Looking to the Future:
The Guild’s Vision for
Europe’s Universities
Acknowledgements

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The University of Tartu Delta Centre provides innovate spaces to bring together a vibrant community of students, researchers and innovators to develop new solutions to societal challenges.

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1. Introduction

Vincent Blondel
Chair of The Guild
Rector UCLouvain

In 2020, universities all over Europe have gone digital, challenging students and academic as well as administrative staff in new ways. But universities are also challenged in the core of their endeavour as academic freedom, and the role of science, can no longer be taken for granted. Finally, the complexity of the societal challenges we face – such as the Covid pandemic, climate change, or digitalisation – pose particular opportunities for interdisciplinary approaches, but they also challenge universities in how they teach and research, and how they connect their research with wider communities. These are some of the reasons why this is a good time to reflect on the nature of universities, what makes us strong, and how we can – and must – prosper in the future.
As the European Union renews its vision for the European Research Area (ERA) and the European Education Area (EEA), it is important to articulate what makes our universities distinctive. What are our universities’ strengths, and how can these be enhanced, for the benefit not just of staff and students, but also of our societies? And how do our universities need to change over the next decade or so to ensure Europe’s universities continue to be world-leading in the research and education they deliver?

These questions were at the basis of the discussions amongst University Presidents of The Guild, held in the first half of 2020. What emerged is a vision for universities that seeks to stimulate wider debate in the sector about our key challenges and opportunities. It invites further discussion in the sector, as well as among policy-makers and a wider public, about how these can be met. And it begins with the values that are the basis for our being, and for our actions.
2. Our values

Universities exist to serve society (Preamble, Magna Charta Universitatum). They are predicated on, and committed to, the European values of ‘human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities’ (Art. 2, TEU). From their origins, universities have been institutions committed not only to their localities, but to the wider exchange of ideas, students, and researchers. They are profoundly committed to defending and strengthening the values that underpin the European Union: pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men (Art. 2, TEU).

Europe is distinguished by a rich variety of higher education institutions, and it is important that different types of institutions are strengthened to realise their mission in their specific contexts. As research-intensive universities, our research advances our scientific and public understanding, enriching our quality of life and improving our ability to adapt and mitigate global challenges. Our teaching translates cutting-edge scientific knowledge and imparts a critical perspective to our graduates, enabling them to make a positive impact in their chosen fields. Our scientists and students bring new knowledge to the market, and they are important cultural and societal actors in their regions, as well as nationally and internationally. Finally, universities are communities of talent in their own right. They are distinguished by the commitment, expertise, and contributions of students and staff, which need to be nurtured and valued.

Universities build on integrity and trust, founded on academic freedom and the integrity of the researcher. Their impact is compromised through direct external control which constrains their capacity for critical enquiry. As major societal actors our universities engage with the global challenges we face today, but they also identify problems, challenges and solutions of tomorrow. Universities have a unique ability, and an utmost responsibility, to be institutions of evidence-seeking where scholarship and discussion is distinguished by rational argument, judgement, reason, and responsibility, actively challenging the culture of ‘post-truth’ in all its forms.
With the economy and society evolving at an accelerating pace, research-intensive universities need to find new ways to help overcome declining trust in public institutions, to promote the values they stand for, and to be sources of scientific inspiration. But inspiring through science is not enough. As the production of knowledge – and the public desire for solutions to the challenges they face – is accelerating, universities need to be effective in strengthening the public understanding of how science works, how unpredictable it is, and what its limits are. To defend and strengthen trust in science, and overcome post-factual discourses, universities need to be part of wider coalitions involving policy-makers, non-governmental organisations, and the media, with each fulfilling their particular role, according to their distinctive strengths.

Research-intensive, comprehensive universities have a unique capacity to address societal challenges in their complexity and interconnectedness. The Covid-19 pandemic, for instance, has demonstrated the need to push the boundaries of knowledge across the entire disciplinary spectrum, as the crisis has fundamentally affected public health, social cohesion, the economy, culture, and international relations. In this crisis, universities also demonstrated their capacity to react quickly, decisively and responsibly, putting the knowledge acquired by their researchers and the commitment of their students at the full disposal of policy and civil society.

