

## Education and the New European Bauhaus

The New European Bauhaus initiative is a vast cooperation project combining sustainability with wellbeing. Inspired by a design movement that was the offshoot of an educational project, the Commission's initiative is intended to address contemporary and future ecological, economic and societal concerns. Education and lifelong learning are central to equipping current and future citizens with a deep understanding of the issues, critical thinking and skills necessary to bring about change.

### European Commission proposal

The European Commission has launched the [New European Bauhaus initiative](#) as an environmental, economic and cultural project to help deliver the European Green Deal and support the transformation of Europe following the Covid-19 pandemic. The initiative envisages the participation of a range of actors, including students and academics, in a vast effort of cooperation between science, technology, the arts and culture. Its core values are sustainability, aesthetics and inclusiveness. The [European Green Deal](#) is geared towards achieving a sustainable economy and eliminating net greenhouse gas emissions by 2025. From now on, economic growth must no longer depend on resource use and must leave no one behind.

### An echo from the past

The original [Bauhaus](#) was at heart an educational project. Established by Walter Gropius in 1919, the prestigious school embraced the unity of art, technology and life to [transform](#) living and working processes. While teaching within the school evolved over time, at points it adopted practices that blurred distinctions between pure and applied art, and art and technology. Teaching also combined theory with practice to develop students' observational, analytical and thinking skills. Teaching methods included playfulness to bring about creativity; the study and association of different elements such as form, sound and colour; and the development of mathematics, biology and philosophy. Students and teachers worked in groups to identify problems, find creative solutions and seek immediate feedback from industry to refine their design approach.

Both the Bauhaus and the New European Bauhaus share a concern for aesthetics and inclusiveness. At a time of economic scarcity, Gropius sought to spread democracy by educating students to create designs for everyone – at once industrial and ideally beautiful, useful and economical. At a time of saturated markets, the New European Bauhaus initiative is applying this inspiration to a modified set of societal, environmental and political issues.

### Designing the future

Still in its early stages, the New European Bauhaus is in an exploratory phase of '[co-design](#)', collecting existing contemporary design examples to inspire further developments. Some [experts](#) claim that the practice of prototyping in design education and research is useful to provoke discussion, derive insights and shape possible future directions. Key to achieving this is to embrace complexity and contestation and to avoid silencing the perspectives of marginalised and disadvantaged voices. It is claimed that a new approach to design education needs to capture diversity while also drawing from forward thinkers in disciplines such as economics, public policy, organisational change theory and practice, psychology, sociology, science, engineering, history and the humanities. This would allow the New European Bauhaus to avoid some of the mistakes made in the name of the original Bauhaus which ironically contributed towards examples of poor city and building design and wasteful consumerism. One example that reflects this line of thought is the [Architekturschaufenster](#) in Karlsruhe, a showroom used to present various aspects of [Baukultur](#) – a built environment that is worth living in – to a growing audience, through a varied programme of events that are freely open to the public. Activities relate to real local construction issues, presenting technical issues and opening up the discussion to a broader public, focusing on sustainability, mobility and demographic change.

## Skills to green the future

Another of education's contributions to the New European Bauhaus initiative lies in the development of the green skills that are necessary for emerging green jobs, for the greening of existing jobs or more generally as life skills. A 2018 Cedefop [report](#) revealed that different Member States define green skills and green jobs in different ways, making it hard to compare trends. It also noted gaps in policy-making when it comes to gender issues. The report concludes that this situation is an opportunity for Member States to share knowledge and understanding about how to identify and evaluate green skills.

In a recent [opinion](#), the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) linked the teaching of green skills to the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs), more specifically to SDG 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and SDG 13 on climate change. Both these SDGs have clear links with the aims of the New European Bauhaus initiative. The opinion welcomed the suggestion that the European Green Deal should set up a European competence framework and recommended that the framework apply to formal, non-formal and informal learning. However, the Committee regretted the lack of a target for adult participation in quality and inclusive training on basic green skills and competences.

An [example](#) of good practice in the area of green skills is the work done by Denmark's local Vocational Education Centre South, which incorporates green skills in all its study programmes. It also organises a special adult education centre for construction workers on new energy-saving techniques. Another example is a [project](#) funded by Erasmus+ that reviews and proposes recommendations based on current vocational education and training practices in five countries (Italy, Romania, Spain, Turkey and the UK) to develop electricians' green skills.

At school level, one [critique](#) points to the risk that when schools teach about environmental issues they may try to develop socially-valued behaviours such as waste sorting, but pay less attention to the scientific knowledge that students need to fully understand issues such as pollution and climate change, and to think critically about them. An example of good practice in Austrian schools is a project led by scientists on [climate change](#). They developed a workshop that teaches students and pupils how to use scientific methods to discover evidence of climate change and to study energy use in their locality.

## A European approach

The European Union already has a number of tools at its disposal to link education with the New European Bauhaus initiative. In December 2020, the European Commission launched a [survey](#) for the Education for Climate Coalition, which received 576 contributions by the end of January 2021. The respondents included students, teachers and non-governmental organisations. Their responses helped the coalition identify existing initiatives and networks at local, regional and national levels that can form the basis for developing national education for climate coalitions.

The [European climate pact](#) invites individuals, communities and organisations to promote a greener Europe. Together with the [skills agenda](#) and the [pact for skills](#), it supports the skilling and re-skilling of those who wish to work in the green economy. [European Vocational Skills Week](#) and the [European Alliance for Apprenticeships](#) (EaFA) are also committed to the development of green skills.

A flagship project of the [European education area](#), the [European university initiative](#) is meanwhile geared towards deepening cooperation among European universities and increasing the number of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) graduates. [Erasmus+](#), the funding programme dedicated to lifelong learning, supports both those initiatives and the rollout of individual learning accounts, micro-credentials and a new Europass platform. These are all initiatives supporting social inclusion in lifelong learning.

In an October 2020 resolution on the [future of education](#) in the context of Covid-19, the European Parliament expressed alarm at the growing educational inequalities caused by the crisis and called for EU policies in education and training to focus on inclusion and equal opportunities in terms of access and quality. In its September 2020 resolution on [greening](#) the EU's educational funding programmes, the European Parliament highlighted that the European Green Deal presents an opportunity to rethink these programmes to promote the acquisition of relevant transversal skills and develop best practice in diminishing participants' environmental footprints.

