

The Agenda for the Modernisation of Higher Education and the new EU programme generation

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Higher education institutions are crucial partners in delivering the European Union's strategy to drive forward and maintain growth, as they play a crucial role in individual and societal advancement and in providing the skilled human capital and the articulate citizens that Europe needs to create jobs, economic growth and prosperity. In order to maximise the contribution of the European Union's higher education systems to contribute to growth, reforms are needed in some key areas.

Last September, the Commission adopted a new Agenda for the Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe. The Agenda focuses attention on five areas: to increase the quantity of higher education graduates at all levels; to enhance the quality and relevance of human capital development in higher education; to create effective governance and funding mechanisms in support of excellence; to strengthen the knowledge triangle between education, research and business; and to improve quality through increased mobility and cross-border cooperation. Key policy issues for Member States and higher education institutions were identified for each of the areas. Increasing the quantity of higher education graduates links directly with the Europe 2020 headline target of 40% higher education attainment. In order to achieve this goal, more attention is needed on attracting a broader cross-section of students into higher education, including adult learners, and retaining them.

The forthcoming new EU education programme generation from 2014-2020, "Erasmus For All", should also support activities aimed at generating reform in the different policy areas prioritized. With a proposed increase in budget of 70% from the current programme, "Erasmus For All", will foster further cross-border mobility of students and staff and strengthen a closer cross-border strategic cooperation of higher education institutions.

In my panel intervention I will outline the key priority areas of the new Agenda for the Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe and how it relates to improving access of more diverse groups of students in higher education and thus contributes to the development of lifelong learning and the work of the EUCEN members. I will also discuss how the new "Erasmus For All" programme can support the integration of adult learners in higher education and lifelong learning activities.