

**Consultation concerning the agenda for the modernisation of the universities
Contribution by the French Rectors Conference (CPU)**

The economic difficulties experienced in the last few years in Europe have had a major impact on higher education and research. In several European countries, funding has been reduced drastically. Inequality, diversity of the evolution of funding between countries have increased differences in important proportions.

The choices of some excellence funding programmes led to the intensification of brain drain within Europe, when the programmes strengthening cohesion could not bring corrections.

Universities have chosen to become economic actors by playing their role as part of the interfaces necessary for innovation and growth. This commitment and this investment also produce resources for the institutions themselves. However, cumbersome bureaucracy and regulations considerably hamper the opportunities for collaboration between the institutions and the social-economic world.

The European context has presented the universities with another challenge, that of countering radicalisation and the rise of extremism. Europe has a role to play, notably by encouraging both the higher education establishments and those at sixth-form level to implement certain specific actions. They are also important players in contributing to the definition and dissemination of European values and interculturalism by aiming at a more inclusive society.

The propositions put forward by the CPU concerning the agenda for the modernisation of the universities cannot be disassociated from this political context that demands rapid solutions. The universities, via their links with the regional social-economic players on which they act, via their international strategies and their actions in the fields of education, research and innovation, are important vectors that carry and give structure to the aims of the EU 2020 strategy. European policies must, more than ever, contribute to giving structure to inter-university cooperation, to increasing the impact of such cooperation in terms of training, employment and innovation and maintaining the ambitious objectives in terms of citizenship, knowledge progress and opening

These propositions are also linked to certain priorities and stakes for higher education establishments at national level.

*****MAJOR NATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS*****

1. National stakes and priorities for the French higher education institutions

1.1 Main stakes

- ***Reinforce the access to higher education and research***

One of the main objectives is that, by 2025, the percentage of an age group having graduated from higher education will have increased to 60%, against 42% today, (50% at bachelor degree level and 25% at master's degree level).

- ***Reinforce employability***
- ***Promote thematic and geographical mobility***

1.2 National priorities

Improved career guidance for improved success

The objective of having 60% of an age-group to graduate from higher education raises the need for improved careers guidance enabling the student to be oriented towards the sectors that are best adapted to their level, abilities and expectations. This strategy imposes requirements to reinforce and develop bridges between different sectors.

Offering a single definition of the ECTS in order to encourage mobility

It is essential to put an end to the misuse of the ECTS system that has been parasitized by the notion of compensatory marks between modules. How is it possible for the ECTS credits that correspond to a student's work and to their learning outcomes and skills to be acquired only by quantitative compensation? This French regulation hampers the clear understanding of qualifications in terms of skills; it reduces the value of diplomas and complicates our relations with a high number of European universities that do not use the same system.

Strengthening university-company links

- A more readable partnership policy

The relations with the companies diversify in different aspects (life-long learning, apprenticeship, research and development, tutoring of students within the companies, vocational learning contract, participation of professionals in the construction of training translated in terms of skills...) and must be further improved:

- By a more global policy of the HEIs;
- By the implementation of a partnership policy that could be better articulated between the different internal structures of the university;
- In the socio-economic world, by an acknowledgement of the missions of the universities in terms of employability and strategy.

- To develop a common vision for life-long learning

To enable a real development of that part of life-long learning undertaken by the state training bodies¹, certain changes are necessary in order to reconcile supply and demand in continuing education, both on the part of the universities, to adapt the training offered to employees most of whom need short non-diploma courses; and on the part of the employees and employers to recognise higher education institutions as major players in vocational training.

- To encourage employability

The notion of skills acquired for graduating must be better explained (diploma supplement, skills framework). Many universities define the evolution of the skills that the labour market is expecting and evolve the content of their degrees. It is worth noting that 30% of today's professions did not exist 20 years ago. The emergence of new professions will accelerate in the coming years. Although it may not be possible for skills to respond purely to short-term imperatives, they can however be the subject of regular on-going discussions with companies. It is a need that exists sector by sector and at all levels, right up to PhD. A balance between the quickly exploitable skills on the labour market and the basics to acquire skills throughout career are the prerequisite to the valorisation of higher education.

- To develop students' entrepreneurial skills.

*******PROPOSITIONS OF THE CPU FOR EUROPE *******

1. An organisation at European level: for an integrated approach, from both higher education and research, in favour of employment

The speed of jobs evolution, the occurrence of daily needs for new skills for society, the emergence of new aspirations for the citizen, advocate a new ambition for higher education by diversifying its objectives, developing its methods and strengthening its instruments.

¹ See the report written by François Germinet, president of the university of Cergy-Pontoise

The EC and the Council of Europe need to unite their efforts to prevent a reduction of the funding available for higher education and ring-fence European funding. They must reaffirm that funding for higher education is an investment, not an expense.

1.1 *Towards an integrated approach to higher education, research and innovation*

The university activities rely on a permanent and continuous interaction between education and research. Research and higher education policies must be carried out in a spirit of close cooperation and collaboration, and should lead to the development of transverse actions. This is all the more important as it is a question of reconciling the trend towards ever-more concentrated research with the wider education offer on a geographical territory.

- It would be useful for the initiatives relative to higher education and research to be approached in close dialogue. Those policies forming part of the EU 2020 strategy could be defined via an integrated approach to be more systematically advocated.
- The evolution of the European Research Area and European Higher Education Area should be tackled in a more concerted manner.
- Interaction between higher education and research is insufficiently taken into consideration within European programmes. It is of first importance to strengthen interactions during the elaboration and the implementation of the upcoming European programmes (FP9 and Erasmus +). We could as well consider education modules after the end of a H2020 project.
- ***Articulating Open science and Open education***
The double impact of digitalisation and globalisation on development and knowledge production opens innovative and revolutionary perspectives. This implies the evolution of research and education methods, notably by reinforcing their interpenetration (co-development). The evolutions in Science 2.0 have an impact on teaching methods through research and learning outcomes. The challenge being to develop a responsible ability in the access and use of the data. This will of openness is one of the major levers to reinforce cooperation between universities at European and international levels.

