has shifted in the past years towards a sustained recognition as **active contributors** to the present and future of higher arts education.

This engagement acknowledges the student community as integral to higher arts education and reflects the understanding that educational, social, and cultural change shape their experiences **directly and acutely**. In recent years, student-led discussions, breakout groups, and collaborative formats at ELIA events have highlighted both the richness of student perspectives and the need for sustained, peer-driven spaces for shared experiences, collective learning, and agency.

The Students Working Group and Community Hub are grounded in [ELIA's Strategy](#) and core values of **embodying plurality** through diverse student voices, experiences, and ways of knowing, practicing care in learning environments, and '**leaping beyond the now**' by questioning existing institutional structures and experiment with new forms of practice.

By building on this history and strategic grounding, the working group and hub creates a dedicated, student-curated space within ELIA that supports peer learning, collective reflection, and **student agency**, while remaining connected to ELIA's wider community and supported by the ELIA team.

The primary purpose of the Students Working Group is to create a student-led space for peer learning, exchange and collective development within the ELIA community. Through the insights, experiences and ideas emerging from this work, the group also contributes perspectives that may inform ELIA's programmes, organisational learning and advocacy where relevant.

Why we exist

We come together to create, curate and sustain a dedicated space for student agency (from and for students) within the ELIA network through the ELIA Students Community Hub.

We respond to the shared need vocalised by fellow students, for connection and collective reflection across borders in a time of uncertainty and rapid change.

The Working Group does not seek to represent all ELIA students or speak on behalf of a single student voice. Rather, it creates a space where diverse student perspectives and experiences can be shared, explored and brought into dialogue with ELIA's wider community. It is a space *for* students working *with* students, sharing experiences, questions, strategies, and imaginaries, and building confidence in how we navigate institutions, practices, and futures collectively.

At its core, we, the members of the working group, **aim to support one another in:**

- understanding the conditions we study and work within,
- articulating our needs, values, and concerns,
- experimenting with ways of learning and organising,
- building the knowledge, skills, and capacities needed to navigate evolving artistic, educational, and professional futures,
- fostering a culture of solidarity and mutual care, and
- building collective confidence in how we interact with and move through institutional structures and power.

We recognise that this work takes place within relationships shaped by asymmetrical power between students, staff, and institutions, and we are committed to navigating these dynamics with care, clarity, and collective responsibility.

While the direction and content of this group are student-led, we are supported by the ELIA team, which provides continuity, organisational infrastructure, and connection to the wider network. This shared responsibility helps make participation sustainable, inclusive, and meaningful over time.

What we work on

We work on issues that matter to students across higher arts education, recognising that experiences differ widely across institutions, countries, and personal situations. Rather than fixing a closed agenda, we focus on shared areas of concern that can evolve over time.

We prioritise areas through collective discussion, focusing on topics and needs as they emerge and in line with our two-year strategic plan. This allows us to turn ideas into action through student-led sessions, shared resources, or collaborations, aiming for concrete actions like toolkits or inputs to various channels of engagement with the Community Hub and adaptable to evolving priorities.

- **Student Life and Conditions of Study**

We explore what it means to study art today, including workload, wellbeing, access, precarity, and economic realities such as tuition fees, dependence on paid work to manage alongside studies, unpaid or low paid internships or labour, and varying national contexts for student support. We create space to share experiences and to name challenges that are often felt individually but shaped structurally.

- **Learning, Teaching, and Pedagogical Cultures**

We reflect on how learning happens in our institutions, what supports or limits it, and how students can actively shape educational practices. This includes exploring alternative formats, peer learning, feedback cultures, and experimentation beyond traditional classroom models.

- **Agency, Voice, and Engagement**

We work on strengthening student agency: learning how to speak up, how to be heard, and how to engage with institutional structures without being tokenised or overburdened. This includes sharing strategies for dialogue, collaboration, and collective action.

