

HOW EDUCATION TODAY CAN STRENGTHEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

Lucija, you are a board member of the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions and were previously president of the School Student Organisation of Slovenia. Based on your experience representing school students and working on youth interests in various public policies at the national and European level, can you tell us about the key changes needed to secure an education fit for the future from the youth perspective?

Education, of course, is one of the most important and life-long factors in our lives. It follows us every step of the way and drastically affects different aspects of it. It is not just school, university, lecture or a class. Education is our everyday and the real final exam is life. To make education fit for the future we must first realise that and after that also realise that changing only formal education simply won't do the justice. Academic competences must meet life skills and schools must meet communities, parents and children. Because in this complex world we are living in, connectedness in all fields plays an important role.

When talking about making education fit for the future, there are four areas that really stand and show importance of tackling the future of education proactively and holistically. These are assessment, curriculum, lifelong learning and technology.

Curriculum

Starting with curriculum - the heart and core of formal education. As a newly graduated student I can give you first hand information, that current curriculum expects students to know textbooks word by word, is not adapted to the changes in our society, does not pursue students to think outside the box and, in majority, does not offer possibilities to gain soft skills needed for the future. The problem I see is that as our society is growing and life is faster and faster and human capital bigger and bigger, schools see that they should improve in a way that learners should simply learn more and more. It feels like we're striving towards perfection, but in the wrong direction. This encourages enormous competition among students and sets unrealistic standards which affect students' mental and physical health. School curricula should prepare students for life, society and work. It should support creative and critical thinking, encourage students to see and meet the world and, in order to really prepare them for the future, it should be inclusive for everyone and anyone equally. Apart from that it is important to strive towards curricula that is flexible, empowering and most importantly, is learner-centred.

Another point of curriculum is also that it should reflect technological and scientific developments and should therefore smartly introduce the use of technology. In the information age we are currently living in, information is obtained much more easily and students live in abundance of it. But the problem is that we do not necessarily understand it because we are lacking competences that would allow us to critically examine information, understand what is false or true and process it into logical pieces of knowledge that can be applied to different areas of life.

Assessment

When talking about education fit for the future, we must encourage schools to keep an eye on the future, but they should also keep an eye on the past. Because without knowing where we stand, we cannot move forward. Assessment is more important than ever in understanding how students learn, receive information, how different learning approaches work, and how to plan efficient and flexible educational system. It therefore plays an important factor in creating guidelines and curricula for the future generations and secure its constant development and adapting to the current society problems and changes.

Life Long Learning

If we want efficient education that will be fit for the future, we need effective teachers. These teachers will need to be lifelong learners, who would be willing to adapt to new approaches, learn new technologies, be able to evaluate their practice and strive towards constant improvement. On that note, we must also start encouraging students to become life long learners and stress the point that learning is not over once we leave the educational system, it should and must become an enriching part of our everyday lives.

So, why am I stressing the importance of making education fit for the future? It is because in ten or twenty years these students will be in your shoes. They will be the ones making decisions about our planet, our politics, our children. And do you want to see this with disappointment because they won't be qualified to do this and they'll do poor job, or do you want to look at them with pride and realise you have given them the best possible education and our world couldn't be in better hands. Because education transforms lives, but it also transforms societies.