As global companies invest unprecedented sums in research and innovation, we reassert the value of publicly-funded, independent research done for the public good. Through public funding universities are unique places of risk-taking in research. Risks need to be taken throughout the research pipeline, including in fundamental, frontier-led research across all disciplines, as an essential complement to the more user-oriented research funded by private companies.
3. The role of the EU

Over the past two decades, Europe’s universities have been collaborating and competing with universities in North America, the best of which have outstanding strengths in scientific and teaching excellence, but also in resource generation. In this period, we have also seen rapidly increasing investment by China in its universities, as well as many other countries in Asia. In the coming decade, Europe’s universities will need to find new ways to remain competitive at a global level. Any vision on the future of European universities will need to begin with what makes universities in Europe distinctive, and focus on how they can be strengthened given the challenges and opportunities we can foresee for the next ten years.

The EU has a key role to play in enabling Europe’s universities to flourish, through:

- Defending academic freedom and the freedom of the researcher, within the EU and beyond it.
- Defending standards of scientific quality and the validity of scientific methods against science denial and misinformation.
- Securing scientific standards globally (such as research ethics, open science), and protecting universities from external threats (data security, IP theft, political influencing, etc).
- Removing barriers to mobility together with member states and regions, and enabling our researchers and students to collaborate across borders. In response to the re-imposition of national borders during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is particularly important that the EU helps universities build on their international character and diversity as a source of strength, and that our students help overcome the boundaries in new ways.

Bernd Engler (University of Tübingen) and Jean-Pierre Bourguignon (President of the European Research Council), at The Guild Forum 2017, Solvay Library.
4.

Key opportunities and challenges for universities in Europe in the coming decade

Berit Eika (Aarhus University) and Ellen Krause (University of Bern) at The Guild General Assembly meeting, University of Tübingen (June 2019).
challenges
A. EUROPE’S UNIVERSITIES MUST BE STRENGTHENED THROUGH ACADEMIC FREEDOM, AND IN THEIR FINANCIAL AND REGULATORY AUTONOMY

Academic freedom must remain the basis of universities, because this alone guarantees that universities can engage critically and productively with policy, society, and culture. It is through challenging assumptions, through never taking knowledge and assertions for granted, that new ideas emerge and discoveries are made.

Academics can and should support policy-making by providing evidence and setting out possibilities. Maintaining a supportive but critical relationship to policy and society is essential to academic freedom, and a public understanding of the proper role of science. Scientists must be held accountable for the evidence they provide, not for the choices taken by policy makers, which are rarely influenced by science alone.

Academic freedom must go hand-in-hand with strengthened financial autonomy, for instance to adequately support the running of infrastructures, or to hire talent at competitive salaries. They also require more regulatory autonomy. This is needed for core academic matters (for instance in their abilities to offer joint degrees with transnational partners), as well as for the ways in which universities can plan for the long term, financially and in terms of their infrastructure needs.

Strengthened financial and regulatory autonomy must go hand-in-hand with accountability. Universities need to make use of the freedoms they enjoy with responsibility and due diligence, committed to the highest possible standards.

“The first dimension of academic freedom is the right to search for the truth independently of any type of pressure. A place where this freedom is guaranteed is essential for the future.”

Vincent Blondel, President, UCLouvain

The University of Oslo’s welcome ceremony (August 2019).
B. UNIVERSITIES IN EUROPE MUST RECEIVE AN AMBITIOUS ALLOCATION OF PUBLIC FUNDING, COMMENSURATE WITH THEIR AMBITIONS TO BE WORLD-LEADING IN THE SERVICE OF SOCIETY

To strengthen their research and education and innovation to the benefit of society, universities must receive appropriate resources that enable them to embrace new challenges stemming from digitalisation, interdisciplinarity, educational transformation, and societal engagement. Many of these innovative areas have high fixed costs. Without additional resources, universities’ ability to meet these needs might lead to the compromising of their ability to provide greater scientific depth and understanding through the research-led excellence of the educational experience.

To ensure universities can meet the demand of citizens for world-class research and higher education to address key societal challenges, universities need an ambitious funding commitment from governments, an agreement to devote a significant share of their 3% of GDP target spending on research and innovation to their publicly funded universities. This entails a commitment of governments to enable universities to leave particular room in their budget for strategic transformation.
C. UNIVERSITIES IN EUROPE MUST BE CUTTING-EDGE IN RESEARCH FIELDS THAT ENABLE THEM TO ADDRESS GLOBAL AND LOCAL SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

Universities act as prisms through which wider societal questions are refracted in specific ways, and to which they can provide specific answers. All over Europe universities are addressing the interdisciplinary challenges articulated through the UN’s sustainable development goals. They must be supported in this mission according to their own strengths, in their own particular regional environments. However, as the policy-driven and challenge-based approaches become increasingly important for research, it is often through the disruptive discoveries in fundamental research that the best contributions to specific societal challenges are created. This is why universities need to balance engagement with policy-driven opportunities and promoting the value of investigator-driven fundamental research (which is frequently interdisciplinary).

