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**NEW CHALLENGES TO EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION – MANAGING
THE COMPLEXITIES OF A GLOBALISED SOCIETY**

**LAUNCHING CONFERENCE OF THE CDESR PROJECT 'THE UNIVERSITY
BETWEEN HUMANISM AND MARKET: REDEFINING ITS VALUES AND
FUNCTIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY'**

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SYNOPSIS OF WRITTEN CONTRIBUTIONS

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Can European Higher Education Meet Global Challenges?

Peter Scott, Vice-Chancellor, Kingston University

As the question mark at the end of the title suggests there is scepticism about the capacity of European higher education to respond adequately to global challenges – as well as other higher education systems (notably the United States). One of the most powerful drivers of the Bologna process is the desire to overcome this – assumed – deficit, taking over from the national modernisation agendas which were the most important drivers of Bologna in its early years.

European higher education is regarded as being unprepared in a number of ways. First, most European systems are too ‘public’, too subordinate to state bureaucracies and as a result insufficiently entrepreneurial. The absence of a significant private sector, outside some central and eastern European countries, is often cited as proof of this anti-entrepreneurial spirit. Secondly, most European systems are too rigid, with limited articulation between traditional universities and other more vocationally focused institutions. As a result Europe has struggled to produce a clearly defined elite of world-class research universities (and has suffered in global rankings accordingly). Finally, European higher education has to cope with linguistic diversity, which is seen as a major disadvantage when English has become the lingua franca of science, technology and, indeed, globalisation (a disadvantage that can be mitigated but not eradicated by offering more courses through the medium of English).

However, these ‘deficits’ have been defined in relation to a particular definition of global challenges. Globalisation is seen as a largely economic phenomenon – global financial markets which severely limit the capacity of national Governments to operate their own independent economic (and social?) policies; and global divisions of labour, manufacturing and services (all powered by rapid advances in information and communication technologies). To the extent that globalisation has a cultural dimension it is the penetration of global ‘brands’ and life-styles. The response of higher education to this particular form of globalisation is to become a global knowledge ‘business’ – which may sit uneasily with the ethos, practices and structures of European higher education.

But there are other forms of globalisation – notably the new world-side social movements focused on climate change and other environmental concerns, and on issues of poverty, equity and development (which are radically reshaping political cultures everywhere, and especially in the West); and global resistances to free-market (and post-imperial?) globalisation as expressed through various forms of ‘fundamentalism’ opposed to the liberal social (as well as neo-liberal economic) values of globalisation. These ‘culture wars’ may represent the supreme global challenge. The response of higher education to these other forms of globalisation has to be different from its response to the dominant form, by becoming a global knowledge ‘business’. Instead it may need to embrace the profoundly ‘public’, and collectivist, values of the new social and political movements, and also to address sensitively the cultural differences that are so disturbing the 21st-century world.

In this wider context the supposed ‘deficits’ of European higher education may be less significant. Its ‘public’ character (and greater emphasis on the ‘social dimension’) and its linguistic heterogeneity (which may make it easier for European institutions to respond creatively to cultural difference) may become substantial strengths. This, of course, does not mean that European higher education should be under less pressure to modernise its practices and its structures and renew its values. But it may mean that these processes of modernisation and renewal will take a different course from those imagined in the over-simple simple scenarios of higher education as a global knowledge ‘business’ dominated by ‘world-class’ universities. The future may be both more complex and more hopeful.

Peter Scott

October 1, 2007

'Promoting Universal Values in the Face of Societal Change'

Dr. Caryn McTighe Musil, Senior Vice President, Association of American Colleges and Universities

(Possible new title: College Learning for the New Global Century: Is Higher Education Ready?)

At the cusp of a millennium characterized by global interdependence, technological revolutions, dangerous inequalities, and a knowledge explosion, higher education can no longer do business as usual. On both sides of the Atlantic—and beyond—students are looking to colleges and universities to prepare them to live and work in a world where uncertainty is the norm, complexity routine, and diversity a given. The new challenges have spawned unprecedented intellectual and pedagogical creativity on campuses in the United States as academic disciplines redefine their boundaries, interdisciplinary approaches deepen comprehension, colleges renegotiate their relationship with their local and global communities, and students practice applying knowledge to real-world issues. While not abandoning its traditional commitment to advancing knowledge and cultivating critical thinking, the academy is in the midst of a far-reaching transformation. The question remains: will these changes occur only at the margins or will they take root and permeate institutional practices at their very core?

Higher education can draw on its rich traditions and commitments even as it also recalibrates itself to better perform its critical function of preparing graduates who are informed, empowered, and socially responsible. As they have always done, democratic societies rely on higher education to prepare not just an educated labor force but an informed citizenry. In her book, *The Open Spaces of Democracy*, Terry Tempest Williams emphasizes the link between education and democracy: “When minds close, democracy begins to close. . . Democracy invites us to take risks. It asks that we vacate the comfortable seat of certitude, remain pliable, and act, ultimately, in behalf of the common good.”

Just like their graduates, higher education itself needs to become more adept, agile, and engaged. There is promise that such is the case: as the academy shifts to organizing around learning and not simply around teaching; as it seeks to describe what students have learned and not simply how many credits they have accumulated; and as it deploys diversity as an intellectual and educational force and not simply a problem to be managed. Powerful new pedagogies are being adopted that accelerate learning, and more institutions are providing evidence to a skeptical public that students are achieving higher levels of learning which they can integrate into their careers and ethical choices.

In the United States there has been a national dialogue over the last decade about how to reconfigure the academy to meet the challenges of the new global century. What has emerged is a new consensus about what the essential learning capacities are to meet the demands of the

21st century. The consensus in the United States echoes similar determinations in Europe represented in the TUNING report. Happily, according to a recent AAC&U poll, what U.S. business leaders want more of from higher education maps perfectly onto the essential learning outcomes. Market forces are not distorting the academy's core mission, but reaffirming it.

Caryn McTighe Musil

October 19, 2007