

The Guild's response to the Commission's renewed Agenda for Higher Education

The Guild endorses the European Commission's latest proposals to further strengthen European higher education, built on a recognition that effective education systems are the foundation of open, fair and democratic societies. The Guild makes the following remarks on the proposed agenda for higher education and its priorities:

Addressing skills mismatches and promoting excellence in skills development

It is crucial that universities are supported in their mission of providing students with skills that relate to the changing demands of the labour market and the wider society. The Commission's initiative to establish a European framework for tracking graduates is one way to support this goal, and The Guild suggests that the initiative should be built on the existing national and regional initiatives of gathering information of the career development of graduates. We urge that the Commission designs a cost-effective and user-friendly system to support evidence-based policy making in the Member States, whilst bringing genuinely added value in relation to the existing initiatives.

We strongly support the further focus on integrating work placements into higher education curricula as an efficient way of improving the employability and diversifying the skills of students. While digital skills are an important element of employability and the development towards a knowledge society, we also urge the Commission to use Erasmus+ to support the development of other types of transferable skills that are relevant across all sectors. These include for example creativeness, interdisciplinarity, intercultural engagement and skills in numeracy and statistical analysis.

We see the proposed guidance on open education initiatives to encourage the implementation of digital learning strategies as an important approach that could be complemented by additional support for blended learning mobility in Erasmus+. We also welcome increased support for teachers, doctoral candidates and postdoctoral graduates to enhance their pedagogical capacities and at the same time engage internationally through the mobility programme.

Building inclusive and connected higher education systems

The Guild welcomes the Commission's initiative to support universities in being inclusive to students from different backgrounds and opening up to the wider society as learning communities. It is important that more funding through Erasmus+ is directed to the development of strategic partnerships that allow higher education institutions to improve their approaches to inclusiveness, access to higher learning and study success from admission to graduation.

Ensuring higher education institutions contribute to innovation

It is crucial that universities are strongly supported in their role as central actors in the innovation ecosystems, and that opportunities to mainstream entrepreneurial education across disciplines are widely promoted. To address the full potential of universities in fostering innovation and educating the innovators and entrepreneurs of the future, The Guild proposes going even further than the actions mentioned in the Commission's proposal suggest. We need to encourage entrepreneurship education through Erasmus+ with wider initiatives that go far beyond expanding the regional innovation schemes of EIT KIC's that target a limited group of regions and universities, and offer programmes that operate within strictly defined disciplines. As for the Smart Specialisation Strategies, we welcome the Commission's approach to encourage public authorities to include higher education institutions in their design and implementation. This would strengthen their opportunities for benefiting from the Structural Funds (ESIF) and their support for education, research and innovation.