EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION

Universities without walls

A vision for 2030

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Foreword

The principal role of a university leader is to ensure that the institution has a fit-for-purpose strategic plan and that it is implemented effectively. Never has this responsibility been more important, nor more challenging. Our evolution into "knowledge societies" has placed universities at the epicentre of human creativity and learning, critical to our planet surviving and thriving. Meanwhile, the forces acting on universities have grown in complexity and accelerate continuously. Stakeholders that institutions serve and rely on to enable their success expand continuously in number and diversity, and have more expectations.

Every institution's strategic plan must begin with a vision of what it aspires to be, what it must become, to discharge its mission in society. That vision relies on extensive horizon scanning, much guesswork and a lot of consultation. "Universities without Walls" is offered as a support, to guide university leaders and their academic communities in their institutional planning. It is a distillation of the views of many experts and stakeholders on how Europe's universities might best serve society in the coming years.

Why a ten-year vision now? Firstly, there is a growing sense of being at a tipping point, a time of transformation driven by multiple economic, political and environmental pressures. Secondly, the ongoing pandemic adds to the urgency of addressing what the future for our societies and our planet should and will be. Thirdly, there are exciting developments in the framework conditions for our sector at the European level with the emerging European Education Area and the revitalised European Research Area seeking to shape a common political direction.

There is a need for a clear vision for and by universities, how they want to develop, shape and respond to these challenges over this decade. While this guide is aimed at providing inspiration and support for Europe's universities, it is also an invitation to partners from other parts of society to join forces for a better future and for policy makers to ensure the right framework conditions. It is not a crisis response; our sector is strong and dynamic. We are looking forward in order to reflect and to do things better. Key to success will be universities that are open, enforcing the vision of universities without walls, engaging deeply with other parts of society while firmly rooted in their values.

We would like to warmly thank all those who contributed to the development of this vision; more than 100 experts from within our membership, the EUA Board, the 33 national rectors' conferences that are members of EUA, and a wide range of external and non-university stakeholders provided invaluable advice and input. We are extremely grateful to them all. We are also grateful to staff at EUA, particularly Thomas Jørgensen and Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik who managed this process, successfully distilling numerous conversations and contributions and shaping the document.

This vision builds on EUA's work with its members over the last 20 years. It was endorsed by all national rectors' conferences at the EUA Council on 29 January 2021.

We commend it to you.

Michael Murphy, EUA President **Amanda Crowfoot**, EUA Secretary General

Challenges and trends

Europe and the world are facing immense challenges; finding a sustainable equilibrium between ecological, economic and social concerns, the digital transition and major political developments will be some of the main drivers of change for the new decade.

Europe's universities are keen to live up to these challenges. They are enduring institutions that have existed for a millennium, expanding the frontiers of knowledge, educating citizens and driving societal change.

The next ten years will be a brief moment in this history but given the challenges ahead it will be a critical decade, requiring significant change beyond the continuum. The Covid-19 pandemic and ensuing economic and social crisis, with which the decade has started, will cast a shadow over the coming years but will also present opportunities for innovation in Europe's universities.

Many of the developments are already underway. While the situations and profiles of universities across Europe vary and are very much shaped by their specific local, regional and national contexts, some overall external trends can be observed:

- **The climate crisis in particular and sustainability more broadly are urgent issues.** This has led many universities to put their missions in education, research, innovation and culture into the service of achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

- **Technological developments are changing lives and disrupting labour markets.** Universities produce knowledge for new technologies and social innovation. The development and promotion of such innovation is a central element of their activities. Universities also ensure that the impact of new technologies on our societies is studied and evaluated and that graduates are equipped for labour markets that are changing due to digitalisation and new technologies, in particular artificial intelligence. These will also change the way universities and their partners work.

- **Democracy and political systems are under pressure in all European countries to different degrees.** This is due to the radicalisation of parts of society that question democratic values, including freedom of expression. This also threatens academic freedom and university autonomy, which are the basis for the scientific endeavour that drives societal progress.

- **There is an erosion of the public debate through misinformation.** The spread of false information, fabricated evidence and the concept of "alternative truth" undermine the value of evidence and the role of science in society. Universities need to position themselves on this issue and find new and more effective ways to help counter this trend.

- **The world order is changing and research, innovation and education are an increasingly important factor in geopolitics.** Europe's universities must share and co-create knowledge on a global scale against a backdrop of foreign interference, security threats and political worries about Europe's technological and strategic autonomy. This requires Europe's universities to make a delicate assessment of collaborations based on their academic values.

