

A young woman with glasses and a blue sweater is focused on working on a computer case in a laboratory setting. She is holding a component, possibly a fan or a drive, and is carefully examining it. The background shows another person in a green lab coat working on a similar piece of equipment. The scene is brightly lit, and the overall atmosphere is one of technical precision and learning.

**EURACTIV**

# SHAPING THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

EVENT REPORT | APR. - MAY 2019  
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# SHAPING THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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*The education sector is facing a process of rethinking in order to provide future students with new skills required for working in a world that is changing ever more rapidly.*

*Students should be trained to be prepared and responsive when huge technological breakthroughs such as digitisation and artificial intelligence become part of our ordinary life.*

*But some social aspects also need to be addressed. Filling the gap between theoretical knowledge and competencies needed by the labour market is not enough, as even well-trained people will struggle to find a job if educational disparities among European regions persist.*

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# New skills will require students to expect the unexpected, education expert says

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By Gerardo Fortuna | EURACTIV.com



Stéphane Lauwick is currently Director of the Electrical Engineering Department of the University Institute of Technology (IUT) at the University of Le Havre in France. [EURASHE]

Over the coming years, the professional higher education sector must smooth educational differences among the European regions, boost local employment and provide students with the new skills needed in a changing labour market, the head of a European higher education association told EURACTIV in an interview.

Since 2015, Stéphane Lauwick has been the president of EURASHE, which represents the interests of institutions in higher education, such as universities of applied science and university colleges. He is the Director of the Institut Universitaire de Technologie (IUT) in Le Havre, France.

Establishing and improving links between professional higher education institutions and the territory is very high on EURASHE's

agenda. "We realise that the situation of professional higher education is quite different from one country to another, and I would say from one region to another," Lauwick said.

The range of issues may differ but the most frequent problem concerns the crucial articulation between training, higher education and the job market, a phenomenon that Lauwick

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calls “skills mismatch”.

He pointed out that the labour market needs are not addressed by education, which is sometimes too theoretical. And there is also the issue of well-trained students who cannot find employment locally.

“And well-trained people who don’t find a job in their regions tend to migrate,” he said. Unmet expectations could often worsen the situation, as some educated students are not paid properly after their studies, or their acquired skills are not recognised by the local companies.

“We find that emphasising the regional, sometimes even the local connections, is the best way to cope with this issue,” Lauwick said, adding that it is important to establish a dialogue with both the business sector and the local authorities.

According to Lauwick’s experience, local companies respond extremely well, if stimulated, and quickly identify challenges and main barriers to regional development.

He said it is relatively easy to speak to big international firms, as they have training departments, but it is more difficult to connect with small and medium-sized (SMEs) enterprises. “And it is a major problem because most of the jobs in Europe come from SMEs,” he added.

## FUTURE SKILLS

EURASHE is focusing its efforts on the ‘new job skills’, a notion developed by researchers who are trying to address future challenges in a changing labour market. However, these new skills go beyond innovation, entrepreneurship or digital literacy.

“The main idea is that the student has to reposition himself to expect the unexpected, to work in situations where nobody has shown him what to do,” he said.

In his training, Lauwick

reproduces, for instance, a major last-minute change to see how the students react. The goal is to understand if the students are going to be lost or are going to ask the right questions even in an abruptly changed scenario.

New job skills definitions come up every new year, which is why there is a need for strong cooperation between higher education institutions and businesses, according to EURASHE’s president.

“It is an ongoing process and it is a constant flux of information and training on both sides, starting of course from the request of the companies,” he said.

Another issue EURASHE is trying to address is how to reconcile theoretical knowledge and practice and make all the theoretical skills operational.

Lauwick noticed that traditional universities have always been interested in thinking and designing courses that equip students with the right thinking.

“Our students, indeed, think well. Now the challenge to enable students who think well to work well,” he said.

## FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

“If you need a concrete answer on how the higher education environment will be in 10-years’ time, I don’t have it. And that’s part of the uncertainty I was speaking of earlier,” Lauwick said.

Although the traditional division in bachelor, master and doctorate programs will still exist, he said, they will be flanked by smaller courses that will involve a wider public.

“We will have good students but also students that are not that good, so a much more diverse public and, also, we will have to respond to the challenges of retraining and upskilling,” he said.

