



RESPONSE TO THE COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION The Role of the Universities in the Europe of Knowledge

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The European University Association (EUA) is responding to the Communication on behalf of its members, *34 National Rectors Conferences and 630 individual institutions from 45 European countries*. EUA welcomes the Communication as an opportunity for critical self reflection, and a clear acknowledgement by the Commission, for the first time, of the unique role of universities in shaping the European knowledge society. This response develops previous statements prepared by the EUA¹ and reflects a consultation of our individual and collective members as well as discussion within our Research Working Group. A formal debate took place with our 34 Rectors' Conferences in the March 2003 EUA Council meeting, and with over 250 individual members in our 2003 General Assembly.
2. Europe's universities are ready to play a decisive role in achieving the goals set for 2010. However, moving beyond the Lisbon Agenda that is driven by considerations of economic and technological development, EUA would like to highlight *the role of the universities in the wider debate on the construction of Europe, and the promotion of European values*, culture and linguistic diversity which we consider particularly important in the present international environment. When it comes to building Europe and ensuring the wellbeing of its citizens, we firmly believe that promoting cultural and social innovation is as important as the purely scientific and technical progress emphasised in the Communication.
3. The *guiding principles* behind our response are:
 - universities play a major role in our society,
 - they need to be viewed as 'institutions';
 - strengthening the research function of the universities and consolidating the European dimension of their work are of particular importance in ensuring they can play their full role in the 'Europe of Knowledge'.

¹ Universities as the Motor for the Construction of a Europe of Knowledge, EUA Input to the Barcelona summit, February 2002; The Role of the Universities in Shaping the Future of Europe, EUA Statement to the European Convention, January 2003

- it is essential to ensure they develop further as strong institutions if they are to be able to reach their full potential;

II. UNIVERSITIES IN EUROPE

II.1 Preliminary Remarks: Defining the term 'University'

4. EUA uses the term "university" to refer to *institutions "with full power to award doctoral degrees"*². With their "twofold traditional vocation of research and teaching" (cf. page 3 of the Communication), universities defined in terms of this integral link form our core constituency. This understanding of the term "universities" underlies all further comments made
5. In the European higher education landscape we are therefore speaking of a *maximum of 1000 institutions* across the continent³, rather than the 4000 institutions mentioned in para. 3.2 of the Communication. While all higher education institutions have an important role in fulfilling some of the processes essential for creating the European knowledge society, only the universities have a central role to play in terms of all four of the different but interdependent elements described in the Communication as being at the centre of the developing European knowledge society, namely the production of knowledge, its transmission, its dissemination and its use in technical innovation.

II.2 A European Agenda for Europe's Universities

6. International comparisons are always very difficult, and while there are lessons to be learned from other continents (e.g. in terms of institutional management techniques or the dynamic division of undergraduate/postgraduate studies in the US), Europe needs to analyse its own strengths and weaknesses, *develop a specific European approach*, and its own framework and models for its universities. This means:
 - valuing diversity as a strength and developing a new "European model" which draws maximum benefit from these differences;
 - building upon and transmitting a heritage of shared European values and culture, as well as a tradition of openness to the international environment;
 - strengthening public responsibility for higher education systems across Europe;
 - promoting equity and access on the basis of merit;
 - demonstrating and further maintaining the integral link between teaching and research while accepting increased differentiation of mission in response to societal needs;
 - delivering excellence at local, regional, national and international level and improving the quality of all universities across the continent;
 - developing a European approach and dimension to QA.
 - ensuring strong links between universities and other higher education institutions;

²cf EUA Articles of Association, Article 2.1

³ the states having signed the Bologna Declaration are taken as the reference framework for EUA's position

- stepping up targeted networking between institutions at European level as well as joint programme development at all levels as a means of offering a wide range of study programmes and reaching critical mass in research.
7. The particular challenges posed by enlargement, some of which have already been identified in the wider Bologna process context, need to be analysed separately, and properly addressed.

III. PREREQUISITES FOR MEETING THE CHALLENGES

III.1 Agreeing on a long term vision

8. EUA believes that the different stakeholders need to *agree on a shared long term vision of the role of the university in European society*. All partners need to be convinced of the importance both of the construction of Europe, and of the European mission of the universities, while being aware that we are building Europe in an increasingly global context. For the academic community this means pursuing European objectives while at the same time strengthening international cooperation with partners worldwide.
9. The present consultation process is an important first step in this direction. Further progress requires that:
- governments (and other partners) continue to support higher education in terms of *a public responsibility requiring long term commitment*, and
 - institutions demonstrate that they have understood the need for change through *strengthening their capacity for, and the implementation of strategic reform*.

