

## Research for CULT Committee – Education and Youth in the European Union - Current challenges and future prospects

### KEY FINDINGS

- The study identified key issues that the EU is likely to face in the next 10-15 years, and that EU education and youth policies could address: social inclusion; youth unemployment; skills mismatch; migration; new forms of communications; autonomy of higher education institutions; and threats to academic freedom.
- The study identified five policy options to be considered by policy-makers as priority development areas: Student-centred learning and flexible pathways; Inclusive digital learning; Targeted investment in early years; Developing socio-emotional development and soft skills; and Strengthening the teaching profession.
- The study identified four scenarios for the future of Europe: Fragmented Europe, Aligned Europe, Cold-feet Europe and Ostrich Europe.
- Having conducted a stress-test on the policy options in the scenarios, it was found that:



The present document is the executive summary of the study on Education and Youth in the European Union - Current challenges and future prospects. The full study, which is available in English can be downloaded at: <http://bit.ly/2ksTB4H>

- **Personalised learning** policies could be successfully implemented across all scenarios but may only achieve some of their objectives or be targeted at different population segments, depending on the level of funding available and on the prevailing socio-economic environment.
- **Inclusive digital learning** could be widely adopted and provide scope for educational inclusion but is likely to be successful where there has also been investment in digital infrastructure.
- Short term solutions that focus on **reacting to the needs of the labour market**, rather than developing more resilient skills are less likely to **involve targeted investment in early years or socio-emotional** development.
- **Reinforcing the teaching profession** is a key enabler for all the other policy options that may require changes to working patterns for teachers as well as changes to how and what they teach

## Background

This study examines possible scenarios (both aspirational and disruptive) for future developments for the education and youth sectors in the next 10-15 years. It also identifies and assesses the policy implications of these scenarios.

## Aim

The study informs EU policy-makers, in particular MEPs, on policy options and their implications for the education and youth sectors in the EU, and seeks to help them prepare for the scenarios identified (both in terms of facing challenges and embracing opportunities).

## Approach

A **literature review** identifies issues and opportunities in the current and future education and youth landscape:

- Several challenges remain in relation to participation in education as a way to foster **social inclusion**.
- Despite some progress, **youth unemployment** is likely to remain a concern for social and economic policies in the future.
- Unemployment can be partly explained by the **skills mismatch**.
- Social, education and labour-market inclusion challenges and opportunities are associated with recent **migration** waves to Europe.
- **“Newer” forms of communication** affect democratic participation in many ways.
- The **autonomy of higher education institutions and threats to academic freedom** is an emerging issue and is likely to become more prominent in the future.

The study identified five possible areas for development in education and youth policy:

- **Student-centred learning and flexible pathways** to ensure that all learners have access to the type of learning that suits their learning needs, and that all learners can be mobile in the education and training system at any time in their life and career.
- **Inclusive digital learning** to ensure that everyone is included in the move towards digitalisation of learning, and to avoid the risk that those left behind are further excluded from work and society.
- **Targeted investment in early years** to erase/limit the effects of social disadvantage as early as possible in the education and training pathway, and to avoid perpetuating disadvantage.
- Focus on **socio-emotional development and soft skills** to prepare today’s students to be tomorrow’s workers and citizens (learning to learn, resilience, communication skills, digital navigation skills, etc.).

- Strengthening **teacher education and training** to make sure teachers are ready for the challenges ahead (teachers being a key differentiator in the implementation of all education and training programmes).

A structured methodology was used to examine the interaction of the key drivers of the education and youth sectors with wider social, economic and technological factors – and the uncertainty in the future development of these factors – to develop four future education and youth scenarios:

- **Fragmented Europe:** While society and industry have embraced digitalisation, albeit at different rates across the EU, the education system is failing to prepare students for this change and workers are not able to play their role in the labour market, with bad consequences for the economy and society.
- **Aligned Europe:** By 2035 technological innovation and the creation of many high-skilled jobs has led to a booming economy. Education has been at the top of the EU's spending agenda for the past fifteen years, with investment in technology-aided personalised learning creating a model of education that is more accessible.
- **Cold feet Europe:** Digitalisation has had a radical effect on the labour market, with fewer workers needed. While people are ready to take on the jobs of today, there is not enough demand for a skilled workforce. While digitalisation was supposed to support growth, the economic situation is not as good as expected, and society is concerned about what the future will bring.
- **Ostrich Europe:** Although education funding is seen as critical, co-operation between Member States is in decline and education and labour market issues are discussed and addressed in isolation. While the economic situation might look good in the short term, and society is not particularly concerned about the future, there are clear indications that the situation is not sustainable.

The Table below summarises how the policy options would play out under each scenario.

	<b>Fragmented Europe</b>	<b>Aligned Europe</b>	<b>Cold-feet Europe</b>	<b>Ostrich Europe</b>
<b>Student-centred learning and flexible pathways</b>	High skills mismatch.	Better skills match, lower unemployment and fewer inequalities.	Fewer inequalities. Lower youth unemployment but may not reduce unemployment in longer term.	Mainstream personalised learning but focused on immediate labour market needs.
<b>Inclusive digital learning</b>	Increasing social inequalities.	Better skills match, lower unemployment and fewer inequalities.	Better education and social inclusion.	Improved educational attainment in mainstream schools and vocational sector.
<b>Targeted investment in early years</b>	Increasing social inequalities.	Improved inclusion and attainment. Reduces employment if leads to good skills match.	Short-term solution to labour market problems.	Short-term solution to labour market problems.
<b>Focus on inter-disciplinarity and soft skills</b>	Limited skills-match.	Improved skills match.	Better skills match across demographics.	Improved short term skills match.
<b>Reinforcing the teaching profession</b>	Differential levels of status, skill, financial reward for teachers.	Better placed to support other policy options.	May result in flexibility in working for teachers without status change.	Improved teaching for some demographic groups.

## Further information

This executive summary is available in the following languages: English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. The study, which is available in English, and the summaries can be downloaded at: <http://bit.ly/2ksTB4H>

More information on Policy Department research for CULT: <https://research4committees.blog/cult/>



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