



## **UNIVERSITIES AS THE MOTOR FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A EUROPE OF KNOWLEDGE**

As the representative body of European Universities (30 National Rectors' Conferences and almost 600 individual institutions), the European University Association (EUA) addresses itself to the Heads of Government meeting in Barcelona. Almost two years after the Lisbon Summit which set out clear strategic goals for the European Union, the EUA sees the Barcelona meeting as a crucial opportunity to take stock of progress since Lisbon and redefine the priorities for the years to come.

Considerable progress has been made since Lisbon in the development of the European Higher Education Area, in particular through the Bologna Process where 32 national higher education systems are working together on common topics in an agreed framework with common goals and in the introduction of the European Research Area. Indeed, the universities of Europe have shown their commitment to this process through the creation of the EUA, founded in Salamanca in March 2001, as the result of a merger between two existing bodies, with a clear mission to promote the development of a coherent system of European higher education and research.

The EUA welcomes the Member States and the Commission's intention to make "knowledge" one of the three main priorities for the coming years, and underlines the importance that the universities, by their very nature and mission, attach to the integration of strategies and policies in the field of higher education and research. The link between higher education and research lies at the basis of the university as an institution with its mission to ensure constantly the relationship between the production and the diffusion and dissemination of knowledge. This is the strength and the originality of the university as an institution which, in a similar way throughout Europe, for many centuries, has had this double responsibility of teaching and research of promoting innovation and ensuring continuity.

The EUA wishes to underline the fundamental role of the university as institution in building Europe, and in further defining the European social model. In recent decades, in response to increased student numbers and growing societal demand, the university has shown itself capable of responding to these challenges through opening to its environment, both economic and cultural. The university is thus a fundamental element of social cohesion, constructing a shared community based upon common values among various sectors of the population in different countries, through its mission:

- To educate and train for employment ever larger numbers of young, and not so young, people across Europe - the vast majority of future leaders of Europe pass through the universities at formative periods in their life;
- To provide and transmit knowledge, and take responsibility for the creation of at least a major part of new knowledge, so important in fostering economic competitiveness and regional development.

Since the mid-1980s Europe's universities have been active partners in supporting mobility and networking across Europe, both within the European Union and beyond. Much has been done, but much remains to be done in the continued promotion of mobility and the removal of the different obstacles to mobility. EUA confirms the willingness and the preparedness of Europe's universities to play an active role in this process both in relation to the mobility of students and teaching staff, and of young and more senior researchers.

In facing the challenges of global competition the existence of high quality doctoral programmes becomes more and more crucial. The university, thanks to its pluridisciplinary teaching and learning environment, remains the natural location. European universities have a long tradition of ensuring the training of young researchers, and preserving this commitment to teaching and research in a large number of institutions across Europe provides a guarantee of geographically balanced economic, cultural and social development. In the present demographic context attractive training possibilities and highly qualified human resources, are a key element in increasing competitiveness.

The further development of mobility and networking between university staff and students at all levels is crucial for the successful articulation of policies and practices linking education and research. Once again the EUA draws attention to the unique role of the university as the only institution which as its core business provides students with training by and through research, and simultaneously ensures constant contact and interaction between students, teachers and researchers. It is through this constant interaction and cross-fertilisation that teaching quality is maintained and innovation is promoted.

The EUA wishes to underline the key role of the institution "university" in these endeavours, and encourages the Heads of Government 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.