

EURASHE (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education)

Key Learnings

- New learning environments are needed to support more active and experiential learning
- Digital learning environments are crucial for personalised learning approaches
- More collaboration is needed across institutions to develop robust digital learning environments
- Digital learning environments can increase international reach
- Changes are slow due to a lack of professional development for academics
- More work needs to be undertaken on the development of Personal Learning Environments (PLEs) for students to help them develop lifelong learning strategies and manage their own learning
- The lack of interoperability between technologies and lack of digital skills increases the costs of developing robust PLEs
- Digital tools can support more effective student recruitment

About EURASHE

EURASHE is the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education that offer professionally orientated programmes and are engaged in applied and profession-related research within the Bologna cycles. EURASHE's mission is to promote, within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the interests of professional higher education and of relevant higher education institutions that are recognised or financed by the public authorities of an EHEA member country, either in binary higher education systems or in unitary 'university' systems. Its aim is to promote the interests of professional higher education in the EHEA and to contribute to the progressive development of the European Higher Education and Research Area (EHERA). In addition to offering professionally-orientated programmes, EURASHE members are specifically engaged in applied and profession-related research, and its technological applications. EURASHE focuses primarily on [policy](#) development and on higher education [projects](#) and research with emphasis on its professionally-orientated segments. It organises annual conferences, thematic seminars and tailor-made [events](#) for its members.

These are some of the focus areas for EURASHE

Active Learning Spaces

One of the key EURASHE's priorities for the coming years is to focus on the future of Professional Higher Education in the digital age where institutions will have great opportunities to address life-long-learning concepts. This should cover the role of such type of higher education, its links to other education sectors within the life-long learning, identification of relevant learning and assessment methods. As a European network organisation EURASHE aims to learn from best practices from its members across Europe and translate these into policy messages. EURASHE's Vice President Ulf Ehlers has been just approved by representatives of 48 governments and other stakeholders to co-chair the Bologna Process Advisory Group for Learning and Teaching (the group in charge of the development of future visions and key themes for future development of the Bologna process/European HE Area) where new teaching and learning formats and spaces for digital learning are on the agenda.

Changes in the world of Higher Education are not always fast, often due to a lack of staff capacity. Governments clearly need to provide the necessary support to ensure staff can adapt to new

circumstances, including the need for more active learning spaces. Identification of adequate and inspiring policy governmental measures to support innovative learning and teaching is the main objective of the Advisory Group. Principally, future learning methodologies involve active, collaborative and self-organised learning while focusing on experience-based learning methods including simulation-based learning (SBL), scenario-based learning (SceBL), problem-based learning (PBL) or any other authentic learning situation which clearly requires more active learning spaces. Digitalisation may contribute to basic knowledge acquisition using various tools, allowing more space for these experiential approaches.

Digital Learning Environments

Digital learning environments are crucial for personalised learning approaches. Not every institution needs to reinvent the wheel or develop its own platform. Digital learning environments could be developed together by partner institutions. There is a growing need for higher education to develop students' lifelong-learning strategies and this is where digital learning environments play a critical role. Additionally, digital learning environments help to enhance the international reach for academics and students.

EURASHE supported the Professional Higher Education Excellence in Central and South Eastern Europe (PROCSEE) project from 2015-2018. PROCSEE is a policy-oriented project, aimed at strengthening the provision of professional higher education, specifically in countries like Slovenia, Romania, Croatia, Czechia and Hungary. The PROCSEE project partners and experts worked together to provide specific policy inputs on how to address the following priorities in each participating country, as well as across the CSEE region:

- Alignment of PHE with regional, local and economic development strategies
- Promotion of PHE in responding to skill shortages
- Organising and monitoring student placements in the world of work
- Personalised Learning Environments in PHE

Personalised Learning Environments in PHE

A summary of PROCSEE's main findings on opportunities and challenges with Personalised Learning Environments indicated several factors:

- There is a misunderstanding as to the nature and needs of Personalised Learning Environments (PLEs). Often PLEs are confused with elearning or with elearning tools, while in fact PLEs cover all the systems that help learners take control of and manage their own learning activity. As such, Personalised Learning Environments describe the tools, communities and services that constitute the individual educational platforms that learners use to direct their own learning and pursue educational goals, as well as to manage the content and process of their own learning
- Currently, the use of effective learning technologies is not yet included in the policies or practices of professional higher education. This contributes to several deficiencies in the system which include high drop-out rates, a skills gap between the desired skills of the labour market and those provided by institutions, as well as an overall lack of student-centeredness in teaching and learning
- From a curricular perspective, it is felt that learners are not primarily responsible for planning their professional development. This is due to inflexible curricular that are usually set within an overly strictly defined education system that is characterised by overly prescriptive time management and a lack of incentives for learners to show creativity and innovation in their studies. Lack of flexibility also makes it difficult for disadvantaged students to take part in PHE, since the system does not always allow for sufficient flexibility to cater to their specific needs
- From a skills perspective, an enhanced emphasis on personalised learning would lead to a better acquisition of transversal competences or 'soft skills', in particular, study skills and communication/ expression skills. It is also believed that enhancing student centeredness would

improve the quality and quantity of feedback coming from student evaluations since students would be more engaged with the outcomes of their learning

- From a policy perspective, the introduction of Personalised Learning Environments is not considered as a priority within the sector. This is reflected by the fact that neither governments nor institutions have instituted policies for the introduction and/or promotion of PLEs and consequently there is a dearth of funding for the introduction of such systems. This is partly due to conservative attitudes towards teaching as well as towards technology on the part of both teachers and students. This in turn means that there is a lack of understanding of the benefits of PLEs and a lack of motivation for their introduction from stakeholders
- Personalised learning environments allow for students to chart their own path to professional employment, and to decide their own orientation to the world of work. This is somewhat hindered by institutions which are traditionally top down rather than based on demand from the labour market as well as by insufficient collaboration between the various stakeholders in PHE
- From a resources perspective, the lack of interoperability between supporting technologies and the absence of skills in institutions for using these technologies in the process of teaching means that the implementation costs of these systems are high, although eventually beneficial for all involved.

How could challenges be addressed?

To achieve the goal of PLEs within professional higher education, the PHE sector will need to:

- Design personalised learning environments which are both learner-driven as well as oriented towards the requirements of the world of work;
- Modernise methodologies and teaching frameworks; and
- Develop new methods to assess learners' progress within a flexible, personalised and technology supported learning environment.

For further information The complete report can be found [here](#)

Student recruitment

Digital media can help students to make the right study choices while they are more and more used as marketing tools by universities. These two roles should be carefully balanced. And digital media helps as well to attract other target groups like people in jobs who would like to further build out their skills. Enhanced internationalisation and opening up to new environments are additional benefits to be considered.

Interview with [Michal Karpíšek](#), Secretary General of [EURASHE](#) (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education)