

May 2011

## **Statement by the European University Association in response to the European Commission Consultation on the Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe**

*EUA's response highlights the factors that the association believes are crucial in the years to come for supporting universities' further development, and thus for determining the strategic direction of higher education, research and innovation in future. Our input is based on evidence collected from EUA's broad membership of over 850 European universities and university associations. It has been validated by EUA's Council of 34 national university associations.*

### **Introduction**

1. EUA welcomes the initiative of the European Commission to revise and update the 2006 Communication "Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities" in the context of Europe 2020, the EU's strategic agenda for growth. Looking forward to 2020, **the main elements of the 2006 Modernisation Agenda remain central to the successful development of a sustainable European Higher Education and Research Area.** Thus, autonomy, governance, funding, innovation of learning and teaching, and promotion of the knowledge triangle continue to be essential to ensure that universities are in a position to achieve their potential and continue to "build on their own strengths and differentiate their activities on the basis of these strengths", as outlined in the 2006 Communication. EUA believes that keeping in mind the paramount importance of respect for university autonomy, **strengthened cooperation and partnership between governments, universities and the EC are crucial to make further change happen.**
2. **In the relatively short period since 2006, one of the most notable changes in universities has been the rapid progress made towards institutional diversification and the development of more focused institutional missions and profiles.** This has meant, at institutional level: introducing more flexible and diverse career opportunities for staff, developing and sustaining a wider range of research portfolios and partnerships, diversifying funding sources, ensuring a multicultural learning environment and increased capacity to respond to the needs of more diverse student populations. This was clearly demonstrated and documented in the outcomes of EUA's 2010 Annual Conference, entitled "Diversities and Commonalities – the changing face of Europe's universities", and in a major research project carried out on this crucial topic<sup>1</sup>.
3. **Significant progress has also been made on other key objectives** identified in 2006 through action undertaken by national governments, universities themselves, and European bodies. In 2010 the European Higher Education Area was formally launched. Even if there is still much to be achieved, significant progress has been made in the implementation of the various Bologna action lines through the efforts of all actors involved. Governance reforms have been introduced in many national systems that have generally increased the autonomy of universities and their power to act. Overall participation in higher education has increased, and European higher education has gained in international visibility and recognition. These are both

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<sup>1</sup> Diversities and Commonalities – the changing face of Europe's universities (EUA Annual Conference, October 2010)  
Institutional Diversity in European Higher Education: Tensions and challenges for policy makers and institutional leaders (EUA, 2009)

elements that have been included in the EU 2020 Agenda, and in the 2020 Flagship Initiatives “Youth on the Move” and “Innovation Union” which seek to promote the attractiveness of higher education and research for the knowledge economy and underline the importance of increasing further the number of citizens entering and completing higher education.

## **A changed context since 2006**

4. However, **the context has changed since 2006**. At the EUA Convention in Prague in March 2009, President (of the European Commission) Jose Manuel Barroso told the assembled university audience that “Investing more in education and research will help Europe emerge from recession faster and in better shape”. This message is more relevant than ever today as **cuts in public finances in education, research and development threaten to undermine the contribution of universities to societal development**. EUA is monitoring the impact of the financial and economic crisis on European higher education and published its most recent report in January 2011. This highlights that the economic crisis continues to affect higher education in several ways. Funding has not only been decreased in a number of European countries, but often public authorities are also reviewing the way the funding is actually delivered to universities. Some EU countries face major cuts to higher education budgets and many others need to adapt to noticeable falls in income while only in a few countries have governments upheld their commitment to increase public funding for universities.
5. Following the 2009 Prague Convention, EUA issued a Declaration which contained a targeted message to political leaders and decision makers with proposals for immediate measures to address the crisis, while at the same time setting a strategic agenda of **10 success factors for Europe’s universities to address in the next decade**<sup>2</sup>. These 10 success factors match strongly the Innovation Union policy proposals relating to strengthening the knowledge base and reducing fragmentation, the objectives set out in the “Youth on the Move” Flagship Initiative, and those of the 2006 modernisation agenda. However, while universities are moving forward and modernisation has proceeded at an impressive pace, **there is now a clear risk that the impact of the financial and economic crisis could set back this agenda in important respects**.

