

## Workshop 15: Skills and innovation: fostering EU human capital

Teresa Küchler, EU Reporter.

European schools have to teach entrepreneurship in primary or secondary schools, before it is too late. European business feels there is a disconnection between the classroom and outer world and demands a debate on how to capture the best European brains.

The young generation does not see why it needs to enroll in technology or science courses, Hans van der Loo, a senior adviser and EU Liaison Director for Dutch oil giant Shell sighed, urging business and education systems to get together to attract young people to jobs the European business is in desperate need of.

“Ask 12 year-olds about what a nurse does, or a doctor or a fireman, and they know. But ask him what an engineer does and the answer is less certain,” he said, urging schools to invite business and academia into their classroom to give students concrete examples of what they do, and how their work impacts on every day life- and the future.

The Shell official said business, education ministries and, above all, finance ministries have to invest the time and money to promote changes in the education system to promote innovation and entrepreneurship.

Caroline Jenner, CEO for Junior Achievement-Young Enterprise Europe (JA-YE), said such teaching had to be done through public-private partnerships.

“Imagine a young schoolgirl who is asked by her teacher to come up with a business idea. At the end of her project, she hands in a report to the teacher. What if instead she could present her idea to a company?” Jenner exemplified.

She said also companies should have a “double bottom line”- to invest in both their own activities, and in the younger generation, in order to be able to pick up their skills in time.

The Director General for the European Commission’s DG Education and Culture, Odile Quentin, talked about the importance of getting business involved in the shaping of university curricula and also in their governance, through so called business-university partnerships.

She said the newly-founded European Institute of Innovation and technology (EIT) is a good example of creating an equal footing between business and academia. According to Commission estimates, there is a need for 20 million highly educated workers in the nearest future, and another 20 million “medium level” educated workers. At the same time, some 20 million people with no or low education will lose their jobs.

Mikael Hagström, responsible for optimizing business performance at the software manufacturer SAS Institute (not to be confused with the Scandinavian airline company) said that although the EU has the highest number of university graduates in the world, the commercialisation of their ideas is disappointingly low.

“They should rank university performance worldwide not only by their academic standards but also according to their commercialisation potential,” Hagström said.

The business expert also promoted stronger “cluster policy”, meaning the creation of world-class centers of excellence where business and academia get together, physically and virtually, to develop methods on how to transform ideas into real economy.

Jakub Dürr, the Czech Deputy Minister of Education, Youth and Sports for European Affairs, urged for an “intersectional approach” to the problem, creating links between general policies aiming at dealing with the acute situation, and concrete measure to solve it. Furthermore, the communication between education and the labour world had to improve, to increase the employability of all people, he said.

Chair of SUEZ University, Nadine Lemaître, suggested concrete tactics to apply in order to promote certain skills and to attract new recruits to those areas.

“Only 20 percent of today’s European engineering students are women, for instance, and for technology classes even less. You could say that half the recruitment pool is missing in some areas,” Lemaître said.

She also recommended mobility of skilled labour from one EU country to another, and proper language and other training to make this possible.