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**Conference on Public Responsibility
for Higher Education and Research**

Strasbourg, 24 September 2004
Council of Europe

**Recommendations addressed to public
authorities in States Party to the European
Cultural Convention and to the Bologna
Follow-up Group**

Directorate General IV: Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport
(Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education/Higher Education and Research
Division)

Distribution: Working Party

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The Conference recommends that:

1. in light of their importance in the process of building a Europe of Knowledge, Higher Education and Research be viewed as strategic investments rather than as consumers of resources and that public funding must remain a major source of their support.
2. public responsibility for Higher Education and Research, be understood as a multidimensional concept that includes the establishment and maintenance of the required legal infrastructure, elaboration of policy, provision of funds and the further development of the social dimension, to meet current and future needs of the Knowledge Society.
3. public responsibilities be exercised throughout the European Higher Education Area with due regard for the need of higher education and research institutions and systems to act freely and efficiently in the pursuit of their mission.
4. in keeping with the values of democratic and equitable societies, public authorities ensure that higher education institutions, while exercising increased autonomy, can meet society's multiple expectations and fulfil their various purposes, which include personal development of learners, preparation for active citizenship in democratic societies, development and dissemination of advanced knowledge and preparation for the labour market.
5. in order for universities in the European Higher Education Area to meet society's requirements for research and respond to public interests, public authorities must provide adequate funds and, together with the research community, design policies to regulate conditions under which private resources can best be used.
6. considering the importance and the potential benefits and risks of research, public authorities ensure that adequate and disinterested oversight is developed and that access to research results be broadened, for example by adopting and supporting Open Access Publishing initiatives.
7. to respond to increased pressure for cost-sharing in higher education, where students and families may be expected to bear a greater share of the direct costs, public authorities stimulate further research and debate on the impact of different instruments such as tuition fees, student grants, bursaries and loans etc, on aspects such as equality of opportunity, system efficiency, social cohesion, long-term impact on public funding etc, as a basis for future action.

8. with the aim of enhancing sustainable employability of graduates in the European labour market, public authorities ensure that appropriate bridges exist between higher education institutions and the world of work; elements of such bridging include a coherent qualifications framework at the national and European levels, transparent mechanisms for recognition of qualifications and quality assurance, two way information flows between the labour market and higher education, flexible exit, entry and re-entry opportunities.
9. avoiding burdensome administrative arrangements and seeking greater transparency, public authorities in the European Higher Education Area adopt a common approach in setting the requirements for the provision of accurate, objective and up-to-date information on higher education options, including on transnational education providers, that corresponds to the needs of learners as well as other stakeholders, enabling and empowering each to make informed choices at all stages from entry, to employment and including for mobility purposes.
10. public authorities establish, as an essential regulatory mechanism in increasingly diversified higher education systems, cost-effective quality assessment mechanisms that are built on trust, give due regard to internal quality development processes, have the right to independent decision-making and abide by agreed-upon principles.
11. a public debate between national and international stakeholders be promoted in order to develop coordinated policies on the implications of transnational education, keeping in mind the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education as well as the work of OECD and UNESCO to develop guidelines on quality provision in cross border education.

In particular, the Conference **recommends that Ministers** meeting at the Bergen Ministerial Conference of the Bologna Process, in May 2005,

- affirm their commitment to making equal opportunity in higher education a fundamental building block of the European Higher Education Area and to undertake actions that will allow the development of systemic and institutional responses to enable all individuals to realize their full potential and thus contribute to the shaping of a competitive and coherent Europe of Knowledge.
- acknowledge that funding, motivating and stimulating the development of higher education and research is as important a part of public responsibility as the exercise of regulation and control.
- as the basis for the formulation of a coherent and sustainable public policy in Europe, stimulate a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of various approaches that would lead to increased funds for higher education and research, paying particularly attention to the requirement of meeting equity,

effectiveness and efficiency objectives as well as those of quality and autonomy.

Building the Knowledge Society that is democratic, inclusive, equitable and competitive is a **shared responsibility** in which an examination of the responsibilities of public authorities must be completed by an analysis of the public responsibility of all other stakeholders. We urge that such corresponding analysis be undertaken as well.