

## **Response to the New Skills Agenda Issues Paper**

The European University Association (EUA) would like to respond to the issues paper on the New Skills Agenda, that it has received both as a member of the EQF Advisory Group (AG) and the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG):

- 1. A New Skills Agenda should encourage European- and national-level strategies, roadmaps and missions in flexible learning and career paths with a clear reference to the different education sectors and their particular roles and missions. For higher education, they should include the respective representative organisations with an active role.**
  - EUA principally welcomes the initiative to launch a “New Agenda on Skills”. This could become a major opportunity to raise awareness, and encourage and support initiatives across education sectors.
  - However, the present paper is not sufficiently comprehensive and systematic regarding:
    - the challenges: for instance, it addresses refugees only briefly, and leaves out economic migration from within and outside the EU;
    - the goals: for instance, we would welcome a stronger emphasis on social inclusion and flexible learning paths;
    - it does not relate to all education sectors: the paper strongly focusses on VET education and training, higher education and other education sectors are ever hardly mentioned. Even parts of the text that address education in general, seem to do this from a VET perspective. This is not very useful, and is likely to irritate and alienate higher education stakeholders.
  - EUA would welcome the New Skills Agenda as a call for a collaboration between the European Commission, national government agencies and education sectors and providers, to develop sector-specific strategies and roadmaps that have a strong focus on flexible learning and career paths, and on European and intersectoral mobility. This would support the proposal made in the paper to develop and support national reform agendas.
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- 2. In addition to skills for employment and the labour market, the New Skills Agenda should underline the general importance of education and skills for the wider benefit of individuals and society. Social inclusiveness and integration should be strong elements.**

From the viewpoint of higher education, the following points are key priorities for a New Skills Agenda. They have been recently presented in more detail in EUA’s response to the Modernisation Agenda:

- Labour market demand is difficult to predict. Rather than attempting to steer students’ study choices, there should be a stronger emphasis on transversal skills, including research, organisational and social skills, critical thinking and intellectual autonomy. This would serve the interest of students and society, also in view of uncertain economic and labour market developments.
- Social inclusion and integration are of major importance for our societies, but also for the relevance and functioning of higher education institutions. In this regard, there should be more emphasis on cross-border mobility, transition between different education and occupation paths, and lifelong learning.
- This would contribute to an enhancement of higher education learning and teaching, in particular with regards to new and emerging forms of provision, through cooperation among universities and with other external partners (industries, public offices, NGOs).

**3. A re-assessment of European structures and instruments regarding their usefulness and added value is principally welcome. As for all structures and instruments, any decision on a revision and new and additional purposes, as in the case of the EUROPASS and the EQF, require proper consultation at policy and stakeholder levels.**

- EUA is principally in favour of a revision of European-level structures and instruments.
- In particular, it welcomes an assessment of how the EUROPASS can be made more user-friendly and meaningful, also as in the framework of the Bologna Process, a recommendation for the revision of the diploma supplement is under preparation.
- EUA is in support of the EQF, and its further development. However, it believes that the relevant questions addressed require more information, an informed discussion, and a proper consultation of stakeholders.
- EUA welcomes an enhancement of comparable data on both skills needs (including brain drain and skills shortages) and the transition from higher education into the labour market, through statistics and qualitative studies, for instance through a European Graduate Study.
- EUA recommends that European-level tools and instruments be externally assessed, and if not considered useful, they should be enhanced or discontinued.

Brussels, 23 March 2016