To address our societal challenges, universities need to bring together expertise and approaches from all disciplines without compromising on the disciplinary depth that each knowledge community can bring to the table. We need to strengthen our knowledge through research and teaching, within individual disciplines and across them. A strong disciplinary knowledge can foster a climate of interdisciplinary engagement, where new intellectual risks are taken, across any number of disciplines. New degrees and courses that traverse disciplinary boundaries will strengthen our students’ ability to collaborate and enquire across disciplines. In engaging with each other and developing new methodologies, all our disciplines will evolve, acquire new dynamism, and prosper.
D. EUROPEAN RESEARCH EXCELLENCE MUST BE STRENGTHENED—WITHIN AND ACROSS UNIVERSITIES

To optimise the unique capacity of research-intensive universities to address complex societal challenges we need to ensure the excellence of our research-intensive universities, to global standards. This excellence is founded on the strength of their researchers, and the universities’ ability to enable researchers to work with the best scientists across Europe and beyond. Universities need to continue to ensure that research excellence is recognised and supported within and across disciplinary boundaries, where risks are taken that are not discernible from a single disciplinary or methodological perspective. Excellent science will stem more and more from interdisciplinary groups of researchers, and this sets new challenges for evaluating individual and collective contributions to scientific excellence, within and across institutions. As ways of conducting and sharing research change, it is important that our capacity to objectify and recognise scientific excellence is strengthened through a range of indicators (especially through qualitative peer evaluation).

“Countries that are not very well represented in European Research Council’s programmes should understand its philosophy: it is all about groundbreaking ideas and excellent Principal Investigators. The European Research Council should not lower its standards in order to be more inclusive.”

Daniel David, President, Babeş-Bolyai University

UCLouvain Learning Centre.
Looking to the Future: The Guild’s vision for Europe’s universities

E. UNIVERSITIES ARE CRITICAL IN ADDRESSING SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE – THIS REQUIRE STRONG RESEARCH AND TEACHING IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

Research and teaching in the Social Sciences and Humanities is an essential enabler for universities to find new ways to strengthen our societies in their pluralism, social cohesion, democratic development, solidarity, sense of justice and equality. These disciplines are indispensable for the abilities of universities to strengthen public institutions and the fabric of European societies, and their capacity to generate knowledge in these areas needs to be strengthened, both through frontier-led research, as well as through their leading contributions to challenge-driven research.

Throughout Europe, elections and social surveys reveal deep anxiety and unease triggered by social, cultural, and economic transformation. Technological and scientific transformations and the economic and social changes they produce set free not only hopes and desires, but also concerns and fears. We need to understand and overcome social and cultural anxieties.

Social Sciences and Humanities are indispensable in appreciating social, cultural and political transformation. Through these areas of knowledge, universities can make an essential contribution to understanding how the European values could be maintained and upheld in a society affected by globalisation, transnational threats, and technological change. If Europe is to master its profound challenges such as climate change, digitalisation, and demographic change, new understanding, policies and tools are needed to help us encounter them in a fast-changing world. Social Sciences and Humanities also have a key role to play in the development, adoption, use and regulation of technologies to ensure that they have the desired positive impact on our societies.

"We have a broad range of disciplines in our university because we think that current research must have as objective addressing global challenges. It is important for us to make disciplines converge but we also know that interdisciplinarity is nourished by very good research at the subject level."

Christine Clerici, President, Université de Paris

The University of Oslo’s library.
F. UNIVERSITIES MUST DRAW ON THEIR PEDAGOGICAL STRENGTHS IN NEW WAYS TO EQUIP STUDENTS FOR THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CHALLENGES OF THE FUTURE

The exponential growth of data and technology, and the complexity of economic, societal and environmental transformation requires students to keep acquiring a deep level of academic knowledge. Universities should engage with new pedagogies (including those facilitated by digital formats), provided that there is evidence that supports their positive effects on learning outcomes. At the same time, many occupations will disappear or change in the future, whilst new ones are being created, requiring high levels of agility in the workforce of the future. Universities need to strengthen the transferable skills of students that enable them to compete and meet the evolving needs of the labour market. In addition, students must acquire the skills to learn, change and adjust their skills and careers over a lifetime. But widening and deepening our students’ education will not be enough. Enabling our students to analyse, critique and embrace social and political change, equipping them with the tools to be active and engaged citizens, is more important than ever.

