From talent
to societal impact

AN EVOLUTIONARY JOURNEY FOR UNIVERSITIES

Yerun
Young European Research Universities

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Table of content

Introduction

The Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN) seeks to engage in the current discussions on the future of the universities in Europe.

This paper aims to contribute to that reflection by highlighting some of the most pressing challenges that higher education institutions will face in the coming years, by identifying enabling factors and conditions that could allow institutions to evolve in the next decade and by providing a series of recommendations to policy makers to support universities in this journey.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that unexpected events can lead us to transformative changes; however, this is not the only challenge that will drive universities' future. From young universities' perspective, important aspects that influence universities' priorities and actions in the next decade will revolve around the lack of sustainable funding; the evolution of technology and digitisation; the need for a more collaborative, responsible and engaged higher education sector; and the development of Europe's future leaders, all within a context of growing disinformation and a questioning to academic freedom.

When thinking about higher education's evolution, YERUN acknowledges and embraces the diversity existing in the European higher education landscape. In doing so, YERUN believes that the universities of the future should devise a long term strategy that covers the four missions of higher education institutions i.e. education, research, innovation, and service to society and that looks at the universities of the future as enablers for talent to grow in all dimensions.

In this vision, universities accompany the individual's development throughout the different phases of life: from the **students** (where talent sparks), passing by the **researchers** (where talent evolves) and by the **leaders** (where talent is mobilised), and having positive repercussions on the wider **society** (where talent connects and has an impact). Each of these sections includes a series of identified enabling factors that would support institutions to evolve in the future.

Finally, with the aim to provide guidance to EU and national policy makers, YERUN sets a series of key messages identifying the type of support and frameworks that will enable institutions to put this vision into practice.

Key messages:

Joint action is needed in order to reach a shared vision. The whole European higher education community will need to be involved in the development and implementation of the initiatives that will shape the universities of the future.

HEIs need access to sustainable funding. A long term transformation can only happen with enough basic funding and life-cycle funding that must come from appropriate investments in education, research and innovation.

A constant interaction between education, research, innovation and impact policies is needed. Real synergies between the European Education Area and the European Research Area are highly encouraged.

Collaborative activities, practice sharing and common understanding among universities shall increase.

Outstanding obstacles to the achievement of the European Higher Education Area shall be targeted, such as the need for an increased recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad.

Everyone should access and make full use of the new technologies. A future knowledge ecosystem should be supported by trusted digital platforms.

New systems, methods and processes to assess and reward research should be promoted.

Open Science should be further promoted as well as the sharing of capacities and resources for an increased education, research & innovation cooperation across Europe.

Diversity shall be acknowledged and supported in higher education leadership positions.

Dialogue, practice exchange and more collaborative activities should be promoted among leaders of universities to facilitate and enable an open, engaged and participatory leadership.

HEIs must be supported in their engagement with society, industry and other sectors, and in becoming increasingly responsible and sustainable.

The advancements and progress of HEIs should be recognised in all their missions (education and engagement with society as important as their research).

Universities should be incentivised to address knowledge valorisation in its broadest sense, acknowledging the importance of basic research as a vector for the creation of new transferable knowledge.

Why adressing
the future
of universities?
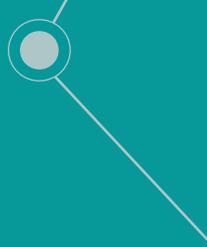
Europe is evolving in a global context characterised by many challenges. New developments keep appearing at an ever-increasing pace, requiring us to adapt at an unprecedented speed[1]. When reflecting on how Europe will transform in the coming years, it is imperative to take into account the future of its universities. Universities are those unique places where students transition into adult life by being exposed to new concepts, skills, and relationships that will shape their personal and professional future. It is where researchers pursue knowledge that contributes to understand a little bit more of the world we live in. It is where many of the current and future leaders get first-hand experience in taking decisions that have an impact on others. Universities are also strong connectors within the societies around them, key actors in their regional innovation ecosystems and ambitious players in the wider world thanks to their globalisation strategies. As the world progresses, so does the higher education sector. In order to continue supporting tomorrow's citizens, professionals and leaders, preparing for their future is an absolute necessity.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that unexpected events can lead to transformative changes. In just one year, the world of higher education has experienced changes that have happened at an unprecedented speed, with universities called to face enormous challenges, but also opening up to new opportunities for a more flexible, innovative, inclusive, and resilient higher education landscape[2].

