

Press release
02.02.2017

Excellent education in research-rich universities: new possibilities for Europe today

At a time when funding and international reputation are based predominantly on research activities, universities are shining a new light on their important role as education institutions. Members of the League of European Research Universities (LERU) are taking a hard look at how they can provide the best possible student education for the twenty-first century, in these days of political and economic challenge. A new LERU position paper, [‘Excellent education in research-rich universities’](#), analyses the characteristics of excellent education. Considering the different ways in which education and research are connected in research-intensive universities, it illustrates some of the diverse ways in which LERU universities are changing their approach towards education, for the benefit of both students and wider society.

In research-rich universities across Europe, opportunities for both undergraduate and postgraduate students to benefit actively from research undertaken at their university are growing. Students’ engagement with research contributes to the development of skills much needed by society today, including critical thinking, problem-solving, analysis of evidence and ethical awareness. However, research also benefits from researchers’ involvement in teaching and from students’ inputs to investigations and analysis. This is especially the case in courses where students are actively engaged in research and inquiry throughout their studies - they bring fresh approaches and insights to the field.

There are barriers affecting the teaching-research relationship and excellence in student education more generally, however. The LERU position paper shows that these barriers are both within universities and outside. The limited and often decreasing funding available for teaching is a particular challenge. Research activities are typically much better funded, and universities have traditionally valued and rewarded research more highly as a result. There are, however, barriers that universities can take down themselves. These include funding educational innovations that enable both students and wider communities to benefit from the exciting research taking place. Many universities are beginning to do this, as illustrated in the vignettes of practice drawn from across Europe, but the paper finds that is not yet the case everywhere.

LERU advocates that in striving for excellent education it is crucial to recognise, support and celebrate educational leadership. “Educational leaders are not just excellent teachers”, comments Professor Dilly Fung, co-author of the paper. “They can motivate and involve others. They show vision and have the capacity to implement changes in practice. University leaders at all levels should ensure that educational leaders have stimulating opportunities for development and for creative collaboration with their peers, and that they are rewarded highly for their contribution.”

Analysing the current situation in research-rich universities, the paper also makes recommendations to universities and policy makers, at both national and EU levels, about how it can be further enhanced. Kurt Deketelaere, Secretary-General of LERU explains: “Policy makers talk about a knowledge triangle, but their narrative often excludes education. With this paper, LERU wants to emphasise that we do cherish and stimulate this angle of the triangle. Policy makers should do the same. At EU level for instance, there is much talk of synergies between Structural Funding and Horizon 2020. Why not, in the future, consider the synergies between the successors of Horizon and Erasmus +?”

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About LERU

The League of European Research Universities (LERU) is an association of twenty-three leading research-intensive universities that share the values of high-quality teaching within an environment of internationally competitive research.

Founded in 2002, LERU advocates education through an awareness of the frontiers of human understanding; the creation of new knowledge through basic research, which is the ultimate source of innovation in society; and the promotion of research across a broad front in partnership with industry and society at large.

The purpose of the League is to advocate these values, to influence policy in Europe and to develop best practice through mutual exchange of experience. LERU regularly publishes a variety of papers and reports which make high-level policy statements, provide in-depth analyses and make concrete recommendations for policymakers, universities, researchers and other stakeholders.

The LERU universities are:

University of Amsterdam	Imperial College London
Universitat de Barcelona	University College London
University of Cambridge	Lund University
University of Copenhagen	University of Milan
Trinity College Dublin	Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
University of Edinburgh	University of Oxford
University of Freiburg	Pierre & Marie Curie University
Université de Genève	Université Paris-Sud
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KU Leuven	

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