- **Persisting social disparities and demographic changes in many European countries put social systems under pressure.** Higher education continues to be a major motor for socio-economic mobility. This makes lifelong learning, access, equity and inclusion key concerns for Europe's universities, which provide education for half of each cohort of young people graduating from secondary school, as well as for all those who return to university later in life. This makes it necessary to provide for the needs of a more diverse student population.

- **Many universities face a continuous underfunding challenge.** Funding does not always follow the expansion of, and changes in, provision, and there are big differences across Europe. This leads to an uneven playing field and to increased competition between universities for resources. These differences, reinforced by the economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, are likely to mark this decade.

- **The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated change.** This is leading to a rapid expansion in digital provision and research capacity to solve major societal challenges. This is likely to have a long-lasting impact in the future. The knowledge base built by curiosity-driven basic research has been the foundation of a quick response to the challenge and should be preserved in order to prepare for future challenges.

Universities in 2030

When looking to the future, we envision universities without walls; these are universities that are open and engaged in society while retaining their core values. All of Europe's universities will be responsible, autonomous and free, with different institutional profiles, but united in their missions of learning and teaching, research, innovation and culture in service to society.

In this decade, universities will build on their capacity to evolve and will become engines of societal change. They will provide an open, transformative space for common knowledge production through research, education, innovation and culture. Together with other societal stakeholders, they will shape the future of a knowledge-driven society.

OPEN, TRANSFORMATIVE AND TRANSNATIONAL

Universities are communities of learners, academics and professional staff with open boundaries, including alumni and a wide range of partners and citizens. They will continue to be characterised by being cooperative and networked institutions locally, nationally and internationally. As such, they continue to build bridges between countries, cultures and sectors.

On the one hand, universities are places of respite and refuge to test new ideas, for lateral thinking and for creating new knowledge that still lies outside of mainstream awareness. On the other hand, knowledge production can benefit from a dialogue with society, actively involving citizens and non-academic partners such as business, non-governmental organisations, public authorities and others that share objectives with the university. Both areas will remain fundamental for the universities' service to society.

The nature and structure of universities will be hybrid. They will be open as physical and virtual spaces and will work to cultivate both of these when engaging with society. In the future, this will entail that physical and digital learning and research environments must be designed in a holistic way to accommodate the different needs of a diverse university community and allow for flexible and

blended approaches. The physical campus will continue to be crucial as a place for social interaction and dialogue: a place that will host encounters that challenge and inspire, but will also offer quiet spaces for focused learning and research. The virtual campus will make the university ubiquitous. It will be developed to improve access for all to participate in research and learning, enhance cooperation, and explore new, innovative ways of pursuing university missions.

The future of Europe's universities will be transnational. International cooperation will continue to provide a prerequisite for high quality research and innovation, as well as learning and teaching. Universities are showcases for peaceful and constructive European and international cooperation. They also nurture a positive and reflective attitude towards a European identity, in addition to global, national and regional ones, and will do so in the future.

SUSTAINABLE, DIVERSE AND ENGAGED

Sustainability is the most significant global challenge. The UN Sustainable Development Goals provide a holistic agenda addressing this challenge by balancing economic, social and environmental needs.

Sustainable development will be the main framework for driving impact through university missions, as universities proactively reflect upon, find and promote solutions in dialogue with society.

Universities will put their missions into the service of sustainability, evaluating and being accountable for the appropriate adjustment of principles and values, as well as policies and activities. This will require a careful balance between funding of strategic research priorities, retaining the freedom of the individual researchers and recognising the responsibility of universities in ensuring a broad knowledge base for society through curiosity-driven research. Providing the skills and the knowledge needed for sustainable development and practices will be a key task in relation to university learning and teaching.

Interdisciplinarity is an important approach based on a proficient command of disciplinary research. Many new discoveries will happen at the interface between disciplines and will be crucial for meeting the challenges.

Diversity and social cohesion are important components of sustainable development. Universities will provide a scientific mindset and opportunities to people from different backgrounds and reflect the diversity of society. Access to higher education will be equitable and open to all who qualify. Universities will be equipped to welcome students and staff from all backgrounds. Through this, universities will play an important role in addressing social disparities that have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis. This will be a crucial element in Europe's recovery.

Universities and their missions will widely benefit from equity and inclusion, and it is therefore in their core interest to promote these values in society. Learning and research environments will be designed to accommodate the needs of a diverse student and staff body. Students and staff will be equipped to work in diverse environments.