- **Transitions and Professional Futures**

We address moments of transition from entering studies, graduating, moving into professional life, or pivoting paths. We share knowledge, uncertainties, and resources related to these shifts, recognising that studies and career paths are multiple and non-linear.

- **Community, Solidarity, and Care**

We value connection across borders, disciplines, and differences. We work on building solidarity between students, recognising care as a shared responsibility and an essential condition for learning, creativity, and participation.

How we work together

We work in ways that reflect the values we care about.

This group is student-led in its direction and content. Decisions about topics, formats, and priorities are shaped collectively by students.

We prioritise:

- openness and mutual respect,
- listening as much as speaking,
- learning from difference rather than aiming for consensus, and
- making space for different skills and experiences.

We value process over perfection. Expertise and presence are appreciated. Contributions can take many forms from speaking and listening to organising, reflecting, or simply being present. Our group acts as a space for collective exploration, embracing friction, critical perspectives, and dialogue.

Members are expected to attend online meetings and contribute to the activities of the Students Working Group and the wider Community Hub. The Working Group meets regularly online, approximately every six weeks, with an estimated average time investment of four to six hours per month, depending on planned activities. In addition to these fixed meetings, optional thematic meetings may be convened to address urgent global issues or emerging priorities.

To reflect ELIA's diverse global membership, including different continents, time zones, cultures, and regional contexts, the Working Group operates primarily online and treats the digital environment not only as a practical necessity but also as a space for experimentation and innovation. Members are encouraged to explore and develop new approaches to online collaboration, participation, knowledge exchange, and collective decision-making that can support more inclusive and connected forms of international student engagement.

The group combines synchronous gatherings with asynchronous forms of collaboration, using shared digital tools, distributed working methods, clear handover processes, and emerging technologies where appropriate. Between meetings, members remain connected through a shared online space for updates, reflections, collaborative work, and informal exchange. By working in this way, the group aims both to enable participation across distances and to contribute new models of online collaboration that may inform wider ELIA activities and networks. The rhythm of work should remain sensitive to student workloads, exam periods, and different levels of capacity.

The group might explore in person gatherings, possibly combined with activities to ELIA events, to collaboratively develop deliverables such as knowledge resources, guidelines, policy recommendations, experimental formats, and events. Participation in the Working Group is voluntary and unremunerated. Any intellectual property created as part of the group's activities is owned by ELIA, while contributing members retain the right to use such material for their own research and study purposes.

Whenever feasible, Community Hub events are organised in proximity to, or in collaboration with, other ELIA events to support broad participation and address ecological and economic sustainability concerns. The Working Group may not incur costs without prior approval from the ELIA Executive Group. Member institutions of the working group members cover travel and accommodation costs unless other funding mechanisms are in place.

How we organise ourselves

[ELIA's governance rules for Working Groups apply to the ELIA Students Working Group.](#)

Membership in the Students Working Group is open to ELIA members. The group consists of eight to ten members, and each member acts on a personal mandate; there is no delegation or substitution. The Working Group reports to the ELIA Executive Group.

The Student Working Group's composition adheres to ELIA's principles of diversity and representation, aiming to bring together a wide range of perspectives and ways of working and studying. In line with [ELIA's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion \(EDI\) policy](#) we value and strive for a balanced foundation across roles, study levels, geographical representation and institutional contexts from the outset. The group seeks to create space for exchange across artistic disciplines, lived experiences, and approaches to learning and practice.

The selection process for new Working Group members follows an open call procedure initiated by the Working Group, through which member institutions are invited to nominate candidates. Calls may incorporate specific selection criteria to support diversity of expertise, experience, and geographic representation. The Working Group drafts a proposal for appointments upon receipt of submissions. This proposal (including justification) is presented to the ELIA Executive Group by the Working Group's Chair. The Executive Group formally appoints the new members of the Working Group.

