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'Smart People for Smart Growth': EUA publishes response to 'Innovation Union' strategy ahead of European Heads of State Meeting

The European University Association (EUA) has today published a position statement on the European Union's "Innovation Union" Strategy ahead of this week's meeting of European Heads of State who will gather in Brussels on Friday 4th February for a meeting of the European Council. The main topics on the agenda will be innovation, research and energy.

Published in October 2010, the "Innovation Union" Communication seeks to set out a strategic approach to innovation in Europe, driven by the highest political level, and is one of the seven "flagships" in the Europe 2020 Strategy. EUA has published this statement, entitled "Smart People for Smart Growth" to underline to all stakeholders the crucial role of universities and higher education in developing an Innovation Union.

The statement focuses around a series of key messages which include:

- Europe's **universities play an essential role in the "innovation chain"** through their research and teaching activities which strengthen the knowledge base and skill development to provide new jobs for the future.
- **Innovation requires a wider interpretation** and understanding than simply being seen as the last step to commercial application. The breadth of university-based research has its impact at many levels in the economy and society. Innovation comes from contributions across the full spectrum of sciences from engineering and technical sciences, medical and life sciences to the social sciences, arts and humanities. Wider interdisciplinary perspectives will also be needed to tackle the growing societal challenges effectively.
- **Three concerns should be overriding for EU funding instruments** in the Innovation Union and the next Framework Programme (FP8): **Excellence criteria** should determine the use and allocation of instruments and funding across the range of research and innovation activities based upon assessments and indicators of best practice in the various research domains; **Simplification** and reduction of heavy administrative and accounting procedures should be the driving forces for the improved implementation of FP8; **Competitive funding instruments open to all research institutions** should be a governing principle of FP8 with no programmes targeted specifically for certain types of research institutions as exclusive partners
- In order to achieve the ambitious programme set forth in the Innovation Union Communication, it is clear that FP8 and related EU **instruments will need an increased budget**
- Particularly in times of economic crisis, **government expenditure on university-based research and training** (and higher education as a whole) should not be regarded as **"consumption"** of public resources that can be easily cut, but as an **"investment"** in training, skill development and research and innovation activities needed to lead Europe out of the economic crisis and towards a truly 'Innovation Union'
- Our **global regional competitors are not waiting for us**, they are investing heavily in universities and the next generation of young people who will be the innovators of tomorrow.

A full copy of the position paper can be downloaded here:

http://www.eua.be/Libraries/Policy_Positions/Smart_People_for_Smart_Growth_Final.sflb.ashx

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You can also visit our website at www.eua.be

The European University Association, as the representative organisation of both the European universities and the national rectors' conferences, is the main voice of the higher education community in Europe. EUA's mission is to promote the development of a coherent system of European higher education and research.

Notes to editors:

- Background on Innovation Union. The Innovation Union is one of the seven flagship initiatives of the **Europe 2020 strategy** for a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. The full communication and key objectives of the Innovation Union can be downloaded here: http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?pg=intro