Affirming the civic role of universities will be an increasingly important part of societal engagement. Universities will remain supporters of pluralistic and democratic societies founded on open and evidence-based public debate. They will continue to uphold these values throughout all their missions and activities.

Universities will keep working in partnerships in order to connect, share and build capacity. They will form an inclusive, truly global research and higher education community with partners all around the world, promoting capacity building and equitable brain circulation. Together with a broad range of partners, they will aim to offer high quality teaching and research and contribute to expanding knowledge for all.

STRONG, AUTONOMOUS AND ACCOUNTABLE

In 2030, universities across Europe will enjoy high levels of autonomy and have the capacity to make strategic choices about organisational, financial, staffing and academic matters. The university community, including all types of learners and staff, will co-create the future of the university together with the institutional leadership. Internal university governance will guarantee adequate representation of all groups within the university community, while ensuring efficient decision-making processes.

Universities are accountable to stakeholders and society at large. Accountability will be ensured through appropriate governance and continuous exchange with policy makers, civil society, citizens, business and industry and other societal groups, through various university activities. External stakeholders in university governing bodies will support such a dialogue. Generally, universities will communicate proactively and will engage in a continuous debate about their role and function in society, as a part of being accountable to society at large.

All universities will strive for continuous improvement of their activities in all missions in order to deliver high quality in service to society. Internal quality assurance will remain a key task for institutions in all their missions. External quality assurance will support them in this task.

Universities will uphold academic freedom, which is the freedom of thought and inquiry for the academic community to advance knowledge and the freedom to communicate this knowledge based on accepted standards of academic ethics and integrity. Universities will engage in dialogue with the rest of society. They will work with the communities around them, participate in public debates and address major societal challenges.

Professional staff will continue to play a key role in the development of universities. They will ensure the quality of various tasks, from diversity management to curating data and maintaining infrastructure. Universities will ensure that all staff groups have access to continuous training for professional development. They will aim to be attractive working places for all.

University missions in 2030

The unique combination of the missions of learning and teaching, research, innovation and culture – and their fruitful interrelations – will remain the key characteristic of Europe's universities. These missions will be equally important and mutually enhancing, and an integrated approach will be beneficial to harnessing synergies. Through these missions universities will support Europe's open, pluralistic and democratic societies.

LEARNING AND TEACHING

The higher education learning experience will nurture and enable the development of learners as creative and critical thinkers, problem solvers and active and responsible citizens equipped for lifelong learning. It will kindle curiosity and creativity and support personal development through familiarity

with the scientific method and the traditions of human knowledge and commitment to evidence-based discourse. Through higher education, learners will also attain high-level skills and expertise, including entrepreneurial skills, for their professional development. They will be able to apply knowledge in a reflective manner and critically produce new knowledge. Studying will be better connected with training and learners will have more opportunities to participate in traineeship programmes during their studies. Learners will graduate with both knowledge in their disciplines and exposure to challenges and problem-solving, including in other disciplines. They will also have experience in working with non-university partners towards positively impacting the society around them.

University learning and teaching will be learner centred. It will be a collegial and collaborative process that involves the entire university community, as well as external partners. Teaching will be a core part of academic practice, closely linked to research activities and respected as scholarly and professional.

Universities will provide a context for learning through the integration of their different missions and they will actively promote lifelong learning. While digitalisation will continue to expand, and digitally enhanced provision will be integrated in university education, physical presence on campus will remain a core feature at most institutions.

Learners' goals and needs will be diversified; some will seek personal development and a degree after finishing secondary education, while others will enter at different stages in their lives and for different purposes. They will have access to a variety of learning spaces and flexible, multi- and interdisciplinary paths that ensure that their learning is at the centre of the process.

RESEARCH

Universities will be essential to the research process and will be strong drivers in this endeavour, collaborating with a variety of different partners. Universities will continue to expand the frontiers of knowledge in order to better understand the physical universe and the human condition. While fundamental, curiosity-driven research will be a precondition for knowledge-based solutions, it will also be fully recognised as an end in itself. Universities will provide space for lateral thinkers, who test and develop new ideas that are not yet acknowledged by fellow researchers or by society at large.

Universities will facilitate dialogue across disciplines and promote multi- and interdisciplinary research.