The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that online learning is no panacea, shifting the debate away from a binary juxtaposition between physical and digital learning. The experience of universities moving to 100% online learning has led to a rich understanding of the potential and the limits of online education and student support. It also yielded a renewed appreciation of the importance of physical learning spaces to support learning as a social activity. Universities have acquired a depth of pedagogical expertise grounded in their experience of teaching in changing times, enhanced not least by rapidly growing student numbers in recent years. It is this experience, rather than a rushed, uncritical adoption of new methodologies, that must be the starting point of how universities embrace the future challenges of higher education.
Without compromising the singular importance of education as a social experience, universities need to develop an enhanced use of blended learning formats, encouraging a greater breadth in the credits that students can acquire, and curricular reforms within and across disciplines. These must always encourage university learning as a holistic experience that enhances not only knowledge, but that trains students in their critical reflection, their judgement, and their ability to learn and express themselves. Increases in the flexibility within the curricula that take full advantage of the digital transformation must not compromise the scientific excellence of the research-led education our universities provide, which requires sufficient levels of specialisation, time and focus. Above all, universities need to ensure a stimulating and challenging learning environment for all their students, actively listening to the concerns of students. Their engaged participation in the development of universities of the future will be a key to success.

"We strongly feel the responsibility to help create the critical thinkers, the leaders of the future. On the one hand, the curriculum is crucial because students learn about the current state of the arts of a certain topic, but at the same time, there should be enough room for students to develop themselves as critical and independent thinkers: that is where universities play a crucial role."

Daniel Wigboldus, President, Radboud University
G. EUROPE’S UNIVERSITIES MUST STRIVE TO BE OPEN, INCLUSIVE, AND DIVERSE

Universities must become more reflective of the diversity of the communities they serve. This diversity should be reflected appropriately at all levels – through the composition of staff (including at leadership level) and students, across all subjects. Universities must actively work towards overcoming cultural barriers to ensure our classrooms are diverse, and that this diversity is reflected in university staff at all levels. Universities must be inclusive communities, where barriers to access to education and careers are overcome across the intersections of gender, ethnicity, social background, and cultural difference, among others. It is important that all those who have the talent and the desire for academic studies have access to university.

"The diversity of society should also be reflected within universities. We need to have universities’ research and education connected with society as a whole so that citizens also see the benefits of supporting universities."

Vincent Blondel, President, UCLouvain
H. EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION NEEDS TO BE STRENGTHENED IN NEW WAYS, BUILDING ON THE OUTSTANDING EXPERIENCES GAINED THROUGH ERASMUS+

Erasmus+ has improved the employability and the intercultural understanding of millions of students. It has also brought European students closer to other continents. No other continent has a comparable programme to contribute to the internationalisation of universities. The international, trans-European experience of our students needs to be strengthened further, as it provides them with critical abilities to engage with an increasingly complex world in which people are mobile, work across borders, have prominent skills in foreign languages, and acquire transferable skills sought after by employers. More students must benefit from Erasmus+, and experience mobility in new and innovative ways.

We welcome the European Universities initiative as providing a test-bed for the closer integration of universities across borders, enabling us to learn from each other, generate new ideas, and develop new forms of partnership at all levels in the university. It is essential that the results generated by the European Universities are widely shared, so that the enthusiasm and focus generated through this initiative enhances collaboration instead of competition amongst universities.

"I hope that the European Universities will be a safe place to try out things with within a network. But I also hope it doesn’t stay there: if these alliances become tight clubs, it won’t be beneficial for our students in the long run. In particular, I don’t think it would be good for Europe because it is crucial that we are open to the world."

Eva Åkesson, President, Uppsala University

Researchers at the University of Vienna.
I. UNIVERSITIES IN EUROPE CAN MAKE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN CONTINENTS

Europe’s universities need to strengthen established international partnerships with their counterparts in countries within and beyond Europe. In addition, they also need to develop new, deep and collaborative partnerships in countries of the Global South, including in Africa, which have a particular potential to address common global challenges. This entails a critical reflection on the extent to which our curricula are Euro-centric, on how universities in Europe have contributed to exploitation and discrimination in the past, and how we can overcome unconscious bias.