The regular term for participation for Working Group members is two years, with the possibility of extension up to four years, enabling sustained contribution and the rotation of new voices. Members who graduate during their term may remain in the Working Group until the end of that calendar year to support continuity and the handover to new members.

We understand this group as a living and evolving space. To support continuity, we pay attention to:

- sharing knowledge and experiences across cohorts through shared documentation,
- building a collective archive, collecting resources, and decisions in an accessible way so that any member can contribute and refer to it,

- creating gentle handover moments when members step in or out through a buddy system,
- crediting individual or collective contributions where relevant, so past labour and ideas can be referenced in future work, ELIA outputs, or personal portfolios.

We experiment with formats such as online gatherings, in-person moments, workshops, informal conversations, or collaborative projects and allow these to change as needs change.

The group does not aim to produce constant outputs. Instead, it focuses on meaningful encounters, learning, and relationships, trusting that insights and initiatives will emerge from these processes.

In addition to its student membership, the Students Working Group may engage with an advisory group or collaborate with relevant ELIA Working Groups to inform its work. This structure is designed to maintain a clear student-led mandate while enabling access to professional, pedagogical, and organisational expertise when relevant. Advisory input is consultative, supporting reflection, contextual understanding, and the development of proposals without replacing or diluting student agency within the group.

Why we participate

Participation in this group offers a dual impact: immediate support through a global peer network and long-term influence on the future of arts education.

We build a unique international network of peer students facing similar challenges across diverse contexts offering perspectives, solidarity, and strategies. These connections extend beyond studies, creating relationships that outlast membership turnover and support transitions to professional life.

Working internationally allows us to recognise patterns that extend beyond individual institutions or national systems. By sharing we can learn from one another, identify shared challenges, and imagine alternatives that may not be visible from within a single local context. The diversity of perspectives within the network is not only something we accommodate; it is one of the group's greatest sources of insight and creativity.

Practically, we advocate for reciprocity to make involvement sustainable by exploring paid opportunities where possible, pursuing ECTS credits or institutional recognition for time invested, and collaborating with ELIA and member institutions to justify absences or workloads. Acknowledging that much student labour remains voluntary amid sector precarity, the group names this reality and pushes for meaningful support, without making it a prerequisite for joining.

Ultimately, we participate out of urgency, to shape the conditions we study and live within, together. The networks, insights, and agency gained are ends in themselves, even as we work to reduce barriers.

Our relationship with ELIA

We are part of the ELIA community and contribute to it from a student perspective.

Beyond serving students, the group also functions as an advisory and reflective space for ELIA's operations, organisational development, and advocacy work. The group does not represent a single, coherent student voice; it brings together perspectives from a diverse student community and carries insights from the Community Hub back into ELIA's wider governance and advocacy processes. In this way, it works as a connector rather than a spokesperson, feeding lived experience, questions, and concerns into broader institutional conversations.

Through collective insights, conversations, and reflections, the group offers perspectives that can inform ELIA's programmes, events, and ways of working, as well as support member institutions in engaging with student experience and participation.

The Working Group is part of ELIA's Community Hub ecosystem, engaging and developing synergies with the strategic themes explored across different hubs and helps bring these perspectives into a wider, cross-institutional dialogue. It also supports exchange between student members of different Community Hubs, fostering peer learning and identifying synergies across local initiatives and shared areas of interest.

Where relevant, insights emerging from the group may also feed into ELIA's advocacy efforts, helping to ground policy positions, sectoral conversations, and external engagement in students' lived realities. This contribution is exploratory and dialogical, rather than representative or directive. The advisory and advocacy role of the group is collective. No student is expected to speak on behalf of all students or to act as a spokesperson. ELIA's advocacy work is shaped through meaningful student participation, with respect for students' capacity and wellbeing.

In doing so, ELIA strengthens student-informed learning, reflection, and advocacy across the community.

ELIA supports the Working Group through organisational infrastructure and facilitation and will seek, where feasible, to enable broad and diverse student participation.