## **Priorities for the Modernisation Agenda in the years to come**

6. **Responding to global challenges:** awareness has grown in recent years of the **global challenges we face and of greater global interdependence**. This has an impact on the three key missions of the university: learning and training, research and service to society. Global challenges require global solutions, which can only be achieved through sustaining a global knowledge base and research capacity<sup>3</sup>. Europe’s universities are working hard to provide innovative research and training environments to help tackle these challenges. EUA has underlined, in various policy statements, that universities need a balanced and appropriate combination of instruments and funding at the European, national and regional level to assist their efforts.<sup>4</sup> At the same time our global competitors are not waiting for us, but investing heavily in universities and the next generation of young people.

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<sup>2</sup> Prague Declaration: European Universities – Looking Forward with Confidence (EUA, 2009)

<sup>3</sup> EUA Response to Commission’s “Green Paper” consultation on the European Research Area (EUA, September 2007)

<sup>4</sup> EUA statement: Smart People for Smart Growth (EUA, February 2011); White Paper: Africa-Europe Higher Education Cooperation for Development: Meeting Regional and Global Challenges (EUA, 2010)

7. **The increased role of universities in underpinning social and economic development:** as indicated in the “Youth on the Move” Flagship Initiative, the number of jobs requiring high level skills is on the rise, requiring more citizens to be able to enter and complete higher education, and also to be able to return to higher education for different purposes throughout their lives. While the impact of demographic change in Europe is well understood, and the general awareness for lifelong learning has risen, Europe is still far from using the full potential of its universities in this field. EUA’s “European Universities’ Charter on Lifelong Learning”, adopted in 2008<sup>5</sup>, sets out commitments from universities in addressing the development and implementation of lifelong learning strategies, and proposes a set of matching commitments for governments and regional partners. **These partnerships will be crucial if Europe’s universities are to develop further their specific role as lifelong learning institutions, and they should be promoted through the Modernisation Agenda in future.**
  
8. **Promoting a balanced development of higher education across the EU:** Europe is privileged in benefitting from a large number of very diverse European universities and other higher education institutions with different missions, profiles and constituencies. This is Europe’s great strength. It will be crucial in the years to come to ensure that every effort is made, and all available instruments and incentives are used, to **ensure parity of esteem for universities pursuing different missions** and to **promote a balanced development that spreads the benefits of higher education across the Union**. Moreover, as crucial actors in regional development, **universities in disadvantaged areas have the potential to become strategic motors of development through their key role in the knowledge triangle of education, research and innovation** and by implementing strategies to attract researchers, staff and students, including international students. This requires further efforts at the European and national levels to promote mobility and to remove obstacles. In addition, Member States in receipt of Structural and Social Funds, in particular, should consider how to build on and promote their regional strengths and to consider further skills development through trans-national programmes.
  
9. **Enhancing the quality of research and teaching in universities:** ensuring high quality is central to the future competitiveness of European higher education, but this is not addressed directly by the 2006 Communication. Quality and improving quality is at the heart of the Bologna Process reforms, and the European QA architecture - the European Standards and Guidelines (ESGs), the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), and the annual European QA Forum (EQAF) - are among the most concrete and successful aspects of Bologna. EUA’s TRENDS 2010<sup>6</sup> Report concludes that at “European level the challenge is to support diversity across - and within - 46 countries while adhering to **unifying principles and values, and to frame common ‘standards’ in such a way that they do not stifle diversity, innovative teaching practices and creative research**, and promote quality levels substantially through the central role of HEIs”. Universities need further support in this process in line with the Berlin Ministerial Communiqué (2003) which underlines that the **primary responsibility for quality assurance lies with universities themselves**. The further development of the European dimension of quality assurance is crucial not only for the functioning of the European Higher Education Area, but also for the international standing of European higher education. This means a continued effort is needed to ensure a shared understanding of the diverse

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<sup>5</sup> European Universities’ Charter on Lifelong Learning (EUA, 2008)

<sup>6</sup> TRENDS 2010 – a decade of change in European Higher Education (EUA, 2010)

approaches to QA included in the ESGs, embraced by universities in the development of internal QA, and also serving as a basis for enhanced exchange and cooperation among Europe's QA agencies.