COVID-19, however, is not the only challenge driving universities' future. Numerous papers outline the many challenges and drivers of change that hint at the need for higher education to evolve[3] . From a YERUN perspective, the key drivers of change and challenges that will influence universities' priorities and actions in the next decade are as follows:

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1 Opening Statement in the European Parliament Plenary Session by Ursula von der Leyen, Candidate for President of the European Commission, 16 June 2019 (link).
2 YERUN (June 2020), The World of Higher Education after COVID-19. How COVID-19 has affected young universities, pp. 38-45 (link).
3 Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services LLP (CSES), Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (European Commission), Towards a 2030 vision on the future of universities in Europe (link)

» **The lack of sustainable funding to match the growing expectations for universities.**

Universities must deliver on many fronts: not only are they responsible for providing high-quality education, but they are also expected to produce excellent research and be key actors in their innovation ecosystems. However, the available funding at national and EU levels rarely matches such responsibilities, it is still very scattered across European countries and tends to be siloed. Expectation is to do more with less or the same funding stream. These risks exacerbating already existing discrepancies across universities in Europe.

» **The rapid evolution of technology and the digitisation of higher education.**

The use of technology in higher education is constantly increasing, bringing about new forms of teaching and learning as well as new types of research activities. More and more, higher education needs to respond to this new reality by integrating the digital transition in the strategic agenda of universities, by ensuring that the whole academic community acquires the necessary innovative and digital skills, by developing a trusted digital ecosystem which keeps the human dimension at the centre.

» **Going beyond a competitive and benchmarked higher education environment.**

Currently, the working conditions and infrastructures needed to develop and attract talent are unevenly distributed across Europe. This renders the process of nurturing and multiplying talent particularly challenging for younger or smaller institutions. In a more preferable spirit of collaboration, sustainability and bench learning, universities could share their available resources and research infrastructures, working together and enabling (online and on-site) access to their resources, so as to multiplicate their capabilities.

» **The development of Europe's future talents.**

The rapidly changing labour market requires an increased focus on skills such as adaptation, creativity, entrepreneurship and lifelong learning. This will enable graduates to be active players in the shaping of tomorrow's labour market. Adequate career development structures must be developed and exposure to other sectors must be promoted in order to support future talents and equip them with the best skills needed for their employability.

» **A more responsible and engaged higher education and research sector.**

Universities already play a significant transformative role, not only by the research they produce and the education they provide but also by engaging extensively with their surrounding communities at local, national and international level and with the wider society. In the coming decade, this engagement will need to be brought to the next level. For YERUN this next level means: a more systemic and better visualised engagement with different sectors, including industry and business, public administrations, non-profit organisations and citizens. This will be particularly important for universities to contribute to the green transition and to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a focus on sustainability, diversity and inclusion.

» **The questioning of academic freedom and the growing disinformation.**

The institutional autonomy and the academic integrity of universities is under pressure[4]. This makes it necessary to take a clear stance against threats to academic freedom while reflecting on the importance of ethics, values, and trust in science. At the same time, disinformation is ravaging and needs to be tackled, by increasing the trust in science as a source of information.[5]

These are only some of the most pressing challenges that universities are facing and will continue to face in the coming years[6]. There is a unique momentum to reflect on them and explore solutions together, as universities, national and international policy makers, and other relevant stakeholders. By tackling these challenges in a strategic way, it will be possible to define the direction of where the higher education sector should go in the future as well as the goals that will be important to achieve.

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4 Matei L. (2020), Charting Academic Freedom in Europe. In: Curaj A., Deca L., Pricopie R. (eds) European Higher Education Area: Challenges for a New Decade. Springer, Cham. (link), accessed on 19 May 2021.
5 European Commission, Fighting Disinformation (link).
6 Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services LLP (CSES), Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (European Commission), Towards a 2030 vision on the future of universities in Europe (link).

Yerun's vision
for the universities
of the future

When thinking about higher education's evolution, YERUN first acknowledges and embraces the **diversity** existing in the European higher education landscape. Being a 'young' university, is already per se a specificity, a distinction that YERUN aims to highlight from its members. Young universities are socially-driven in their DNA, since their establishment has often resulted from the need to find an answer to locally identified challenges[7]. By nature, therefore, their actions tend to always have a look into the future[8] . These "trailblazer" characteristics mark young universities, and are complementary to the features of other institutions. This diversity should be embraced and strategically used in the future evolution of higher education.