III.2 Improving the dialogue between universities and society

10. Universities need to:
- *Work in a long term perspective* in order to counterbalance the predominant tendency to short-term thinking in our societies. By promoting critical thinking through teaching and research, and demonstrating respect for diversity, universities are essential elements in upholding sustainable democratic societies across Europe;
 - *Communicate the key role of research in underpinning university autonomy* and guaranteeing academic freedom, as an essential element in undergraduate curricula contributing to high quality teaching, improved employability and enhancement in knowledge transmission;
 - *Consolidate links to different stakeholders*: stakeholders include students as key members of the academic community, government at all levels, enterprise and business, (both large firms and SMEs), different social and cultural actors. Universities must respond to their needs through teaching, research and dissemination of results and knowledge transfer activities which serve to:
 - Ensure wide and democratic access to higher education on the basis of merit,

- promote LLL and the direct involvement of stakeholders;
- respond to key social issues through promoting targeted interdisciplinary research;
- Promote economic growth and competitiveness through creating and exploiting new knowledge;
- *Strengthen links at local/regional level* where the importance of universities in the life of their communities is growing rapidly. Universities are major employers in many cases. They support local partners in teaching, updating, research and transfer activities, thus improving the competitiveness of local industry, contributing to social cohesion and more generally providing a high return on investment.

III.3 Building Strong Universities

11. Europe needs strong universities in terms of their organisation and their ability to act at different levels:
 - At university level: to promote open and responsive institutions which at the same time are able to function efficiently;
 - At system level: to promote excellence, in particular through different forms of targeted networking activities.
12. *Institutional missions should become more differentiated* in order to meet the needs of a variety of learners and maximise the use of limited funds available. EUA welcomes this development while at the same time drawing attention to the limits of differentiation and the need to uphold the following principles:
 - The *integral link between teaching and research*: teaching is defined, supported and underpinned by the essential link to research, and, conversely research benefits from teaching and working with students;
 - Equity and openness of institutions to all on the basis of merit;
 - The need for an equitable geographical distribution of universities across Europe offering a wide range of teaching and research options
13. These principles are fundamental. While accepting that not every institution can carry out top level research across all disciplines, the goal in Europe should be *to increase the number of universities which are excellent in what they do* in specific areas, and not merely to concentrate more resources on an increasingly limited number of institutions at the expense of the others.
14. The *improvement of institutions' quality and strategic management capacity* is essential to achieve this goal. The EUA welcomes the Communication's stress on universities as institutions with a strategic management capacity, and suggests that in addition to action already being undertaken, the EUA might be asked to identify and share examples of good practice in this area across Europe.

15. This means at university level that strategic long term thinking is required of universities to:

- Reflect on institutional mission, strategic management and efficient use of resources while ensuring sufficient internal communication and dialogue;
- Define appropriate internal governance and management structures;
- Strengthen internal quality culture (including human resource development) as one of the primary responsibilities of each and every institution.

16. This means at system level:

- Governments need to provide universities with the environment they require to function efficiently, for example in respect of the introduction of lump sum funding mechanisms;
- Basing external quality assurance procedures on checking that internal monitoring is done effectively, through institutional audits. An institutional focus for external accountability is, moreover, in keeping with the spirit of the consultation document.
- The sector needs to contribute to the development of a QA policy framework at European level to ensure that quality assurance is effective in improving quality rather than simply controlling it. To this end EUA proposes adopting a Code of Principles for external QA procedures and ensuring its effective monitoring at European level, with the involvement of different stakeholder groups (universities, students, governments etc.).

III.4 Europe needs properly funded institutions

17. Europe's universities have long recognised the premise developed in the Communication, namely that its universities are under-funded to varying degrees and in different ways. While there are no easy answers to the resource question, it is closely linked to the role of the university in promoting socio-economic development, its capacity to respond to the expectations of society, and to the role of the different societal actors in supporting the universities

18. Government and society must feel concerned and be convinced of the importance of the role of universities. There is a general understanding that higher education remains a public service in Europe, and that this implies re-affirming public responsibility for the system as a whole. EUA believes that this must be translated into long term vision and *a common agreement on establishing a stable long term perspective for European higher education*. This should be done by states working together at European level as, to be effective, the vision needs to be shared by all governments involved in the Bologna process. While different traditions and contexts will mean different national solutions on specific issues, it also has to be borne in mind that national options increasingly impact on policy and practice elsewhere in Europe.

19. There is general agreement that *additional financial resources are needed from both public and private sources* in order for institutions to be able to play the role expected

of them in contributing to building Europe⁴. Universities recognise the desirability of attracting more private funding and the need to move towards *ensuring more diversified funding* sources, although the situation will differ considerably from country to country. More importantly, EUA points out that only strong institutions are capable of properly managing and balancing different partnerships. Clear mission and goals are essential to balance the risks of over responding to external demands expressed generally as short term needs, and the attendant risks of endangering the values of critical thinking, autonomy and academic freedom as well as disadvantaging specific disciplines, and the career development of graduates. The importance of strengthening strategic thinking and introducing appropriate, internal quality management mechanisms is essential particularly at a time of resource constraints and the need to juggle such multiple priorities.

