

Manifesto

Empower European Universities

Expert group on European Universities.
Meeting June 15/16, 2010
Brussels

Europe is in many respects in a crisis: a financial crisis, one of sustainability and one of demography. For universities there exists also an intellectual crisis, as the complexity of the present world – and how to cope with it - is insufficiently transmitted through teaching to the next generation.

We believe that universities are an important force to address these crises and to find new ways to surmount them.

The undersigned plead for urgent action to be taken by universities, EU member states, the European Commission and civil society to empower universities so that they can fully utilize their innovative potential.

1. Increase mission differentiation within higher education, along with differentiation of strategies, new governance and financial arrangements. Much of today's diversity is stuck in regional or national contexts. Increased differentiation is needed in order to integrate the full spectrum of students who aspire to adequate participation in the emerging innovation society. This includes a substantial part of presently untapped talent, like underrepresented groups and life long learners. But European universities must also become more attractive to the best and brightest in order to maintain Europe's competitive position in a globalizing world.

2. Mobilize the full potential of universities to engage in innovative teaching and learning and in research. This requires their full autonomy. A professional management approach by universities makes it necessary to separate academic leadership, responsible for high academic standards, and a (supervisory) Board of Trustees. The latter must be independent and responsible for the strategic pursuit of the mission and appoints an independent university leadership for the day-to-day management. The arrangement for public funding of higher education should be assigned to support such autonomy, which includes risk-taking and innovation as well as public accountability.

3. Make European universities and HE systems much more international. This means attracting more students and researchers from Europe itself, but also from other parts of the world. Education should be based on effective learning and geared towards problem solving, preparing them for a global labor market embedded in

responsibility for a sustainable future. The development of broad, general education in the introductory part of renovated curricula has the potential to enhance cultural awareness and democratic citizenship among students. Universities themselves need to develop a stronger culture of placement, a sense of responsibility for the destiny of their students in society and in the labour market. In short, European universities should train for globalized leadership.

These recommendations can be better realized when European Governments commit themselves to a financing of universities which is balanced with the social and economic returns.

Time has come for creating a differentiated world class system of higher education within the context of the European Higher Education and Research Area.




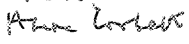





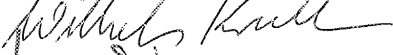






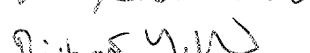
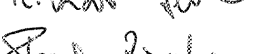


Governments and the EC are requested to take further steps in this direction e.g. by portability of (students) grants and loans over national borders and the introduction of a European Statute for a limited part of European universities.

The undersigned are in full agreement on these points, led by a wish to promote the empowerment of Europe's higher education. We hope to produce a basic guideline to assess the performance of EU member states to empower European universities by June 2011. A first progress report is scheduled to be prepared by June 2012, to be followed by successive progress reports. These documents shall be produced by an NGO (Empower European Universities – EEU) for which the undersigned act as founding members in collaboration with independent correspondents in each of the 27 EU countries.

“Educate the next generation so as to cope intellectually, morally and politically with the messiness and complexity of the world” (Yehuda Elkana)

Brussels June 16, 2010

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Background for Manifesto

A living document – version June 17th 2010

Preamble

Higher education is the key to well being in our present day knowledge driven societies. HE institutions can bring out and develop the manifold best talents of European youth and can contribute to the knowledge base needed for social and economic innovation and for world-wide competitiveness.

There have been dramatic improvements during the last years in some of the EU countries: The Bologna process changed curriculum structures, in a few countries investment in research excellence was made, in other countries legislation led to increased autonomy. There are outstanding examples of European universities changing their governance, internal structures and funding defining their missions according to the needs of society and improving performance in teaching and research rapidly.

Though some European universities are outstanding in their chosen mission, European universities as a whole can be much more productive in contributing to social and economic progress. In the next section “Where we are” we outline a number of weaknesses of our universities. Many of these are the result of a delimiting operating context for universities: they are not empowered to function properly.

This manifesto is directed equally to national governments, European politicians, civil society and to the European university community. Its purpose is to spur the contribution that European universities can make to well being and prosperity in Europe.

