Press Release
Manifesto Empower European Universities

Twenty eminent thinkers and practitioners of higher education cried out in Brussels for urgent change in higher education, in a Manifesto: Empower European Universities. They plead to let the European garden of higher education and research grow according to the basic principles of gardening:
- variety
- empowerment through autonomy
- proper nourishment
- internationalization.

Gardens can be the delight for the spirit. The variety in colors and shapes of flowers and leaves nurture the soul. Plants and trees grow in the right texture, with sufficient nourishment, by empowerment, not by pulling the leaves, by pulling the branches, by coercion or imposition. Present day gardens are enriched by the (literally) cross fertilization with plants and trees of all continents.

Universities could be a major force to address and overcome the crises which affect the future of a viable, creative, social and innovative Europe: the financial crisis, one of sustainability and one of demography, if indeed they are allowed to and feel pressed to realize their full potential.

European Commissioner Vassiliou received the manifesto from Dr. Ritzen, together with his recent book: A Chance for European Universities. She strongly supports the statements of the Manifesto and will bring them into the Europe 2020 strategy, while realizing that European member state governments consider education first and foremost to be subject of subsidiarity.

The Manifesto: “Empower European Universities” is attached. For those interested in the background document or in the book: A Chance for European Universities, please address Jo Ritzen (j.ritzen@maastrichtuniversity.nl).
Attachment

**Manifesto**

Empower European Universities

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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