

Vienna

November 2025



Circle U.
Student Union

Political stance.

The Union of Skills from a Student's point of view

Introduction

The European Commission's proposal for a **Union of Skills** marks a new chapter in Europe's vision for education and lifelong learning. It aims to build a shared European space where every learner can develop and use their skills across borders — strengthening prosperity, democracy, and social cohesion.

For **European University Alliances (EUAs)**, this initiative represents both an opportunity and a responsibility. Universities are key actors in translating the Union of Skills into reality: they connect research, education, and civic engagement, empower students with future-oriented competences, and bridge the gap between disciplines, countries, and generations.

For **students**, the Union of Skills offers the promise of a more flexible, inclusive, and portable education system — one that recognises diverse learning paths, supports mobility, and values civic and democratic skills alongside professional ones.

A true Union of Skills must therefore go beyond employability. It must place learners at its centre, reinforce cooperation between universities across Europe, and ensure that skills development serves the broader goals of democracy, equality, and sustainable well-being.

Addressing Skills Shortages and Gaps through Circle U.

The Union of Skills calls for stronger cooperation between education, research, and society to respond to Europe's evolving skill needs. Circle U. is already well-positioned to contribute to this agenda by connecting disciplines, institutions, and learners across Europe.

Through its **four Knowledge Hubs** Circle U. promotes interdisciplinary learning that links scientific excellence with societal relevance. These hubs enable students and researchers to work on real-world challenges that demand complex skillsets: from systems thinking and digital literacy to intercultural communication and ethical reasoning.

By fostering collaboration between universities, students, and external partners, Circle U. contributes to **future-oriented skills development** that extends beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. CUSU calls for a more **student-centered development** of the Knowledge Hubs to provide improved interdisciplinary learning opportunities that align with the EU's educational goals, and its vision for skills development.

Exploring Lifelong Learning Opportunities and Micro-Credentials

While lifelong learning has not been a primary focus of Circle U. so far, the Union of Skills highlights the need to make learning accessible throughout life and across sectors. This presents a strategic opportunity for the alliance to expand its mission and respond to the growing demand for **flexible, modular, and recognisable learning offers**.

Circle U. could become a **laboratory for lifelong learning in practice** by:

- Developing **micro-credential pathways** that reflect its knowledge hubs and can be combined across partner universities.
- Recognising **non-formal and informal learning**, such as volunteering, civic engagement, or professional experience, in line with ESU's recommendation to value all forms of learning.
- Using the **Democracy Knowledge Hub** to pilot micro-courses on democratic values, active citizenship and critical thinking.
- Leveraging the **Language and Interculturality Lab** to integrate multilingual and intercultural competences as core components of lifelong learning.
- Strengthening the Alumni networks by **opening micro-credentials for Alumni**.

Such initiatives would strengthen the alliance's contribution to the Union of Skills and help ensure that learning within Circle U. is accessible, portable, and inclusive – particularly for students and professionals seeking to reskill or upskill in key areas for Europe's green and digital transitions.

Supporting Students through EU Policies and Circle U. Initiatives

The Union of Skills can only reach its full potential if students have access to stable, inclusive, and flexible learning pathways. European University Alliances like Circle U. can play a central role, but students need **supportive frameworks from the European Union** to benefit fully.

Firstly, stable **non-project-based funding** for alliances is essential. It ensures that student-centred programmes, mobility schemes, and cross-university learning pathways can be maintained beyond the lifespan of individual grants. This would allow students to participate in joint curricula, interdisciplinary modules, and micro-credential offerings with confidence that these opportunities are sustainable and recognised across the alliance.

Secondly, **Erasmus+ must be strengthened** to support more inclusive, long-term, and flexible mobility. This includes not only physical mobility but also hybrid and virtual formats that integrate micro-credentials and lifelong learning modules. Students should have clear pathways to accumulate and transfer skills across partner universities, ensuring that all learning experiences contribute to their personal and professional development.

Finally, Circle U. can leverage its **Global Fellows programme** to enrich students' skills and perspectives. By inviting experts from third countries outside the alliance, students gain exposure to global knowledge, diverse approaches, and intercultural collaboration – enhancing the Union of Skills beyond European borders.

Coupled with **automatic recognition** of qualifications and prior learning within the alliance, these initiatives make mobility, international collaboration, and lifelong learning tangible and inclusive experiences for every student in the alliance.

Through these measures, the European Union and Circle U. can together ensure that students are not only participants in the Union of Skills but also co-creators of a learning ecosystem that prepares them for a global, sustainable, and democratic future.

Towards a Circle U. Contribution to the Union of Skills

The Union of Skills provides a framework for rethinking how higher education connects with society. For Circle U., it means moving from cooperation between universities toward a **shared learning ecosystem** where students, staff, and partners co-create knowledge and competences.

The Circle U. Student Union supports the following principles:

- **Student-centred learning** as the foundation for all skills initiatives.
- **Recognition of diverse learning pathways**, including non-formal and civic competences.
- **Inclusive access** to lifelong learning and mobility opportunities.
- **Integration of civic and democratic skills** alongside professional ones.
- **Participatory governance**, ensuring student involvement in skills strategy design and implementation.

By aligning its teaching, research, and engagement activities with these principles, Circle U. can become a model for how university alliances make the Union of Skills a reality – not as a top-down policy, but as a shared European practice that empowers learners and strengthens democracy.

Conclusion

The Union of Skills represents a defining moment for Europe's universities and students. It challenges us to rethink education as a lifelong, inclusive, and collaborative process – one that strengthens Europe's competitiveness while also protecting its democracy and social fabric.

For Circle U., this vision aligns with the alliance's mission: to connect knowledge, people, and ideas across borders, and to equip learners with the competences needed for a sustainable and democratic future. By integrating skills development into its teaching, research, and innovation activities, Circle U. can turn the Union of Skills into practice – not through new structures, but by reinforcing what already works: cooperation, openness, and student participation.

Realising this ambition requires commitment at every level. Universities must continue to innovate and collaborate, but they also need structural support from the European Union – stable funding, a strengthened Erasmus+ programme, and automatic recognition that enables genuine mobility and lifelong learning.

As the student voice within Circle U., we believe the Union of Skills must be built with students, not just for them. It should empower learners to shape their own educational journeys, recognise their diverse experiences, and prepare them not only for work, but for active and responsible citizenship in Europe's future.