

European University Association (EUA) welcomes French debate on university autonomy

July 5th 2007. The European University Association (EUA) welcomes the move by the French Minister of Higher Education and Research to underline autonomy as a critical aspect of the higher education reforms currently under discussion in France. As the representative organisation of more than 700 higher education organisations in Europe, EUA believes that universities need more autonomy in order to give them more flexibility to adapt to Europe's changing society.

"Autonomy is one of the key issues for universities across Europe and not only in France. We hope, therefore, that the present consultation in France will help create a wider debate on this issue across Europe," says EUA Secretary General Lesley Wilson. "If we can't decide who to employ, and what to spend our money on, universities are never going to be able to change." Autonomy is one of the five pillars of a declaration by EUA, entitled 'Europe's universities beyond 2010: diversity with a common purpose', that has been presented to the 46 European Education Ministers attending last month's Bologna process ministerial summit (This declaration is available in French http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Publications/Lisbon_Declaration_final_French_version.pdf).

The declaration states : "For universities, the adaptability and flexibility required to respond to a changing society and to changing demands relies above all on increased autonomy and adequate funding, giving them the space in which to find their place. The common purpose of contributing to Europe's development is not opposed to diversity; instead, it requires that each university should define and pursue its mission, and thus collectively provide for the needs of individual countries and Europe as a whole. Autonomy implies control of major assets such as estates, and of staff; it also implies a readiness to be accountable both to the internal university community – both staff and students – and to society as a whole."

"We are glad that our French member, the *Conférence des Présidents d'Université* is playing a key consultative role in the preparation of these reforms and look forward to debate that will follow," adds Lesley Wilson.

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The European University Association, 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.