Open Science, making research accessible to all, will be the default way of producing knowledge. Universities will support a diverse non-commercial publishing system and will, themselves, be directly involved in such a system, by promoting and supporting non-commercial and smaller publishing initiatives. Data and other outputs resulting from research will be made FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable). Scientists will be adequately rewarded for the processing and publishing of data. Europe's scholarly information infrastructure will facilitate cross-border, multidisciplinary research with advanced digital services and tools.

Ethics and integrity are an integral part of academic research and universities will actively promote them across all missions, through the education of students and training of early-stage researchers, as well as a culture of academic self-discipline. Furthermore, universities will maintain the responsibility of delivering doctoral education and ensuring the formation of the next generation of highly qualified researchers.

INNOVATION

Europe's universities will make human-centred innovation their trademark, aiming to achieve sustainability through cooperative models. They will engage in co-creation of solutions with a wide range of partners and with the purpose of meeting common challenges and making a demonstrable difference to society through technological as well as social innovation. As such, universities will play a leading role in innovation ecosystems. They will bring together stakeholders around a common vision, bridging different cultures spanning from academia, business and start-ups, to civil society and the social and cultural scene. They will also reinforce their contribution to the development of knowledge and skills together with partners in the ecosystem.

Academic research and education will be a key foundation for innovation and academics, as well as higher education students and learners, will be active contributors to innovation by working on concrete challenges in multi- and interdisciplinary teams. Universities will enable and support innovation across the other missions by promoting an entrepreneurial spirit in its widest sense.

CULTURE

Universities will continue to make an important contribution to culture, the interpretation of society and the human condition. They will be places where culture is created, performed, exhibited, spread and discussed. Artistic and cultural activities will remain a key element in universities' engagement with society.

Universities will be critical custodians of knowledge and traditions through continuous academic engagement with cultural heritage, including new forms involving digital technologies. They will continue to protect heritage through their responsibility for historical buildings, and be places of experimentation with new architecture.

Universities will be active in cultural debates, providing evidence to demonstrate the changing nature of culture, giving new interpretations to cultural heritage and acting as a window to different kinds of culture. They will promote the study and knowledge of culture and language diversity within Europe and beyond and will continue to be places where people from different cultural backgrounds meet, exchange and collaborate. As such, they will foster mutual understanding and the development of intercultural competences, a vital contribution in a world where local and global realities converge through the increased use of digital technologies.

TURNING THIS VISION INTO REALITY

Universities are created to tackle the unknown. While their future cannot be planned, the tools they have at their disposal to meet the future can be improved. In order to thrive, universities need the right framework conditions: academic freedom, institutional autonomy, sufficient and sustainable funding and efficient support for collaboration.

Europe has different university traditions and unites institutions with different profiles. Differentiation and institutional profiling are key features of the European university landscape and represent a unique strength, also in serving society.

European universities are characterised by collaboration. While universities across Europe compete for resources, they are cooperating on different levels to advance all their missions. They form diverse alliances and partnerships with different scopes in order to develop and enhance all their missions and ensure that excellence in learning and teaching, research, innovation and culture are present in all parts of the continent.

To face the challenges of this decade and drive positive change, it is critical that Europe's universities are equipped to make decisions in line with their institutional profiles about the paths they want to pursue in order to best fulfil their missions in service to society. Europe is and remains a place of diversity, which means that universities across the continent work in different contexts and have different points of departure. For some, the messages below are a call to enhance structures already in place, for others they offer inspiration for new initiatives.

Factors for success

Making this vision a reality will depend on three factors: enabling frameworks, adequate investments and strong leadership.

ENABLING FRAMEWORKS

Regulatory and funding frameworks at the relevant regional, national and European level must:

- strengthen and protect university autonomy in its various dimensions, enabling institutions to make strategic decisions;
- aim at supporting universities in their continuous development. They must go beyond control and compliance. This includes enabling interdisciplinarity, flexible learning and career paths, and exchange and cooperation in research and education. The diverse profiles and strategies of individual universities should be the basis for this support;
- include clear and consistent provisions guaranteeing scholars and students the rights that constitute academic freedom;
- consider the needs of Open Science, for example in copyright and data protection regulation;
- build bridges, safeguarding the diversity of institutional profiles, not levelling it out;

- support transnational collaboration among Europe's universities by considering the impact of regulation in areas such as copyright, data protection, taxation and international immigration and mobility, as well as the transferability of pensions of mobile researchers.

The multilateral frameworks in Europe through the Bologna Process and the European Union provide a unique opportunity to work together across borders. These need to be further developed in the future. The goal of these frameworks must not be harmonisation but building a system that is united in its diversity.

