

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION

Skills and education for Europe's competitiveness

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POLICY INPUTS

Skills and education for Europe's competitiveness

Response to the European Commission's Communication on the Union of Skills

The European Commission's Communication on the Union of Skills is a timely call for more and better investment in citizens' skills and competencies.



The Commission's communication on the Union of Skills is a timely call for more and better investment in citizens' skills and competencies. It highlights the importance of skills and competencies for Europe's competitiveness and the need for a more integrated approach to skills and education. The communication also calls for a more holistic approach to skills and education, taking into account the needs of all citizens and the challenges of the future. The EUA supports the Commission's vision and calls for a more integrated approach to skills and education, taking into account the needs of all citizens and the challenges of the future.

Read more >

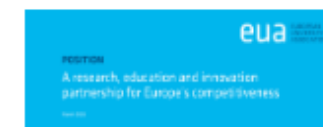
<https://www.eua.eu/publications/policy-input/skills-and-education-for-europes-competitiveness.h>



26 Mar 2025
POSITIONS

A research, education and innovation partnership for Europe's competitiveness

To truly foster a competitive economy, Europe must sustain the entire ecosystem of knowledge, skills and culture that produces solutions over time.



The EUA supports the Commission's vision of a research, education and innovation partnership for Europe's competitiveness. We believe that a strong ecosystem of knowledge, skills and culture is essential for Europe to sustain its competitive edge in the global market. We call for a more integrated approach to research, education and innovation, taking into account the needs of all citizens and the challenges of the future. The EUA supports the Commission's vision and calls for a more integrated approach to research, education and innovation, taking into account the needs of all citizens and the challenges of the future.

Read more >

<https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/a-research-education-and-innovation-partnership-for-europes-competitiveness.html>



EUA's position

Europe's skills gap cannot be solved by a few flagship institutions alone.

EUA March 2025

Concern about timely & prompt response to skills gaps

- Skills intelligence is important – but no simple responses – e.g. need to go beyond the STEM
- Existing skills gaps
- Demographic developments
- Lead time (HE programmes, capacities, time to graduation)

Leverage the strategic importance of higher education & research

- Building on and enhance the strength of the European HE and research system
- Appeal to all disciplines and all types HEI
- Importance of inter- and multidisciplinary approaches – also for innovation Investment from both public and private funders – f.e. through a 'Skills Fund'
- Skills intelligence: "A research, education and innovation partnership for Europe's competitiveness "

Build capacity for LLL

- Policy & framework(s) to link existing tools & initiatives
- Eliminating obstacles
- More European cooperation

EUA's position – why a flagship for LLL?

2008: EUA's European universities' charter on lifelong learning

- “to assist Europe’s universities in developing their specific role as lifelong learning institutions forming a central pillar of the Europe of Knowledge”
- 10 university commitments for development and implementation of lifelong learning strategies
- matching commitments for governments and regional partners.

2025: LLL not yet an established & recognised higher education mission

- building blocs in place: micro-credentials, recognition of prior learning, qualifications frameworks, QA
- little policy attention; fragmented offer; organisational, legal & funding challenges

Need for a more comprehensive & systematic approach – a LLL flagship:

- dialogue and collaboration on LLL between governments/ministries, HE sector, industries/employers
- Identify and eliminate systemic obstacles
- economic and demographic changes - consequences for HE (beyond “providing skills”)

Ongoing change at higher education institutions

Trends 2024 data
<https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/trends-2024.html>



Non-degree learning: growing, in both learner numbers and importance

- 70% offer non-degree courses (microcredentials, certificates, badges)
- 50% of respondents expect an increase in enrolment in non-degree education in the next five years (N=486)
- More part-time & flexible learning

Micro-credentials: popular, but not without challenges

- **Challenges reported by 50-75% of institutions**
- Identifying skills & learning demand
- recognition & credit award
- finding a business model / funding
- quality assurance
- Course format and design
- Learner status
- legal and regulatory hurdles (system & institution level)

Institutional strength:

- ability to define, develop, modify and adapt contribution to lifelong learning
- crucial for their role in and value for society and the economy
- strong focus on Third Mission⁵

Conclusions

- Skills intelligence? Yes, but this will not be enough
- Enhance LLL offer & capacity
 - Establish LLL as a recognised university mission
 - Two-tier education mission: degrees & shortcourses/ microcredentials
 - Eliminate obstacles at institutional & national level
- Public responsibility for LLL and CPD
 - Not to rely only on motivation of individual learners and offer of (for-profit) providers
 - Establish more steering power
- Learn from others, but do not copy - build on Europe's strengths

The European university system is arguably the best in the world. Nowhere else is capacity distributed among so many different institutions that serve so many different innovation ecosystems, and the European system of transnational cooperation among universities is unparalleled. This system of cooperation is further strengthened by including associated countries outside of the European Union. And nowhere else do such a large number of research-intensive institutions also have a large number of students that have access to cutting-edge knowledge. EUA March 2025



Reactions of others to the Union of Skills

Neth-ER - Building the Union of Skills: Education as the Foundation

- ‘Foster lifelong learning and acknowledge the value of diverse skills development’

The Guild - Union of Skills: New ambition, old barriers?

- ‘Empower the sector as a whole for pedagogical innovation, including lifelong learning.’

European Parliament Intergroup: The Future of Education and Skills

- ‘We call for bolder policies, increased investment, and a stronger commitment to lifelong learning to truly empower all people in Europe and ensure Europe remains a global leader in innovation and social progress.’

ESU’s Position on the Union of Skills

- ‘Microcredentials bear potential regarding flexibility, employability, and accessibility, especially regarding lifelong learning, but must not replace traditional degrees. [...] The Union of Skills must uphold higher education’s broader mission beyond workforce training and recognise the value of traditional degrees.’

Thank you for your attention