Moreover, the above-mentioned drivers of change are asking universities for certain directions of transformation. To embrace such drivers of change in a sustainable and resilient way, YERUN believes that the universities of the future should ensure a constant, mutual interaction between education, research, innovation and engagement. This will contribute to devising a long term strategy between both that covers the four missions of higher education institutions i.e. education, research, innovation, and service to society.

By adopting a cross-cutting approach, YERUN looks at the universities of the future as **enablers for talent to grow** in all dimensions. In this vision, universities accompany the individual's development throughout the different phases of life: from the **students** (where talent sparks), passing by the **researchers** (where talent evolves) and by the **leaders** (where talent is mobilised), and having positive repercussions on **society** overall (where talent connects and has an impact). By looking at universities along this narrative thread, YERUN finds an approach that ensures that no one is left behind and that can contribute to finding answers to some of the multiple challenges of our time.

How can universities empower students to grow within adversities?

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7 A. Zomer, P. Benneworth, The Rise of the University's Third Mission p.88-101. In "Reform of Higher Education in Europe" (link).

8 YERUN (2021), The future starts today! Inspiring initiatives from Young European Research Universities (link).

CHAPTER 1

A university for students:
where talent sparks

How can they foster their creativity and encourage them to be innovative? How do they facilitate the development of the right skills to benefit their changing environment? These are questions that will inevitably arise throughout a university's evolutionary journey. The answers to them will need time to implement the right structures, there will be a need for adequate investments in tools, and efforts will need to be channeled towards developing the right content and skills and towards providing training for teaching and administrative staff. Notwithstanding the challenges, it is possible to start delineating a path for universities to evolve in order to support students to become active players of their learning journey and to ensure adequate mentoring from staff, teachers and their own colleagues.

1.1. New horizons for students' learning pathways

Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, the emerging new **agile teaching and learning** structures have opened new horizons for the broadening of the students' learning pathways. Academic curricula are becoming more and more flexible, allowing students to build their own learning experience and adapt it to their individual needs, for example by offering the possibility to sign up to a wide range of optional modules across programmes and universities. In the coming years, universities should build on these practices to develop an even more **participatory and personalised learning model.**

Such a model will need to consider the importance of developing a clear pathway for **students' career development.** In this sense, attention needs to be put on an intergenerational educational offer which supports **lifelong learning** strategies. Among such strategies, an increase of educational modalities, including **micro-credentials**, with the aim of moulding future talent will certainly be beneficial. Fostering innovative and entrepreneurial mindsets should be a part of the educational experience. Universities should not only prepare students for the labour market and equip them with the skills needed; students need to develop the ability to adapt to the world around them, allowing them to be co-creators of the future job market.

The increased pace of **digitisation** of teaching and learning will be equally part of the development of such a model. Indeed, thanks to the continuous technological developments, universities will have the possibility to adapt their educational programmes to a **blended methodology**, bringing the best of both digital and physical presence and interactions to students. This will open the door for new higher education professional roles to emerge such as coaches for online studies for students, educational technologies, blended teaching experts, etc. as well as for using a great variety of digital tools.

The new personalised learning pathways will furthermore go hand in hand with an update of the **evaluation methods** that are currently used for students, which still too often cause anxiety (for the risk of a re-take, or for a possible negative impact on the student's grade average) rather than encouraging creativity, interdisciplinarity and innovation. It is important to evaluate students in their overall approach to their development, rather than according to the sole exam result on subjects, and to encourage them to keep an eye on the post-university life and the application of their learning in the job market and in their everyday life as citizens.

Finally, students' journeys will be increasingly supported through a combination of **physical and virtual mobility**, allowing them to build (international) networks and communities of practice. In this sense, virtual mobility will need to be seen as a complementary tool to expand (access to) learning opportunities, complementing face-to-face experiences.

This **tailored-made and intergenerational** approach to education will contribute to the delivery of a talented generation which will be empowered to take action and innovate. Future graduates will be equipped with the skills and competences Europe needs in the forward looking sectors such as digitisation, artificial intelligence, sustainability, social sciences and humanities, and climate change.

However, to ensure that all these teaching and learning aspects are implemented in an optimal way by universities, a series of enabling factors will need to be in place.

1.2. Enabling factors for sparking students' talent

» **Research on new teaching and learning structures** will enable universities to provide innovative and truly inclusive education. New fields of study in teaching and learning will be encouraged, taking into account in a holistic way the changes that the evolution of our societies brings about.

