



EUROPEAN COMMISSION - PRESS RELEASE

Modernisation and employability at heart of new higher education reform strategy

Brussels, 20 September 2011 – As part of Europe's strategy for jobs and growth, the European Commission today presented a reform strategy to boost graduate numbers, improve teaching quality and maximise what higher education can do to help the EU economy emerge stronger from the crisis. The strategy identifies priority areas where EU countries need to do more to achieve shared education objectives and sets out how the European Union can support their modernisation policies. EU-level initiatives will include a multi-dimensional university ranking which will better inform students about the courses which are best for them and an 'Erasmus for Masters' loan guarantee scheme for students taking a full degree course abroad.

The European Union has approximately 4,000 universities and other higher education institutions and more than 19 million students. In recent years the number and variety of higher education institutions, as well as student numbers, have substantially increased. But funding, governance structures and curricula have often failed to keep pace. Higher education is not performing well enough to provide Europe with enough people with the right kinds of skills to create jobs and growth. And worldwide, Europe's competitors, especially the emerging economies, are rapidly increasing their investment in higher education

Speaking at the launch of the strategy, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, Androulla Vassiliou, said: "*Higher education is a powerful driver of economic growth and opens doors to better living standards and opportunities for people. It is also the best insurance against unemployment. Even so, too many graduates struggle to find jobs or quality work. We need to reform higher education – and vocational education – so that we equip our young people with the skills they need to reach their potential in terms of development and employability.*"

Background

Priority areas in which further reforms are needed include:

- Increasing the number of graduates, attracting a broader cross-section of society into higher education, and reducing the numbers who drop out without completing their courses
- Improving the quality and relevance of higher education, so curricula meet the needs of individuals, the labour market and the careers of the future, as well as stimulating and rewarding excellence in teaching and research
- Providing more opportunities for students to gain additional skills through study or training abroad, and to encourage cross-border co-operation to boost higher education performance
- Training more researchers to prepare the ground for the industries of tomorrow
- Strengthening the links between education, research and business to promote excellence and innovation
- Ensuring that funding is efficient – freeing up higher education governance and investing in quality education to match labour market needs

Many EU countries are prioritising the modernisation of their higher education systems; but the potential of European higher education institutions to contribute to Europe's prosperity and fulfil their wider role in society remains underexploited. This is why education is at the heart of the Europe 2020 strategy, which has set a target for 40% of Europe's young people to have a higher education qualification by the end of this decade (33.6% in 2010).

In July, the Commission launched its proposals for the next multiannual EU budget (2014-2020) which include substantial increases for education, training and youth (+73%), and for research (+46%), in recognition of their pivotal role in supporting growth. The reform agenda for modernising higher education will guide the spending priorities of EU programmes in support of reforms.

The Commission's reform strategy has been shaped by analyses, studies and consultations with higher education institutions, teachers, researchers, students, businesses, trade unions, governments and international bodies. It is accompanied by a Commission staff paper that examines recent developments in European higher education systems and by the study 'Modernisation of higher education in Europe: funding and the social dimension' that examines trends in funding higher education and policies for opening up access to higher education ([IP/11/1037](#)).

For more information:

[MEMO/11/613](#) - Modernising higher education – facts and figures

[MEMO/11/615](#) - An EU strategy for modernising higher education – Questions and Answers

Communication: EU strategy for modernising higher education:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/com0911_en.pdf

Statistics – Commission Staff Working Paper on recent developments in European higher education systems:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/wp0911_en.pdf

Eurydice study 'Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Funding and the Social Dimension':

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/thematic_studies_en.php

European Commission: Higher education:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc62_en.htm

The Commission's proposals for education, training and youth in the next EU budget: [IP/11/857](#)

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