BusinessEurope input to BFUG meeting, November 2026

BusinessEurope supports the principles of an **inclusive, innovative and interconnected EHEA by 2030**, as set out in the Rome and Tirana Communiqués.

Building on the Tirana Communique, it is necessary to draw attention to burning issues that affect higher education institutions, their governing bodies, and the labour market across borders more than ever before. This includes answers to the changing realities of students' lives, demographic changes, digitalisation, the need for flexible, practice-oriented curricula,to artificial intelligence, to boost future skills (especially entrepreneurial, digilatisation and transversial skills), up-skilling and re-skilling of workers and to understand international students and graduates as highly qualified workers for the whole of Europe.

Employability of graduates

The employability of graduates is one of the key issues that BusinessEurope believes needs to be better taken into account as part of the ongoing revision of the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in higher education (ESG). This is not only an important issue for graduates and the design of university programmes. but is a key element of improving the functioning of European labour markets. The knowledge and understanding of occupational fields and their qualification requirements, increasing cooperation between the world of work and higher education, feedback loops with graduates and acknowledging the shared responsibility of all actors, are necessary steps to ensure that individuals can continually refresh their knowledge and skills in a lifelong learning perspective, to improve both their personal and professional competences, and to reduce skills mismatch.

The employability of graduates is also closely associated with graduate tracking, which is an important element for informing the updating of education and training curricula and in making curricula more responsive to evolving labour market needs. This can be particularly important in the context of updating higher education curricula.

The Access to Skills study conducted by Deloitte for BusinessEurope, published 23 October 2026, highlights that identifying skills needs does not always lead to timely changes in curricula or training provision. For higher education, this reinforces the importance of using graduate tracking alongside employers' knowledge of changing occupational requirements. Cooperation with employers should help translate this evidence into programme updates and provide students with practical experience relevant to their future employment.

Higher education institutions also have an important role in continuing education for people already in work. The study identifies workload and lack of time as major barriers to training, alongside limited organisational capacity and costs, particularly for SMEs. Short cycle courses and micro-credentials can help workers update their skills where they offer relevant learning that can be combined with employment. Their development should involve employers so that the content meets workplace needs and the learning outcomes are clear. Funding arrangements should also make it easier for employers to support participation.

Internationalisation

The number of international degree students in the EHEA is rising steadily. Given the glaring shortage of skilled workers, especially in STEM subjects, their qualifications and education need to be understood, valued, and utilized sustainably within the EHEA. Conversely, with mobility figures stagnating, there is a need to take a clear look at the value of a stay abroad

for students, teachers, and staff. In this context, practice-oriented mobilities,such as internships, and the associated, expected international and transversal skills (adaptability, creativity, resilience) must be promoted even more strongly and made visible to the mobile students themselves as well as to future employers.

Knowledge Triangle and Third Mission of Higher Education Institutions

BusinessEurope recognises and fully supports efforts to foster cooperation between research, education and innovation, the so-called knowledge triangle. This is an approach that we have been advocating over many years and one that we think should receive more prominence in view of the Letta report. Bearing in mind that universities make a significant contribution to innovative regional or even cross-border ecosystems, we support all facets of the Third Mission, and thus the transfer of science to non-university partners, companies, regional organisations and the public.

About BusinessEurope:

BusinessEurope is the leading advocate for growth and competitiveness at European level, standing up for companies across the continent and campaigning on the issues that most influence their performance. A recognised social partner, we speak for enterprises of all sizes in 36 European countries whose 42 national business federations are our direct members (https://www.businesseurope.eu/members).

The organisation is headquartered in Brussels at the heart of the EU institutions. We work on behalf of our member federations to ensure that the voice of business is heard in European policy-making. We interact regularly with the European Parliament, Commission and Council as well as other stakeholders in the policy community. We also represent European business in the international arena, ensuring that Europe remains globally competitive.

BusinessEurope presented the findings of the Access to Skills study on 23 October 2026. Conducted by Deloitte, the study examines employers' experience of identifying skills needs and developing training responses, including provision and certification. It draws on consultations with national and sectoral stakeholders and a survey of 209 companies in 25 countries. BusinessEurope has published a separate note setting out the lessons it draws from the research. Link to the report and the lessons drawn note is here: Link.

Skills Working Group

The Skills Working Group discusses and prepares positions on issues such as EU skills strategies, learning outcomes, apprenticeships, the European cooperation frameworks on vocational education and training and higher education, and EU education and training tools. Promint issues for the coming months include the skills portability initiative and the EU VET strategy.

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