



European University Association (EUA) Spring Conference, University of Barcelona (27-29 March 2008)

EUA Conference outlines future for university leadership in Europe

31st March 2008. The nature of university leadership in Europe will have to change as institutions respond to the developments of a competitive knowledge economy whilst meeting the demand for greater social cohesion. This is one of the conclusions to come out of the EUA Spring Conference, hosted by the University of Barcelona, which ended this weekend.

In his concluding remarks, EUA President Professor Georg Winckler outlined some of the key requirements that university leaders will need to guide their institutions into the next decade.

He explained that rectors should not be seen 'as a corporate chief executive', as universities were unique organisations that needed to integrate the strategic management of all three elements of the 'knowledge triangle' through education, scientific research and innovation activities.

As custodian of the institutions, heads of universities would also need to 'embody the core academic mission of the university'; to sustain public confidence, whilst also engaging all university stakeholders (including the public authorities, students, and business).

There also needed to be a clearer understanding of the role of governing boards, Professor Winckler said, so there was a clear definition between governance, management and administration.

EUA's President also had a message for governments and policy makers. In particular he stressed that there needed to be more efforts to increase funding for higher education – by moving towards the European Commission's stated goal that 2% of national GDP should be invested in this sector.

It was also important for governments to understand that league tables – which are often based on research performance – were often 'poor measures of educational attainment'. "Excellence needs to be unpacked and the parity of esteem ensured", he told the audience of European rectors, policy makers and higher education experts.

Professor Winckler also said the conference debates in Barcelona had shown that there was need for further discussion on a number of topics, in terms of strategic development of universities. These included: defining how best to involve students and other external stakeholders in governing the university; how to organize the university services in an optimal way to best serve society.

More debate was also required on the issue of ensuring the critical mass in higher education; particularly the impact of a new generation of clusters and the impact this will have on university management and international cooperation.

Professor Winckler explained that the conference had been successful in identifying some of the ways that universities and national/regional higher education systems could become more efficient in responding to the challenges of global competition.

Ends:

A copy of Professor Winckler's presentation is available from Andrew Miller (please see contact details below)

The European University Association (EUA), as the representative organisation of both the European universities and the national rectors' conferences, is the main voice of the higher education community in Europe. EUA's mission is to promote the development of a coherent system of European higher education and research.

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