As global transformations, including those brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, change the geopolitical influence of nations and universities within them, universities in Europe should act as bridge-builders with their global partners to ensure that ideas fostered through research and education can flow across borders. Universities need to act responsibly in the establishment of their global partnerships, including with non-university partners. They also need to work closely with decision-makers – including the EU – to fight against the misuse of science, and violations against academic freedom anywhere in the world.

New forms of partnership, including networks of several universities within or across countries, are needed to address common societal challenges through research and education. They must strengthen the pipeline of scientific talent in all directions through doctoral exchange and collaboration that encourages mobility without causing brain drain. In addition, universities need to develop innovative forms of educational collaboration and exchange, enabled by digital technology, to apply the experiences obtained from the European University alliances.

The development of digital platforms as tools for internationalisation enhances the importance of online storage and data platforms for universities. Here, the EU can have an important role in ensuring European resilience against foreign, commercial providers. This could also be one way in which the EU could shore up data security against attacks and misuse from abroad.
J. UNIVERSITIES NEED TO EMBRACE A CHANGING LABOUR MARKET, BUILDING ON THEIR DISTINCTIVE STRENGTHS

As our economies transform at an accelerating pace, the skills and competences of the workforce need constant adaptation. Appropriate courses will need to be provided for learners at all stages, by a range of providers, both through face-to-face and distance learning. Universities need to build on their strengths in providing experiential and contextual learning, which sets the university learning experience apart from the targeted provision of other providers. Universities should thus offer new formats for lifelong learners where it is appropriate for them to do so, e.g. where there is a particular need to acquire research-led teaching through courses that are best provided by universities. In this context, universities might be able to open up existing educational content to new types of learners. Where universities engage with professional learners, they need appropriate levels of funding, because a diversification and broadening of the student body cannot go at the expense of their core mission, which is the provision of a holistic education to students pursuing a full degree.

A European system of credits could be developed building on existing classifications, experiences and achievements at the European level to ensure it is effective and minimises bureaucracy. Such a European system would allow learners to acquire credits for courses taken in different countries, at different stages of their lives, and for these credits/micro-credits to be valued in academic and non-academic professional settings.

"Capacity-building in new ways in international collaborations between European and African institutions will be extremely important. Having not only investments in research and HE but also strengthening institutional capacity will be a key factor in developing the African continent towards becoming African knowledge societies."

Åse Gornitzka, Vice-President, University of Oslo
K. UNIVERSITIES MUST BE RECOGNISED AS KEY ACTORS IN INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS, MAKING A DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THEIR LOCALITY AND SOCIETY BEYOND

Our universities have been shaped by their histories and their regional identities. Their international world-view derives from a deep rootedness in their local societies, for whom they carry a major responsibility as employers. Universities inspire their regions through knowledge and culture, and they are inspired in turn by the needs, contributions and cultures of the communities they serve. The local embeddedness of universities is at the core of their national and international mission in research, education, but also in the transfer of knowledge to society and the economy.

The universities of the future will seek to increase collaboration with governments, funders and entrepreneurs to help ensure that new scientific discoveries can lead to incremental and radical innovation. Universities need to ensure that students are equipped with up-to-date knowledge and skills that enable them to make a transformative difference as innovators, entrepreneurs, and in any of their chosen professions. As influential regional actors, universities have particular access to local businesses which they are particularly well positioned to support through their knowledge and expertise.

Universities play an increasingly important role in the innovation eco-system, fostering collaboration with a wide range of actors based on their research expertise, which is distinguished through results from basic research. It is essential that universities contribute to an understanding of innovation that refers to providing solutions for all aspects of life, without being limited to the development of new technological products with a goal of creating economic growth.

New solutions are needed not just to strengthen our economies through innovation that benefits the private sector, but also to strengthen the well-being of our societies based on the needs of the citizens and the public sector. This includes the need to maximise collaborations between academia and non-academic partners such as governments, NGOs and companies to strengthen the impact and role of research in society. To realise this ambition to strengthen our societies, we need new approaches not only from universities, but also from public funders and governments.
L. EUROPE’S UNIVERSITIES NEED TO DEVELOP, SHARE AND USE WORLD-CLASS RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE IN NEW WAYS

World-class laboratories with state-of-the art instruments are becoming more and more expensive, with their innovation cycles accelerating through the development of new technologies and capabilities. Universities’ infrastructure needs must be met with better resources. World-class research infrastructures need to be pooled between multiple institutions within and across borders, and many will involve private partners. The planning cycles for new infrastructures must shorten, with a greater focus on changing the uses of infrastructures as new needs arise. Europe’s Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) needs to be further strengthened, whilst it is also important to improve the governance of small and mid-size infrastructures at the local and regional levels. This includes ensuring their long-term financing, as well as planning how these facilities are shared to ensure their optimal use.