The issues of lifelong and work-based learning, in particular, need some efforts as the educational

harmonisation process at the EU level, the so-called Bologna process, is currently mostly oriented towards young students, according to Lauwick.

But the lack of apprenticeship programmes in every part of Europe, an essential prerequisite of professional higher education, should also be examined by the Bologna process.

Asked about EU-funded programs like Horizon Europe and Erasmus+, he said he expects both to promote excellence, something they already do reasonably well.

“We have a very good dialogue with the Commission on Horizon Europe and we have been working on that with some MEPs as well,” he said.

One of the scopes of EURASHE is, indeed, offering a platform for people working in the sector also to share best practices and identify areas of excellence.

“Of course, we’re not going to change several centuries of higher education in two years. We need a lot of work and time,” Lauwick concluded.

# Better learners can become active citizens, education professionals insist

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By Zeynep Atilgan | EURACTIV.com



“Higher education to Europe: Play to Win” debate, organized by EURASHE on 29 April 2019 at the European Parliament. [EURASHE]

Advocating for more and better education is the only way to promote values such as democratic participation, human rights, and the rule of law, the head of a European higher education association has told an event at the European Parliament in Brussels.

The event was organised by the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) on

29 April and brought together higher education professionals, experts and students, who debated the challenges and the way forward.

The panel focused on the current state of higher education, but also on the challenges for the sector ahead of the upcoming European elections, sharing the principles of the European Parliament’s ‘This Time I’m Voting’ campaign, aimed at encouraging citizens to vote in the elections taking

place on 23-26 May in 28 member states.

“Transformation, participation and diversity are three keywords for our future,” said Stéphane Lauwick, the president of EURASHE.

He added that his association’s mission is not just to equip learners with knowledge, understanding and skills, or even competences for the

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labour market, but to transform the learner into a citizen ready and eager to participate actively in society.

### **FUTURE OF EDUCATION**

Academics, researchers and representatives of European umbrella associations active in higher education discussed the future of the sector in relations to skills requested, the next generation learners and the forthcoming education systems.

A first panel consisting of learners, teachers, employers and policy makers presented their take on future skills, highlighting that students need both the latest technical knowledge and soft skills to better interact with others.

These two aspects go along with the capacity for critical and systemic thinking, as well as the development of new digital skills to process data flows and the use of artificial intelligence and robots.

Concerning future learners, the lifelong learning approach was considered essential. The vice president of EURASHE, Professor Ulf-Daniel Ehlers, said it is going to be the most likely scenario in the future, as it offers personalised learning paths and a steady flow of short courses, the so-called mini-credentials, helping to update and upgrade the workforce.

He also outlined major shifts to take place in higher education, moving away from mere knowledge transmission to competence training.

“If you want to educate students to become skilful actors, you have to develop certain specific competence of skill courses,” Ehlers said, listing diversity, access and quality as some of the challenges facing higher education.

### **SKILLS MISMATCH PERSISTS**

Future systems for higher education need to be more flexible and should open their door for diversity and assessment, according to the experts who took part in the debate.

A student-centred, sustainable and scalable ecosystem should be established, extending the accessibility to higher education and revising the current exam and rewarding system. It was said that students should also take more responsibility for their own learning process.

Some of the panellists argued that the current bachelor studies are not enough adaptive to the rapidly changing labour market, which is the main reason why extra-knowledge has become ever more important for students.

Stéphane Lauwick of EURASHE said that employers have been increasingly demanding that students have transferable skills, such as the ability to work in a team, creative thinking and problem-solving.

“The skills mismatch is still the same as it was 20 years ago,” he said.

### **CIVIC COMPETENCES**

Participants from the audience underlined the importance of attitude and character training to become a real winner in the job market.

Some pointed at the need for tailor-made training solutions for the unemployed, while others also complained about the prices of higher education.

Another topic raised during the debate was the need to distinguish the European higher education system from the mercantile and state-driven ones, observed in the US and China, respectively.

Building civic and democratic competences is an integral part of the European higher education equation, and Europe could already play strong cards in this regard, particularly in the light of affordability, accessibility, diversity and high-quality of its system.

The debate's main outcomes will be discussed further at the EURASHE Annual Conference, which will be held in Budapest the next 16-17 May 2019.



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