ADEQUATE INVESTMENTS

Across Europe, more investments are needed in research, education and innovation in order to meet the challenges of the new decade and contribute to Europe's ability to access and develop new knowledge and key technologies.

- Public authorities must allocate core public funding that corresponds to the growing responsibilities of universities. There must be a balance between core block grant funding and competitive funding.
- Financial autonomy must be strengthened to enable the university to take strategic decisions and foster institutional profiling. This must also include the possibility to diversify income sources.
- In order to meet the challenges of this decade, additional investments in infrastructure will be crucial. This includes both physical and digital infrastructure, so that universities, students and society at large can fully benefit from both forms of interaction.
- Investment in people, both in academic and professional staff and their development, will be essential to support transformation and address challenges.
- Funding programmes need to provide flexibility for universities to build bridges between different disciplines and strike a good balance between curiosity-driven and challenge-based research.
- Financial incentives and regulatory flexibility should enable universities to increase cooperation.
- European funding programmes are very important for European collaboration, but they must operate in addition to sufficient national public funding.

STRONG LEADERSHIP

Universities need strong leadership to take universities into the future. This entails the capacity to shape the institutional profile, articulate goals for the institution as a whole and make strategic choices for implementation.

- Institutional leadership needs to be inclusive and transparent in its decision-making and be part of the institutional accountability setting.
- Current and future leaders must have support for the development of their leadership skills and transformation capacities.
- The professionalisation of staff in all areas of university management is essential in the implementation of the institutional strategy and needs to be supported and part of institutional development plans.

Priorities for action

Reaching out to society at large and opening up for co-creation will be a continuous ambition for universities in this decade. Many initiatives will facilitate this, and the list of priorities for action is open-ended. The list below demonstrates three key areas where Europe's universities see major potential for moving forward in increasing their societal engagement and contributing to sustainable development.

To fully realise this vision of universities without walls, a coordinated approach and ownership among the main stakeholders are needed. These include university leadership, students and staff, funders and policy makers.

REFORM ACADEMIC CAREERS

This vision for Europe's universities in 2030 requires a reform of academic careers. This should be acknowledged and supported by all stakeholders through the following actions:

- using a broader set of evaluation practices for academic careers, which include a wide definition of impact, beyond traditional bibliometric indicators;
- promoting further parity of esteem between different career paths, including parity of esteem between research and teaching;
- enabling and valorising Open Science in career and research assessment;
- incentivising activities with different forms of impact, including innovation or citizen science, dissemination, supervision and mentoring, while retaining the core goal of research activities, which is the expansion of human knowledge;
- making academic careers less precarious and more attractive as life choices in order to develop and retain talent;
- providing more flexibility for academic careers. It must be easier to switch jobs between academia and other sectors, such as start-ups, industry or public administration. Researchers with job experience outside academia must have access to university careers.

PROMOTE INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Interdisciplinary approaches must be better used for meeting societal challenges across university missions. While disciplines must remain important in order to organise and expand the knowledge production at universities, interdisciplinary approaches must be promoted by:

- recognising interdisciplinary engagement in academic assessment and reward schemes;
- implementing institutional accreditation to complement discipline-based programme accreditation and facilitate interdisciplinary learning;
- making interdisciplinary teaching part of the professional development of academic staff and supporting academic staff from different disciplines in working together.

STRENGTHEN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

As pluralistic societies come under threat, universities must support civic values through active engagement. They can do this by:

- supporting the members of the academic community in using their academic freedom to contribute to public debates, encouraging open and evidence-based discussions, countering misinformation and falsehoods and explaining the lack of finality in scientific judgements;
- promoting opportunities for learners to actively engage in societal projects and debates that build bridges and foster understanding throughout society;
- promoting civic engagement across the university missions, developing participation, respect for diversity and open debate as a common value across the institution;
- providing a continuous reflection on European identity and culture, as well as their contribution to a global world.

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION

The European University Association (EUA) is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 48 European countries. EUA plays a crucial role in the Bologna Process and in influencing EU policies on higher education, research and innovation. Thanks to its interaction with a range of other European and international organisations, EUA ensures that the voice of European universities is heard wherever decisions are being taken that will impact their activities.

The Association provides unique expertise in higher education and research as well as a forum for exchange of ideas and good practice among universities. The results of EUA's work are made available to members and stakeholders through conferences, seminars, websites and publications.

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