“...No matter how you look at innovation, the impact of universities is truly fundamental, either in an incremental or in a very disruptive way. In the future, we will not have strong innovation which can change the paradigm, mentalities and enhance our cultures without the fundamental research coming from universities.”

Daniel David, President, Babeş-Bolyai University
M. EUROPE’S UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS MUST WORK MORE CLOSELY TOGETHER

In many countries top-quality research is distinguished not just by universities, but also by research performing organisations (RPOs) and academies. Scientists in the RPOs and academies are often already embedded in universities, or work closely with them. Europe’s research base can only be optimised if we maximise the synergies between universities and research performing organisations, as well as the academies, harnessing the particular strengths of each. As more research is shared and interdisciplinary collaborative research becomes increasingly important, the connections between scientists in universities, research performing organisations and academies must grow. Governments and research funders need to support this collaboration through the removal of bureaucratic, financial and legal obstacles.
N. DIGITALISATION CHANGES THE WAY WE DO RESEARCH. UNIVERSITIES NEED TO CHANGE THEIR PRACTICES TO SUPPORT THEIR RESEARCHERS, AND DEVELOP NEW WAYS OF RECOGNISING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

The growing need for interdisciplinarity and open science, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has led to more sharing of data and collaboration in research. In future, data will need to be made FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable), requiring much more resources from universities to support their scientists in the collection, storage and management of data. At the same time, they need to develop ways to evaluate the quality of data that is shared. On this basis, universities must develop new ways of sharing information and research according to the principle ‘as open as possible, as closed as necessary’ – with each other, a broader scientific community, as well as the wider public. This will require significant resources, as research data management will need to be appropriately supported. Universities will also need to develop new ways of evaluating the work of researchers in career appraisals, where research increasingly relies on sharing, openness and collaboration. At the same time, this cannot just be left to individual universities. Mobility is an indispensable part of academic careers. Standards for the recognition of excellence need to be developed bottom-up through researchers and research performing organisations, and recognised across institutions and boundaries.

“"There have to be priority areas for innovation, we can't spread resources thinly. But we cannot impair basic research. Wherever directionality is imposed from top-down, it doesn't tend to work very much because a lot of resources are expended at the translation of existing research but you then do not replenish the pipeline with the basic discoveries needed to really make a difference. Therefore, you cannot impose a top-down approach: there needs to be much more collaboration.""

Anton Muscatelli, President, University of Glasgow
O. UNIVERSITIES OF THE FUTURE MUST SET GLOBAL STANDARDS TO ENABLE ALL STAFF TO THRIVE

Research and teaching are the core business of universities, and excellence in these areas must remain at the centre of career evaluation. At the same time, academics perform a growing variety of activities (for instance, public engagement, collaboration with partners in industry and society, or the commercialisation of new discoveries), and this must be recognised and rewarded appropriately.

Universities must provide appropriate career guidance for PhD students, including on career paths outside academia. In addition, they need to strive to improve the working conditions for academic staff, especially for early career researchers. To achieve this, they need to work closely with governments to ensure that necessary improvements for staff can be resourced in sustainable ways.

In addition, new areas of activity for universities will require new types of careers for support staff, for instance in research data management, digital expertise, and ability to liaise with external stakeholders including on an international scale. It is important that the need for expertise is recognised early on, to enable universities to continue to be as effective in research and teaching as before.
All three areas of development – the need to recognise (and in this way encourage) different activities amongst academic staff besides research and teaching, the need to improve conditions for early-career researchers, and the need to provide for new types of administrative staff – will increase pressure on university budgets. Universities are communities, and it is important that different categories of staff are not competing with each other for resource, but that public funding enables the strengthening of both the academic and the administrative base for European universities of the future.

Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic, during which universities moved online their teaching, administration and most research activities, has raised new possibilities for ways of working in universities. Universities of the future may be able to test and implement more flexible working patterns, especially for administrative staff, through strengthening opportunities for remote working. This also has important implications for striking a balance between the physical and digital infrastructures, noting that the physical experience of working and learning will always be distinctive and necessary.
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