» **Adequate career development structures for students** will offer them a greater number of opportunities for their personal and professional development. For this purpose, lifelong learning and tailor-made micro-credential programmes will be strategically used.

» **Digital readiness and resilience** will be key for universities in order to mitigate the risks of digital poverty and digital inequalities. Everyone will be able to access adequate IT infrastructures so as to make full use of the new technologies. Educators and learners will be supported in the acquisition of the required innovative and digital skills. The human dimension will equally be duly protected under the new digital and blended setting.

» **High quality and accessible mobility for students and staff** will give the opportunity to a wider pool of beneficiaries to take advantage of transnational exchanges.

» **Common programmes** by several groups of universities will enrich the educational offer and develop joint content available to all students.

After obtaining their degrees, students start navigating the professional world. Strong of the knowledge they have acquired at universities, of the network they have built, and of all those transversal skills they have developed, they will put into practice their knowledge and contribute to transforming the world as citizens and as professionals. Among them are also those who want to develop their professional career in the field of education, research, and innovation in the higher education sector. These professionals are passionate about research, about finding answers to seemingly inexplicable problems. Here is how universities can ensure that their talent is further developed in a research context.

CHAPTER 2

A university for researchers:
where talent evolves

How to harness the great amount of knowledge that is developed in universities? How can universities enable all researchers to thrive? When looking at the environment in which researchers currently operate, especially those in the early stages of their career, it is possible to identify a series of aspects that will need to be addressed and improved in the coming years. Such aspects relate to the need for adequate and attractive careers structures, transparent assessment criteria and for universities to be rightly equipped in order to be able to support researchers, among others.

2.1. Research through bench learning and collaboration

Researchers, and especially **Early Career** ones, are still very much affected by an environment which often frustrates their ambitions and, more generally, hinders their career development opportunities[9]. The existing funding mechanisms strongly depend on projects, which leads to a short-term approach to research and inhibits sustainable careers. This often has a negative impact on researchers' career expectations and has a detrimental effect on the attractiveness of researcher careers overall. Going beyond project-based funding, new mechanisms should be used to foster the so-called life-cycle funding: in this funding model, researchers are assessed at the end of their funding period based on the quality of their research overall, and the progress made, allowing more opportunities for a long-term perspective and continuity in the research journey.

Related to researchers' careers are also the assessment and rewards systems. Going beyond a predominant use of publication-based criteria, by 2030 such systems will need to be updated and take into account more flexible, holistic and qualitative approaches. Education, (societal) impact, Open Science practices, collaboration and leadership should play a prominent role in academic career paths. Attention should also be paid to the fact that a large group of researchers cannot devote themselves full time to research, having to combine research with teaching, management responsibilities, etc. Following this road, the universities will be able to support excellence in a horizontal, meticulous and inclusive way, recognising the more diverse set of talents[10].

While only a minority of the researchers pursue a career in academia[11], a majority certainly continues to apply the learned and acquired skills no matter the career path they will take. This is why a focus on skills development and **skills awareness** for researchers will be also crucial to consider in the future. By 2030, researchers will need to be highly trained with the skills to analyse and solve complex problems, be practitioners of open science and become active agents of change. Fostering and training this human capital will need to be a core activity of universities.

Finally, universities will need to be adequately equipped and well connected (physically, virtually and legally). In fact, they will need to offer good working environments with adequate equipment and infrastructure, in combination with a high-quality research management and administrative support system that stimulates team work while also reducing the administrative burden on researchers. In this context, the role of non-academic staff will be crucial, hence the need to continue recognising and supporting their work.

Well-connected universities with their local and international environments will offer researchers the possibility to collaborate with different sectors of society, stimulating brain circulation and active societal engagement. Interconnectedness will ensure that collaborative science is fostered, expensive equipment is shared, brains are valorised and economies of scale are ascertained. This will be key to harnessing the knowledge that is developed at all universities by, at the same time, also addressing the individuals' potential and needs, leaving no one behind.

In view of the above, a series of enabling factors for ensuring researchers' talent evolves throughout the next decade will need to be considered.

9 Initiative for Science in Europe (2021), Position on precarity of academic careers, p.9 (link).
10 VSNU, NFU, KNAW, NWO and ZonMw (2019), Room for everyone's talent - Towards a new balance in the recognition and rewards of academics, (link).
11 Initiative for Science in Europe (2021), Position on precarity of academic careers, p.7 (link).