10. **Quality assurance and rankings serve different purposes:** the current initiatives to develop rankings and performance indicators for higher education must be guided by the same objectives: increase understanding of diversity rather than standardise it, and unleash innovative capacities rather than inhibit risk taking. The emphasis on transparency tools, often used as a synonym for rankings, cannot replace the important and necessary debate on the improvement of quality in European higher education. In its most recent publication ENQA has underlined that the **"Bologna transparency tools, quality assurance and rankings/classifications serve different purposes...and that it is misleading to consider them as alternatives"**, noting also that "Rankings and classifications, by putting the performance of institutions in relation to criteria, contribute to the accountability function by informing the public, but they do not contribute directly to quality enhancement, the second function of quality assurance. Thus, rankings and classification tools should not be seen as quality assurance tools"<sup>7</sup>. EUA, in its recently adopted Quality Policy statement<sup>8</sup>, underlines once more that quality is contextual and always related to a stated purpose, taking into account both the national context and the diversity of institutional missions and profiles that Europe is trying to encourage in its universities. In June 2011, EUA will publish a first analysis of the methodologies of the most well-known international rankings.
11. **The substantial growth and development of doctoral education:** this has been one of the most striking developments over the last five years. The major reforms that have taken place in Europe developing training and supervision, interdisciplinary approaches and European and international collaboration are documented in TRENDS 2010. In addition, Europe's universities, through EUA, and specifically its Council for Doctoral Education (CDE), established in 2008, have come **together to adopt the Salzburg Principles (2006) and the Salzburg II Recommendations (2010)<sup>9</sup> as a basis for further development.** A particularly important element is the insistence on doctoral education being based on research and connected to institutional strategies and research capacity. **The establishment of structured doctoral programmes and of doctoral schools, which is rapidly becoming the norm in Europe, reflects universities' capacity to articulate and implement coherent strategies, and to establish appropriate support structures.** These changes have also included improved university-industry partnerships<sup>10</sup> and enhanced internationalisation. Nevertheless, further development is necessary, and support at the level of both universities and governments, for example regarding the further enhancement of institutional structures and management, the acknowledgement and promotion of the doctorate in providing skills for the labour market, and of European and international collaboration and mobility. EUA has also proposed the introduction of an EU competitive funding scheme to support European and international recruitment of doctoral candidates to doctoral schools.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> ENQA Position Paper on Transparency Tools (Adopted on 4 March 2011)

<sup>8</sup> EUA Policy Statement on Quality and Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EUA, October 2010)

<sup>9</sup> Bologna Seminar on "Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society" (Salzburg, 3-5 February 2005); Conclusions and Recommendations: Salzburg II Recommendations – European Universities' Achievements since 2005 in Implementing The Salzburg Principles (EUA, 2010)

<sup>10</sup> Collaborative Doctoral Education: University-Industry Partnerships for Enhancing Knowledge Exchange (EUA, 2009)

<sup>11</sup> Various presented by the EUA President in 2010 and referenced in EUA's response to the recent Green Paper on a Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation Funding (2011)

**12. The global dimension of European higher education:** through the development of the European Higher Education Area a distinct European higher education identity has started to emerge, and **European higher education** has gained international visibility. It would be in the strategic interest of all stakeholders, also for the coordination of action undertaken, to build on this momentum in the future, and to develop further the **global dimension of European higher education**. The planned "EU International Higher Education strategy" should support institutional and national strategies and instruments for global exchange and internationalisation, and thus also promote, through them, the European Higher Education Area, both as a partner and a potential study destination. There is a clear need to articulate and promote a European approach to internationalisation, that reflects not only interest in cutting-edge research collaboration and attraction of talent, but also commitment to global dialogue and partnership, and willingness to respond actively to global challenges, and to contribute to global capacity building through collaborative research and teaching activities. This vital and complex issue was most recently addressed in an EUA White Paper on Africa cooperation, and underpinned through a Joint Statement prepared by EUA and the Association of African Universities and submitted to the 2010 Africa-EU summit. Both the White Paper and the Joint Statement include principles and concrete recommendations that are also valid for higher education cooperation and capacity building with other parts of the world<sup>12</sup>. Enhanced student and staff exchanges, as well as further promotion of capacity building projects for HE institutions would contribute significantly to enhancing Europe's reputation as a high quality and socially responsible higher education and research provider, as well as strengthening ties with third countries. The vital role of universities for the EC's external action portfolio, and that of Member States, should also be considered.

