

EUA Statement on the Research Role of Europe's Universities

Prepared for the EC Conference on "The Europe of Knowledge 2020: A Vision for University based Research and Innovation", Liège, 26- 28 April 2004.

I. Purpose: the Research Role of Europe's Universities

1. *The Graz Declaration*¹ underlines that "Universities advocate a Europe of knowledge, based on a strong research capacity and research-based education in universities – singly and in partnership – across the continent. *European universities* are active on a global scale, contributing to innovation and sustainable economic development. Competitiveness and excellence must be balanced with social cohesion and access."

2. As "multi-actors" in the research process, through their teaching, training, research and innovation activities at regional, national and European/International level, Europe's universities have an essential role to play and are key actors in the debate on future research policies for Europe. This is the message that EUA wishes to deliver to the Liège Conference on behalf of its 680 individual members and 34 National Rectors Conferences.

II. Context

3. The Lisbon Process objectives and the Barcelona 3% target are becoming the reference framework not only for research policy discussions but also for the development of the European Higher Education Area. The European Higher Education and Research Areas are converging, linked by the central role of universities in the training of researchers. EUA is committed to reinforcing synergies between the two processes at all levels.

4. EUA's recently adopted Action Plan for 2004/2005 indicates the growing importance of the "research profile" of the Association. In the interests of its members, EUA is likewise committed to full engagement in the debate on research policies for Europe. Europe's universities support the European Commission's recent proposals for a new mechanism to fund individual project grants, and the establishment of a European Research Council, provided that the necessary funding is secured.

5. As the date of 1 May approaches, and the extension of EU membership to 25, it becomes all the more important for Europe to ensure the successful participation of universities from the new Member States in the development of the European Higher Education and Research Areas. Universities in the new Member States have played an important role in social and economic transition; the intensification of their research efforts needs particular support.

¹ Adopted by EUA in July 2003 and presented by EUA in September 2003 to European Higher Education Ministers meeting in Berlin to discuss next steps in the Bologna process

III. University strategies and policies: principles for action

6. Universities are aware of the need to overcome their fragmentation and to develop institutional strategies underpinning their action. EUA has formulated a set of principles on which strategies and policies should be built. These reflect the unique research role of universities as institutions without which there would be no research and no researchers, and seek to identify a “European way” of fostering and utilising high quality research.

7. In formulating these principles, EUA acknowledges the importance of two phenomena that are increasingly and simultaneously shaping the landscape and character of Europe’s universities: on the one hand growing competition between universities that is resulting in increased differentiation, and on the other increased cooperation and interdependence between institutions that serve to create both focus and critical mass in research on a European scale.

8. The principles upon which Europe’s universities will build the research and innovation strategies and policies needed to meet the challenges of the Europe of Knowledge are:

- universities provide a *unique space for basic research*;
- universities play a *crucial role in the training of researchers* thus ensuring the continuity of the “research pipeline”;
- universities are research institutions *based upon the integral link between teaching and research*;
- universities pursue excellence in disciplinary research, and provide environments that enable the *cross-fertilisation of ideas across disciplines*;
- universities are knowledge centres that *create, safeguard and transmit knowledge vital for social and economic welfare*, locally, regionally and globally;
- universities are engaged in knowledge transfer as *full partners in the innovative process*;
- universities’ willingness to *focus and concentrate their efforts through enhanced cooperation* and networking among themselves and with business, industry and other partners.

IV. Key Challenges for university based research and innovation

9. Growing *competition between universities* is leading to certain degrees of specialisation as universities increasingly play to their strengths rather than maintain strong research profiles in every research field, thus also enhancing their capacity to compete globally. The proposed European Research Council, by funding the best basic research wherever it is found, should support this process. One result of growing competition is an increasing trend towards *differentiation* of mission between universities. Europe needs a diverse spectrum of research institutions, all of which are based upon the link between teaching and research and fulfill key research training and knowledge transfer functions.

10. As a result of more focusing of mission *the role of networks of institutions* at local, regional, national and European levels is growing, for research, research training and the provision of infrastructural support. Based upon complementarity of different interests, these networks foster enhanced cooperation and efficiencies of scale.

11. The structure and performance of university research communities are related strongly to *attracting and retaining the most talented young people* and to the existence of appropriate career opportunities in both the public and private sectors.

12. Mobility is an important element of research training and career development and is not designed to promote brain drain inside or outside Europe; within Europe, universities should seek to contribute to the development of the continent as a whole by promoting mobility while *seeking to discourage long term 'brain drain' from one part of the continent to another*.

13. A comprehensive vision of university based research and innovation requires both the promotion of excellence in basic research and *the fostering of a research agenda that links more effectively research with innovation processes*, and better manages the ways in which the research base is used to benefit society in relation to both economic and social development and cultural engagement.

V. Realising the goals: financial independence, autonomy and responsibility

14. In order to realise these ambitious goals it is important to ensure that universities, as a unique space for basic research, are able to work in a long-term perspective. *Governments and universities alike must be committed to the long-term vision of a Europe of Knowledge based upon university based research and innovation*.

15. While universities need to be encouraged to develop in different forms and to generate funds from a variety of sources, *governments* must empower institutions and strengthen their essential autonomy by providing stable legal and funding environments thus ensuring that universities have the capability to manage themselves in a dynamic way and the freedom to act to seize the opportunities that are offered to them.

16. Universities accept accountability and assume the responsibility of fostering leadership, a quality culture and strategic management capacity in each institution as well as greater transparency, also in relation to the costing of research and innovation activities.

17. EUA is debating these issues with its members across Europe and has accepted the challenge of carrying out an analysis of issues related to the difficult and complicated question of the financing of university research. This question is of paramount importance in any debate on promoting research and innovation at European level and EUA looks forward to a broad discussion on the issues resulting from this study.

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