The Manifesto has been drawn up by a group of concerned experts, who have ample experience in matters of higher education. On the 15th and the 16th of June 2010, these professionals met in Brussels to discuss the present state of European universities and the challenge to contribute more to Europe’s well being and prosperity in intensive discussions, sharing the common belief in an exciting future for Europe.

The undersigned to the Manifesto will work towards a common platform promoting the reforms needed to ensure the success of European universities. In this regard a new NGO has been set up to promote the progress in Empowerment of European universities. We ask the governments of member states and the European Commission to consider this Manifesto as an input for their elaboration of a 2020 strategy.

Where we are

During the last decades European universities have accommodated increasing numbers of students and are now educating almost 50% of the age group. In particular the success among female students is striking. Labor markets have been well supplied with trained staff, society has benefitted from the civic effects of education as well as from the proceeds of research in the form of new insights and new enterprises. European student mobility has increased bringing the Europe of the citizen closer.

But Europe could do better. Every day we witness that existing opportunities are not used. As a result the potential to achieve excellence and equality of opportunity are not sufficiently explored. Several areas of underperformance emerge.

First of all, the structure of European universities has serious flaws. The European higher education area suffers from strong national fragmentation. The HE system tends to be homogeneous, lacking diversity and variety in deliverance of education. The weak cooperation between the actors of the so-called Knowledge Triangle (education, research and business) causes sectorial segregation. The operational and management structure of many universities – especially in the CEE Countries, where there is no clear division of the functions between the professional governance and the Academic Senate – is too rigid.

When the underperformance of European universities is addressed usually the existing worldwide rankings are mentioned. Indeed league tables provide an alarm signal. This signal shows that Europe, with the exception of some countries like UK, Switzerland and Sweden, is not able to compete specifically in research publication.

The focus on such rankings neglects other important areas of underperformance. A major weakness of European universities is their lack of attractiveness for top talent. Every year thousands of the best and brightest Europeans leave Europe to do their studies or research in the US because of a better study and research climate.

Overall drop-out rates are too high and mobility goals for students are not met, quite often because of insufficient mutual recognition of credits/degrees. University research contributes less to innovation in European universities than we wish for. The number of female professors is too low, in spite of the emergence of an inverse gender gap at the student level. Innovations in learning methods which would substantially enhance learning quality and efficiency are rare, while innovations in curricula and the development of new fields of study are not encouraged. The feedback from students, alumni and society at large, including industry, towards curriculum reform is not always ascertained. Universities do not engage enough in lifelong learning and are not effective enough in attracting new and non-traditional student groups.

A major field of underperformance is the capability of universities to deal with changes in society, especially with the demographic change many European societies have to face. Universities have to adapt to these changes, but they also have to be a driver of change.

A single university on its own will never be able to meet all these requirements. Underperformance will only be overcome by differentiation of institutional profiles, geared at the plurality of societal needs. These facts stress the dangers inherent in the existing rankings. If just one of the problems is noticed, the risk is that we create a monoculture driven by the requirements of research and are not able to address the other wake up calls.

In short: European universities are contributing to the basis for a strong and viable future of Europe in a cultural, social and economic sense – but can do much better. This will only be possible if they find their specific and diverse strategic paths, being released by comprehensive and adequate autonomy. Europe does not only need world-class research institutions, but needs to have a world-class university system

covering the whole range of needs of European societies. World-class research universities are only one part of these systems.

Why are we there?

Europe's universities work under operating conditions which are not conducive to achieve the attractiveness needed to realize fully Europe's potential. These conditions have to be analyzed to find the reasons for and to find adequate instruments against underperformance.

Universities are nationally organized while they train for an international labor market. Some are even governed by political whim and restricted in collecting the financial means to perform well. They are put in the straightjacket of sameness while students are searching for diversity, at the minimum between university and non university higher education.

The Bologna agreement has been a breakthrough by creating an open European higher education space in which the wheels of competition could promote the best achievements. But the Bologna process has been bogged down in the narrow-minded concept of national accreditation, quality control, language problems, government regulation and the budgetary constraints of higher education, so that true competition is severely handicapped. Equality of opportunity is a far cry because special studies and study abroad programs are not available for those who do not have the financial means to benefit.