1.2 *To reinforce teaching innovation*

The evolution of teaching methods partially relies on the use of new media, and caused a dramatic change in the practices of both teacher-researchers and students.

- The aim is to support the renewal of teaching methods, not only through the development of structural partnerships and discussions, but also for a more ambitious approach through an exchange of good practices coordinated at European level.
- A strong investment in technical tools is needed, but awareness, training and implementation of measures motivating teachers are a priority.

1.3 *To reinforce the interconnections between higher education and employment*

Today, the subject of "skills" is handled at two levels in Europe, within the DG EAC (with the universities) and within the DG Social Affairs and Employment (in collaboration with employers). In order to ensure greater transparency:

- The EC should encourage greater dialogue through the creation of framework conditions between universities and companies rather than having them work independently.
- The EC should systematically involve the universities for the definition of skills (skills that correspond to the needs of the labour market and a capacity to learn skills do not equate to knowledge).
- At the operational level, it could be useful to reinforce synergies between thematic clusters in Europe (engineering, information systems, construction, financing, health...) to better link education and innovation, and creating an immediate transfer of skills enabling students and professionals to be in the core of the project approach.
- Develop initiatives such as internships abroad, gap years or international volunteering throughout Europe (such as the model of Ubifrance).

1.4 To reinforce social inclusiveness of universities

It is necessary to boost, enhance and valorise the social and inclusive policy of the higher education institutions (integration, refugees). The open science and open education can help strengthen the inclusive society, although different sectors are concerned. Support at the institutional level and through European programs (Erasmus Programme and H2020) would be useful.

1.5 Towards the promotion of the status of the teacher-researcher

The EC has set up the charter of the European researcher to enable mobility in Europe. Such an initiative should be established for teachers-researchers, encouraging the institutions to promote the teaching function

1.6 Others suggestions in terms of communication and method

- It is important that higher education figures as one of the President Juncker's priorities insofar as it contributes to the implementation of the EU 2020 objectives (growth, competitiveness and employment).
- An administrative and regulatory simplification is necessary to facilitate co-constructions in research and development programmes, as well as technology transfers and valorisation towards the socio-economic world.
- Encouraging learning a second language must be amplified in order to favour direct exchanges between academic staff/students.
- The translation of the documents of the calls for proposals as well as dedicated websites in several languages of the European community is necessary to encourage the academic staff and students to integrate more European policies and programmes.

2. The European Higher Education Area through more structural cooperation between European universities

The European universities represent major vectors for the implementation of the EU 2020 objectives (growth, competitiveness, employment). However, the difficult economic context brings with it the risk of a deep rift between universities, damaging to earlier targets and to cohesion within the European Union. It is therefore indispensable to develop structural cooperation between institutions.

2.1 Strengthening inter-university networks to help in improving quality, employability and the modernisation of the institutions. In favour of European campuses

The European programmes must contribute to reinforcing an improved structure and harmonisation within the European Higher Education Area.

- To this end, cooperation concerning those aims that conform to the EU 2020 strategy must be supported via structural cooperation networks developed between at least 3 universities. These universities could be situated in regions with a different GDP (by borrowing the typology used for the cohesion policy: developed regions - those in transition - those with a GDP below 75% of EU GDP) in order to contribute to a harmonisation of the EHEA.
- The EU should enable a strengthening of the dialogue between European institutions and an exchange of good practices.
- **Rare disciplines** to preserve and promote a solid European base for this heritage, represents an opportunity to reinforce inter-universities network. The aim is to preserve the knowledge that forms part of a common heritage and that will be useful for the careers of the future. They are particularly useful for any project involving an interdisciplinary approach. These disciplines require European support.
- **Using project costing** for higher education. Innovative teaching methods, E-learning, digital (...) so many targets for which the universities are at very different stages of development but that require bottom-up cooperation and exchanges. These networks,

composed of all the stakeholders, could enable structured exchanges concerning the institutions' strategies and the preparation of cooperative projects. The implementation of Project Costing for higher education would enable a strengthening of the networks on themes linked to higher education and see the emergence of inter-university projects that improve the quality of education and employability.

2.2 Increase the number of joint degrees

The DG EAC has already implemented, within the framework of the Erasmus+ and H2020 programmes, initiatives to support joint diplomas (joint master, ITN, etc.). These programmes contribute to the harmonisation of course content between institutions, the mobility of students and teaching staff, and more closely aligned teaching teams. They are also a means to reinforce language learning and contribute to digital development within the establishments.

- The DG EAC should encourage, particularly during this period of economic crisis, structural projects that have a greater impact both through their number and through their effect on the international strategy of the institutions. The creation of European campuses should also be promoted.
- Joint diplomas (joint master, doctorate schools) should be more strongly supported at European level.

2.3 Develop cross-border actions as pilot projects and strengthen the university-oriented policies as an unavoidable actor at the regional level

The universities act at a local level with regional and international social-economic partners. The cross-border regions have very frequently enabled the implementation of closer cooperation in the fields of higher education and research. As such, they are able to serve as laboratories for pivotal partnerships between European universities.

- The aim is to support and encourage such partnerships, thereby implying the development of more structured synergies with the DG Regio. Once again, the aim is to achieve greater impact in terms of training and employability.
- The need for political support to strengthen the dialogue between regional actors (regional authorities, universities, companies, etc.).
- The need for an improved alignment of funding mechanisms to enable more strategic synergies.