



EUA, 31 March 2003

PRESS RELEASE

The role of universities in the European knowledge society

Eric Froment, President of the European University Association (EUA), invited European universities to contribute to the development of a European knowledge society in his conclusions after the EUA Conference and General Assembly at the University of Bristol, UK 28-29 March.

Professor Froment pledged a concerted EUA response to the European Commission's recent communication on the role of universities:

“The diversity of universities across Europe can be a major strength in developing a European knowledge society, and our task is to find the best way for all of our universities to contribute to the interests of Europe as a whole. We have to move forward with a diversified response to the many needs of European society. We also have to maintain our commitment to research-based teaching as a defining characteristic of European universities.”

A creative "intellectual buzz"

In Bristol, the role of universities in the emerging European Research Area was the subject of discussion among 270 university leaders across 45 European countries.

In keynote speeches, Sir David King, Chief Scientific Advisor to the UK government, and Eric Thomas, Vice Chancellor of the University of Bristol, stressed the need for long-term strategic thinking, appropriate structures and government commitment to funding and developing research excellence.

Professor José Mariano Gago, former Portuguese Minister of Science and Technology, underlined the importance of research within universities for democratic societies. Through developing a culture of scientific and critical thinking, and through involving students in research from undergraduate level, universities are able to generate a creative “intellectual buzz” whose effects in wider society cannot be matched by even the most high quality isolated research institutions.

500.000 additional researchers needed

Dr Caracostas, representing Dr Busquin, Commissioner for European Research, highlighted the necessity of ensuring sufficient resources, whether public or private, to bring every institution to the peak of its possibilities. Stressing the importance of the 3% GDP target for investment in research in Europe by 2010, Dr Caracostas pointed out the need for 500,000 additional researchers in Europe, concluding that “human capital is our European strength.”

Conference participants actively contributed to discussions, ranging in topics from the true cost of university research, to examining the potential for increased European cooperation at doctorate level. The results of this meeting will feed into the upcoming EUA Convention of European Higher Education Institutions in Graz, May 28-31, where the links between teaching and research will be a key theme.

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