2.2. Enabling factors for evolving researchers' talent

» **New policies for research career development based on updated research assessment systems.** New academic assessment methods and rewards frameworks will foster a more inclusive, responsible and diverse recognition of quality research, its impact and contribution.

» **Mainstreaming Open Science practices** across the whole European HE sector will increase collaboration among researchers, knowledge and data sharing, having positive repercussions in the quality and impact of research. Open Science behaviour will also be considered when evaluating researchers.

» **Development of researchers' transversal and transferable skills,** allowing them to evolve their talent not only in academia, but also in other sectors of society.

» **A bottom-up research approach to foster early-career researchers'** initial creativity and autonomy. Less hierarchical, more flexible structures will support researchers to pursue their ideas from the beginning of their career.

» **Adequate research environments and strong R&I agendas will enable high-quality research.** Measures and structures will be in place to allow for connecting research facilities and staff, sharing of equipment, within countries but also across borders and sectors.

Among those who manage to pursue a career in academia, some reach senior leadership positions within the university. Academic leaders are at the driver seat of the institution and can pilot the transformation needed in line with what they see in their communities and beyond. Focusing on leaders, therefore, is essential when discussing transformation of higher education, as this cannot take place without deep support and a long-sighted approach coming from the management.

CHAPTER 3

A **university for leaders:**
where talent is mobilised

How can universities evolve in a way that encourages leadership through the whole academic community, so as to empower everyone to be part of the transition towards the university of the future? The creation of diverse and inclusive institutions cannot be the sole responsibility of Rectors and Presidents, but of everyone participating in the universities' life, in their different capacities. This requires significant change in terms of the human capital and innovative skill set across higher education institutions (HEIs), and in general a change of perspective on what leadership is and should be. Traditionally, leadership has been taken for granted, as something that either one possesses or not. In reality, leadership is something that can and should be trained, at all levels. Universities of the future will be paying much more attention to leadership and to making sure that everyone, from those at the lead of institutions to students, possess the right drive for the whole academic community to shine.

3.1. Leaders that take care of their communities

By 2030, leaders will need to be able to understand the spirit of the time and adopt innovative solutions, even when these do not immediately seem to be the most obvious ones to take. Being a leader involves courage, foresight and the capability to take bold decisions when needed, supported by evidence and appropriate governance. Leadership in the university of the future will entail that universities raise their voice and provide critical, science-based responses to the challenges of society in the broadest sense, proactively and on request. This requires autonomy and credibility. The first is to be ascertained by society. The second is to be earned by universities themselves. Hence the need to foster talent in leadership at universities.

It will be important for university leaders to be able to mobilise talent by taking responsibility as **mentors for the career development of others.** This will entail promoting a vision that embraces talent and assesses students, researchers, professors, non-academic staff by looking at non-traditional aspects such as creativity, entrepreneurship, teamwork and in general at their potential to trigger positive change.

Moreover, leaders will be able to mobilise talent by triggering and supporting institutional change and by supporting their communities to grow into certain values. In this sense, it will be important for leaders to foster **inclusiveness and diversity** in their higher education institutions, for example by supporting under-represented and disadvantaged groups of students in accessing and completing higher education, developing strategies to achieve gender equality in academic careers and gender balance in leadership positions and anchoring SDGs at the highest level of leadership in their institutions.

Equally important for leaders will be to foster collaboration and strengthen their relations with different sectors of society, such as international organisations, national governments, industry, business, NGOs, etc, in order to ensure that the knowledge that circulates in the university is linked to the wider world and equips the whole academic community with a realistic mindset ready to take responsibility to address pressing and future challenges.

Finally, fostering leadership talent in universities means acknowledging that leadership requires a broad range of skills, including the ability to develop a vision for the whole academic community and empathise with its members. A process of professionalisation of leadership will therefore be crucial, not only at rectors' and president's level but across the whole university community (team leaders, support staff, student representation, etc.).

On the basis of the above-described considerations and in order to adequately mobilise talent, it will be important to consider the following enabling factors for supporting leadership.

3.2. Enabling factors for supporting leaders in mobilising talent

» **Leadership will be a driver and catalyst for mobilising talent.** Leaders will trigger and support institutional change by pursuing forward-looking priorities and by promoting inclusive and collaborative approaches.