### **Underpinning all developments: the importance of autonomy, funding and leadership development at all levels**

**13. Increased autonomy:** this enables universities to contribute fully to economic and social development by allowing them to exploit their potential in the most suitable ways, leading to better performance. Autonomous universities are also better able to attract additional funds to sustain their academic mission. There is evidence that institutional autonomy and robust internal quality processes are mutually reinforcing, to the benefit of all stakeholders. EUA therefore supports the emphasis placed on the need for European universities to be freed from over-regulation and micro-management in return for full accountability<sup>13</sup>. EUA is collecting empirical evidence<sup>14</sup> and is monitoring progress on the development of institutional autonomy in Europe with respect to autonomy in academic matters, financial issues, organisational structures and staffing policies. Despite significant progress, a large number of universities still lack autonomy in crucial areas. There is also concern that governments are returning to greater micro-management as a consequence of the present public budget cuts.

**14. Reducing the funding gap and achieving the 2% target:** universities need to be able to continue to invest in their future academic and research activities. EUA has

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<sup>12</sup> White Paper: Africa-Europe Higher Education Cooperation for Development: Meeting Regional and Global Challenges (EUA, 2010); Joint Statement of the Association of African Universities (AAU) and the European University Association (EUA) on the role of higher education in the Africa-Europe Strategic Partnership - for submission to the Africa EU Summit October 2010 (October 2010)

<sup>13</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions (The European Commission, 2010)

<sup>14</sup> University Autonomy in Europe I (EUA, 2009)

recently published a major report, which shows that European universities' financial sustainability<sup>15</sup> is conditional on reliable and sufficient public funding. The report also underlines that improved funding mechanisms, such as funding on a full cost basis and further simplification, in particular at European level, are a key element to underpin sustainability. In addition, as an example of an innovative support mechanism, consideration is given to the more widespread introduction of matched funding schemes that foster private giving to universities. Given the current economic crisis and the significant cuts in teaching and research budgets taking place in many European countries, it would be crucial in any revision of the Modernisation Agenda **to restate the importance of "reducing the funding gap and making funds work more effectively for teaching and research", as well as to maintain the goal of achieving the 2% GDP target of investment in higher education.**

- 15. The importance of leadership and professional development:** the profound changes these different reforms imply inside universities have above all highlighted the importance and, at the same time, challenges of leadership, and professional management at different levels. While strategic leadership and professional management capacities in Europe's universities are growing, it will be crucial to strengthen these further across Europe if the goals of the modernisation agenda are to be accomplished. EUA strongly recommends that, in revising the Modernisation Agenda, consideration be given as to **how the various partners can support the development of strategic leadership and professional management capacity in universities.**

## Conclusion

- 16.** In conclusion EUA would like to underline that, given the considerable reforms of the past 10 years, growing global challenges, and the specific European context, the next decade may well be decisive in determining the success of a coherent and consolidated European Higher Education and Research Area, with a distinct global standing, built on strong universities able to both cooperate and compete successfully. While there is considerable potential for Europe to achieve this goal, the present economic climate has also demonstrated a tendency to privilege national interests over European solidarity, and, within some systems, moves towards less autonomy and more accountability for HE institutions. It is our hope and expectation that the revised Modernisation Agenda will continue to address those issues that hinder European universities from making their full contribution to building Europe's knowledge society. EUA looks forward to engaging in this process on behalf of European universities.

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<sup>15</sup> Financially Sustainable Universities II - European universities diversifying income streams (EUA, 2011)

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