In all of these respects universities are insufficiently empowered to fully realize their potential. As a result European universities seem to miss the proper functioning of the main pillars of the EU single market principles, namely the free movement of:

- goods/services: joint degrees & mutual recognition of credits/degrees,
- capital: strong cooperation of universities and business/industry,
- people: mobility of students and lecturers/researchers.

Where we want to be

We would like to see a Europe which is attractive to the best and brightest, to the creative and reflective, the entrepreneurial and the governmental from all over the world and definitely from Europe itself, but also for those with potential whose talents are not so easily recognized. Universities should provide education to the full range of talents in the relevant age groups, including those for life long learning. They should not only educate workers which are well placeable in the labor market, but also prepare EU citizens to deal with the complexity of the world and of democratic societies.

European universities and HE systems should provide the world's best possible education and research and not feel relegated to a second place after the US or – as could happen in the next decade – to third place after the US and Asia. Europe's universities should attract more students from Europe itself, but also from other parts of the world because they provide the best education and research. Education should be based on effective learning and geared towards problem solving in teams on a global labor market embedded in responsibility for a sustainable future. The development of general education in the introductory part of renovated curricula has the potential to enhance cultural awareness and democratic citizenship among students. Universities themselves need to develop a strong culture of placement, a sense of responsibility for the destiny of their students in society and in the labor market. In short, European universities should train for globalized leadership.

This also requires steps to bring the European space for higher education and research closer, like portability of (student) grants and loans over national borders and a European Statute for a limited part of European universities. European governments and the European Commission should evaluate the finance of the net inflow of students from other member states. A portability of education costs is impractical. But, for example, compensation out of structural funds would create incentives to attract foreign students from member states.

Europe is going through demographic changes, which threaten its ability to ensure an adequate supply of well-trained manpower. This undersupply can be averted by

engaging actively in brain circulation, due to a greater attractiveness of European universities for non European students, and by remaining focused on equity and opportunities for students in Europe itself.

How to get there

Ample evidence is available on the policy measures necessary to be taken to make European universities conducive to a vital, energetic, dynamic and attractive Europe.

In 2000 the Lisbon declaration exhorted Governments to expand their financial resources for higher education and research by public and private means. The goal was to make Europe the most competitive knowledge economy. Ten years later and in the midst of an economic crisis we find that Governments have by and large been unable to move. Private funding for higher education is still one of Europe's weakest spots. We would plead to raise the contribution of society to higher education (excluding R&D) to 2% of GDP by 2015, being well aware that the economic return on such investment is far above that of alternatives.

Growth and the stimulus of talents need to be strengthened. The present need to reduce budget deficits all over Europe should be regarded as an incentive to speed up the change process and indeed create the financial framework for turning European universities into centers of excellence. This can only be achieved when universities can develop much more diversity in their missions and outlook. Such diversity can also be an answer to the strong demand and even protests by students for more challenging higher education experiences. Diversity demands a greater variety in decision-making and institutional strategy of universities, for which they need a greater autonomy. More autonomous universities need new governance and leadership. This also entails the release of the internal powers of the institutions to engage in the innovation of teaching and learning and in research.

Neither the oligarchic, self administering university, nor the bureaucratic university, governed by public rules and regulations are ideal. Ensuring the professional management approach by universities makes it necessary to draw a more distinctive line between the executive board and the Senate: the one being responsible for strategic and financial issues of the university, the other ensuring high academic

standards. Human resources management should be also improved. In many countries a public servant/employee status of university staff based on an egalitarian promotion system stifles, rather than encourages academic excellence and meritocratic competition.

The arrangement for public funding of higher education should be designed to support such autonomy, including risk-taking and investment in innovation by such autonomous bodies, to achieve innovative diversity instead of homogeneity.

Universities accept that this approach to autonomy and diversity demands clear accountability of their achievements and the responsible use of public funding. In order to enhance the transparency of universities, especially in smaller EU member states, the national accreditation system should be broadened on a voluntary basis to include international accreditation bodies or experts – especially for the MA and the PhD. Governments should rely on trust based on clear accountability for government finances and let the universities decide for themselves as entirely autonomous bodies how they organize the best possible teaching and research.

17 June, 2010