» **Nourishing leadership throughout the whole university community.** Investment in leadership skills training within the right strategies will support students, academics and staff along their entire career.

» **Personalised career plans** will offer the opportunity to everyone to reflect on leadership and to develop one's leadership in line with one's personality and ambitions.

» **Flexible and dynamic management structures** will encourage open and interactive dialogue, allowing for collaborative decision-making.

» **Diversity in leadership positions will be encouraged[12],** and will ensure a holistic and inclusive approach in the management of the university.

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12 Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (European Commission), She Figures 2018, p.130 (link).

Finally, by 2030 universities will operate as outward-looking entities with open, visible relations to society at large, while they will be very engaged with their surrounding communities. Their impact and value will be assessed by their contributions to education, research and their service to society.

CHAPTER 4

A **university for wider world:** where talent connects and has an impact

How can we ensure universities to be key connectors within the ecosystems in which we live in? How to embed a true culture of societal engagement throughout the whole university community? Universities have increasingly become interconnected with society. In the coming years it will be important to continue strengthening their links with society, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, of the Sustainable Development Goals and of the green transition. We have already seen how universities are doing remarkable work in getting closer to their surrounding communities[13]. In the future, these practices need to become the normal modus operandi.

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13 YERUN (2021), The future starts today! Inspiring initiatives from Young European Research Universities (link).

4.1. Universities transforming societies

In the future, universities will strive to engage even more with different **actors of society** as **equal partners**. They will be strongly connected to different sectors of society (i.e. business, industry, public administration, civil society organisations, NGOs, etc.) as well as to cities and regions. Universities will strengthen their involvement with their surrounding communities along their education, research and innovation missions in order to maximise their impact.

Acknowledging current practices, universities are not starting from scratch in this journey towards full engagement. By 2030, universities will shift to a higher level and have a more structured and well-thought approach, one that adequately facilitates and promotes collaboration with different actors of society. It is important to acknowledge, however, that engagement beyond academia requires new skills, new supporting mechanisms, and clear frameworks. Partnerships must be mutually beneficial and contribute towards strategic ambitions on both sides.

In this sense, it will be important to ensure that students' learning experiences go hand in hand with their engagement in different kinds of **participatory activities**, such as community-engaged teaching, volunteering, etc. This will help them acquire transversal and professionalising skills.

The same will happen for researchers and research support staff, who will also need to be trained in order to understand how to adequately interact with surrounding communities and their needs. This would inspire innovation in academic practice by, for example, intensifying dialogue with citizens in order to make sure that citizens' involvement becomes part of the social impact equation.

Finally, the **role of intermediary actors** (i.e. research support staff, outreach and research engagement professionals, knowledge transfer offices, incubators, parks, etc.) in facilitating the interaction with the surrounding communities will be key and will therefore need to be strengthened in the upcoming years.

The following enabling factors will need to be in place so as to reinforce the role of universities as central actors in (regional) innovation ecosystems, valorise the knowledge produced, circulated and used, and ensure universities will be positioned as autonomous, independent and critical actors.

4.2. Enabling factors for enhancing talent's impact

» **Recognition, evaluation and rewarding mechanisms** for individuals (i.e. students, researchers, leaders), teams, departments and/ or institutions will embrace societal engagement, motivating more people to engage with their wider communities

» **Resourced and skilled community managers across all facets of the HEI** will operate as boundary-spanners and communicators for impact beyond academia.

» **Support from other actors of the community** (e.g. private and public sector) and their willingness to cooperate with universities will allow for a stronger societal impact.

» **Universities will be supported in implementing knowledge valorisation** strategies through a systematic and structured approach.

» **Citizens will be partners of universities and be actively involved in science**. This will give them an insight into topics that concern them and their living environment, and will be mutually beneficial for scientists and for the wider society.

"One word to describe your university in 2030". Result of Roundtable discussion with YERUN members on 9 April 2021.

Key messages
from young research universities
to policy makers

Putting this vision into practice will certainly require time and resources so as to ensure a successful university's evolutionary journey. For this, support from the EU, national governments and, more generally, the wider higher education environment will be key. As representatives of young European research universities, we call on these policy makers to take into account the following recommendations when working towards empowering the future higher education sector.

