



European University Association

Brussels Office — Rue de la Loi 42, B-1040 Bruxelles

) +32-2 230 55 44 - fax +32-2 230 57 51

e-mail: info@eua.be

More Research for Europe – Towards 3% of GDP

EUA Research working group – October 2002

General comments

In its address to the Heads of States and Governments, meeting in Barcelona in March this year, the EUA underlined the key role of the European universities in endeavours to build a Europe of knowledge. The strength and originality of the university is its double responsibility of teaching and research, thereby promoting innovation and ensuring continuity. The EUA encouraged Heads of States and Governments to “make more systematic use of this resource in the important process of consolidating and strengthening Europe’s position in the perspective of a global competitive world, and in the creation of a European Area of Knowledge”.

The universities represent one of the largest groups to be influenced by the processes initiated by the Communication from the Commission, and yet the universities are not mentioned as institutions, except in direct relation to co-operation industry-university. Yet clearly any serious reflection or analysis would reveal that European universities are of importance in relation to the policy areas listed in the Communication far beyond the co-operation activities with industrial partners: the training of researchers; the basic research carried out to supply new knowledge; the development of master’s and PhD programmes; the networking of researchers and clustering of universities; orientations to meet society’s needs; the cultural influence; an example of the European social model; etc. This central role played by universities needs to receive recognition and attention, not be neglected.

The policy areas

Sufficient and high quality human resources

The Communication correctly points out that the human resource question needs urgent consideration. The demographics are, indeed, quite serious throughout Europe with about one third of university staff retiring over the next 10-12 years. Serious initiatives are needed to ensure future perspectives which go beyond merely upholding the *status quo*: universities need encouragement to continue developments of master’s and PhD programmes, inter-disciplinary studies must become more widespread, joint degree programmes should be boosted, mobility programmes need firm links to research environments and credit transfer guarantees. Europe’s future researchers must be trained to the highest possible level, with a diversity of competences and skills and in a variety of languages and academic cultures.

The implications of this analysis go far beyond the need to raise awareness about S&T careers only, as indicated in the Communication. Europe must uphold the high level of social cohesion and the EUA must insist on the important contribution to the social model provided by the universities.

Suggested actions:

- a) monitor patterns of employment of researchers at European universities over the coming decade, covering all disciplines and research areas;
- b) support pilot projects to develop PhD studies within European university networks, regardless of discipline, but preferably as inter-disciplinary studies;
- c) encourage national authorities to support regional co-operation to meet labour market needs; and
- d) support European co-operation among regional clusters of university-industry collaboration and collaboration among regional research institutions.

A strong public research base with improved industry links

The realisation of this policy area depends completely on the success of human resource strategies and actions (cf. above). Further initiatives should include considerations about management structures and of infrastructure. Much can be gathered from existing examples of successful co-operation (as in the initiative on “Innovative funding of university research” carried out by the EUA in co-operation with the Directorate-General for Research).

Suggested action:

- survey existing examples of good practice in public-private partnerships.

Entrepreneurship for, and through, R&D

To support the development of an entrepreneurship culture, the diversity in national legislation needs to be surveyed. The legal status of universities differs from one country to another as do the legal instruments needed by universities to receive private funding and to launch spin-offs and other innovative business ventures. It is to be hoped that the future Green Paper will uncover some of the obstacles encountered when launching national and European initiatives.

Suggested action:

- survey the legal basis for university-industry co-operation, also with a special view to assist candidate countries in developing beneficial legal frameworks for such co-operation.

Effective adaptation and use of intellectual property rights systems

The EUA has followed the work of the Commission’s IPR group and find the IPR questions of major importance (including international patents and grace periods). The existing rules and regulations vary considerably, not only from one country to another, but also among individual universities, and a unified EU framework would be a step forward.

The EUA has worked in co-operation with the EURAB working group, “Improving innovation”, to look at ways in which to promote university-industry co-operation, and one recommendation is to examine pragmatic IPR rules and establish examples of good practice.

Suggested action:

- the EUA proposes to undertake a project in collaboration with the European Industrial Research Management Association (EIRMA) on the pragmatic use of IPR, based on existing experience among universities and companies throughout Europe, and provide examples of good practice.

Research- and innovation-friendly regulations

The three remaining policy areas are outside the direct influence of universities and rectors' conferences but the EUA would like to support the proposed efforts to encourage the systematic development and use of common European standards to provide more innovation-friendly environments. As mentioned above, the legal status of universities varies from one country to the other, as do the legal instruments available to launch university-industry co-operation. It is of major importance to ensure transparency in the procedures and maintain the level of ethics demanded from universities and the accountability *vis-à-vis* democratic structures.

Supportive financial markets covering the various stages of development of high-tech and other innovative companies

- cf. above.

Macro-economic stability and favourable fiscal conditions

The EUA has supported the introduction of tax incentives and other favourable fiscal instruments to increase investments in universities. In most European countries, the present fiscal and highly regulatory environments are not favourable to entrepreneurship and innovation. The involvement of the EUA in the recent workshop on "Innovative funding of university research" is an example of the commitment of the EUA.

Conclusion

European universities have vast experience in training researchers, in collaborating in creative and alternative ways and across sectors, in taking market needs into account in planning course curricula as well as innovative research projects, etc. The experiences are often limited to a national regulatory framework, but are not necessarily less creative or innovative because of that. The EUA would like to stress the need to involve universities much more actively in discussions about possible future initiatives and to draw upon their experiences, notably in research training, mobility of researchers, cross-sector collaboration and networking at European level. A genuinely competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy can only be developed with the full participation and engagement of the European universities.