IV. KEY ISSUES

IV.1 Strengthening the Role of the Universities in Research

20. In defining the role of the universities in the knowledge society EUA accords a particular priority to strengthening European universities' research capacity. The universities have a *unique contribution* to make to improving Europe's research capacity because of:

- The intellectual 'buzz' of university based research – only possible through the interaction of the generations and the disciplines provided by the university environment;
- The focus on research training and the universities' monopoly in awarding of PhD degrees and thus in producing future generations of young scientists;
- The provision of research based training for ever larger numbers of young people.
- The opportunities provided for the pursuit of interdisciplinary research;
- The multiple possibilities for developing links to society through structured contacts to different stakeholder groups;

21. This means that universities need to further develop their research potential and the benefits that this would bring, to concentrate on networking and partnerships based on their research strengths, in order to reach the critical mass needed for top quality research, and to provide a stimulating research environment able to attract the most talented young researchers. Particular challenges lie in:

- establishing the true cost of university research across Europe⁵ with a view to: (1) developing a common approach and principles in respect of the financial management of research and (2) examining if European agreement on these issues is possible;
- raising awareness of the importance of blue-sky research for a European knowledge society,

⁴ The 3% target for investments in research by 2010, as proposed by the Commission, underlines specifically the importance of improving public support to research and technological innovation and increasing levels of public funding

⁵ EUA urges the Commission to carry out as soon as possible the study on the funding of universities mentioned both by EURAB and in the Communication

- demonstrating the importance of research in the social sciences and humanities,
- promoting university/industry cooperation underlining the importance of mutual trust and not overstating the financial value;
- developing pragmatic models for IPR as well as clear and transparent rules at national and institutional level;
- ensuring a stable legal environment that enables universities to be flexible in defining and implementing their mission and objectives.

IV.2 Consolidating the European dimension and projecting a coherent image to the outside world

22. EUA believes that coherent European policies and implementation mechanisms allowing more co-operation, and not just increased competitiveness need to be put in place, as a means of strengthening Europe, and that these policies should cover the teaching, research and knowledge transfer functions of the university.

23. This means:

- Encouraging *coherent development and implementation of higher education and research policies* at all levels;
- At European level *improving the articulation between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area* in particular through emphasising common concerns related to enhancing scientific training and the need to encourage more talented young people to enter research careers. EUA believes that a concerted effort is needed by universities, national and European funding bodies to secure real progress in improving career opportunities for young researchers and women in science and suggests promoting exchange of good practice and envisaging coordinated action in the framework of the European Higher Education and Research Areas;
- Ensuring that the *link between teaching and research is fully recognised within the Bologna Process*, in particular through the inclusion of doctoral studies. EUA believes that the provision of high quality doctoral and postdoctoral training across Europe is an important element of the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area and that in order to maintain and enhance this quality the universities should take responsibility for sharing examples of good practice and for further defining structured means of working together at doctoral and postdoctoral level in Europe;
- Rethinking the next generation of EU education programmes in terms of a framework programme for education and training which would increase investment in higher education as a key thematic objective, through a number of cross cutting actions, based upon the Bologna Process priorities, bridging the divide to research, including cooperation with third countries, and targeting support to universities and their students as the key actors in the system⁶;

⁶ cf. EUA Response to the EU Consultation Document on the Future Development of the EU Education, Training and Youth Programmes after 2006, February 2003

- Rethinking the approach to mobility and *strengthening European co-operation at the doctoral and postdoctoral level*, bearing in mind the unique role of the universities in providing a research environment allowing established scientists and young researchers to work together creatively. This means *redoubling efforts at all levels to tackle barriers to mobility*, in particular in order to ensure more coherence of the systems of social insurance throughout Europe;
- Concentrating *additional resources on support to networks* of European universities working together in both teaching and research contexts. Such support must include specific provision for the development and running of joint programmes, doctoral programmes and schools, as well as collaboration with different partners. At regional level the support must ensure that the benefits universities can offer are fully accessed. Additional support for universities' networking activities is needed both at national level and at European level where the priority should be for increased involvement of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers as a means of strengthening the European research capacity and making science careers in Europe more attractive.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

25. In summary, EUA's position is:

- We are convinced of the unique role universities have to play in building Europe and that it is in the interests of society to ensure that universities can fulfil their potential if Europe is to advance;
- We are ready to 'contract with governments' at European level on this basis bearing in mind that this implies significant additional resources for universities - that should not only come from private stakeholders – and which should be allocated on the basis of demonstrated capacity for strategic planning and management, quality assurance and development;
- We urge the Commission to facilitate debate between universities and their stakeholders at the highest level in order to arrive at a framework agreement and operational plans for future development;
- We believe that European universities, the European University Association and the European student bodies should be fully involved in the planning and development of further European initiatives resulting from the present Communication.