Overarching recommendations:

01

Joint action is needed in order to reach a shared vision. The whole European higher education community will need to be involved in the development and implementation of the initiatives that will shape the universities of the future. This will entail that the EU, national governments and regional authorities look towards the same objective with a long-term and inclusive perspective; that university networks continue promoting dialogue and collaboration in order to reach effective solutions; that European Universities Alliances continue acting as test beds for innovative education, research and innovation practices; and that active cooperation with different actors of society is enhanced.

02

Ensure that HEIs can access sustainable funding in order to be able to truly transform. A more generous, structured and coordinated approach to the different funding streams available for HEIs (i.e. EU and national governments funding, structural funds, project funding, private investments, etc.) will be needed. Moreover, while a well-balanced mix between private and public funding as well as project-based funding are certainly welcome to trigger change, a long-term transformation can only happen with enough basic funding and life-cycle funding that must come from national governments and appropriate investments in education, research and innovation at European level.

03

Ensure a constant interaction between education, research, innovation and impact policies, so that there is a common long-term strategy covering the four missions of HEIs. Synergies between the European Education Area and the European Research Area are highly encouraged and must persist in the future. Synergies with other sectors of society are also important to consider.

04

Increase collaborative activities, practice sharing and common understanding among universities. Only by further implementing cooperation across institutions, will we achieve a true transformation of the European Education and Research Area, one that is truly inclusive, that does not look only at frontrunners but engages the largest number of institutions possible.

Recommendations to spark students' talent:

05

National governments should **tackle outstanding obstacles to the achievement of the European Higher Education Area**, in order for students to fully enjoy the benefits of personalised learning pathways and have their study outcomes recognised across the whole of Europe. On a similar vein, governments should work towards the full recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad.

06

The EU and national governments should work towards a **knowledge ecosystem** that is supported by trusted digital platforms, one that makes use of the opportunities offered by technologies while protecting other aspects such as the human and emotional side of the education interaction, as well as privacy, security and data compliance, among others

07

National governments should ensure that **everyone will be able to access and make full use of the new technologies.** It will be equally important to offer guidance and training to educators and learners to help them acquire the needed skills (digital, but also social and creative skills).

Recommendations to evolve researchers' talent:

08

The EU and national governments should **work on new systems to assess and reward** research, by using a mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators. This will allow for a more inclusive, responsible and diverse recognition of quality research, its impact and contribution.

09

The EU and national governments should **foster Open Science** by working towards a rewarding system that takes into account Open Science practices and by facilitating information sharing, infrastructure, training activities on open data, open publishing, intellectual property, ethics and integrity.

10

The EU should **increase R&I cooperation across Europe**, also by facilitating the sharing of capacity and resources within countries and across sectors and borders, through the European Universities Initiative and beyond.

Recommendations to support leaders in mobilising talent:

11

The EU should **continue acknowledging and supporting diversity in higher education leadership** positions.

12

National governments should **consider leadership skills and activities supporting leadership** as key elements in the reform of research assessment mechanisms.

13

The EU should further **promote dialogue, practice exchange and more collaborative activities among leaders of universities**. This will allow to gather a greater understanding of the conditions, skills and management structures that facilitate and enable an **open, engaged and participatory leadership.**

14

The EU and national governments should **increase opportunities for cross country and cross sector collaborations in leadership**, for example through mentorship programmes.

Recommendations to connect talent with the wider world:

15

The EU and national governments should **continue supporting HEIs in their engagement with society and in becoming increasingly responsible**. In light of the Green Transition and of the need to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, guidance on how to exchange practices and cooperate across institutions and countries is crucial..

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The EU should **enable and support the sharing of knowledge and experiences on how universities can engage with other sectors** (industry and beyond), e.g. through the organisations of fora and other collaborative actions.

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The EU, national governments and relevant international actors should **recognise** the advancements and progress of higher education institutions in their **missions** of education and engagement with society as important as those achieved by their research.

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The EU and national governments should continue to create incentives for universities to address **knowledge valorization** in its broadest sense, acknowledging the importance of **basic research** as a vector for the creation of new transferable knowledge.

A coordinated action among the EU, other international organisations, national governments and the higher education stakeholder community is fundamental. Some call it "transformation", others refer to it as "strategy", we look at it as a "journey". Regardless of how we refer to it, what we are proposing is a vision of what we feel universities should look like in 2030, based on what we have experienced so far and on the pressure coming from the drivers of change.

While we are spelling out the areas of change, we are already seeing universities evolving towards those objectives. Now, we need that it happens in a mainstream, concerted, and inclusive way.

YERUN members have already embarked on this journey. What about you?