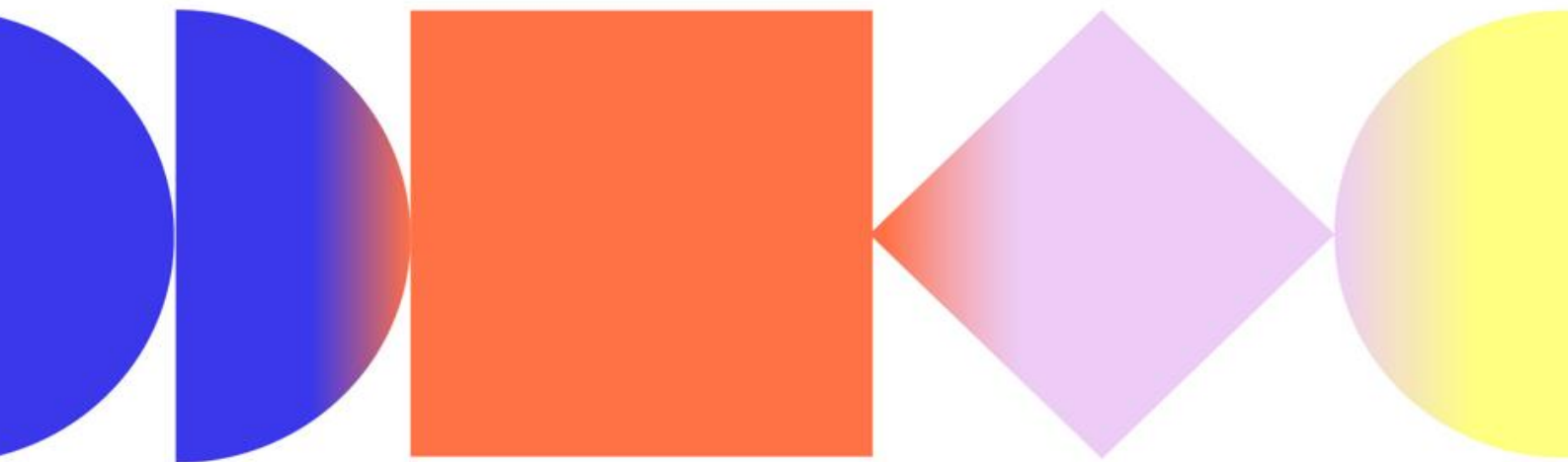# Una Europa Future UniLab

Integration Cluster,
July 2021

Facilitating mutual understanding and cooperation between Una Europa universities

Introduction

There is a deficit of real communication within universities. Addressing this is possibly the most powerful thing we can do to facilitate mutual understanding and ultimately inter-university integration. There is also a situation in which universities are faced with large, cross-national and almost intractable problems that rarely surface and do not receive the collective consideration that they deserve. Our proposals here address these two challenges together.

The Una Europa alliance aspires to rethink higher education and aid the establishment of the European University of the future. Its approach is to generate a unique inter-university environment by collaborating on new collective initiatives and building on collective strengths across our eight world-class European universities. A unique and hugely ambitious vision and the Alliance is already seeing progress.

However, in considering the conundrum of inter-university integration, the Integration Visionary Team noticed that while there are multiple examples globally of innovative and world-class collaboration between universities, these don't automatically lead to greater mutual understanding or depth of integration. In some cases, mutual understanding is not even a measure of success or a required outcome for successful collaboration. What is required, therefore, is a vision of real and meaningful integration between our institutions.

The Integration Visionary Team asked itself a fundamental question: *What really constitutes integration?* The answer, we believe, is that to be visionary about integration is to create a new space by forming our institutions into a university of the future that really is different and new in its approach and initiatives. We need to consider opportunities arising out of our collective strengths and, in particular. to think again about how we communicate. In essence, we are looking to create a communicative space in and across the eight universities.

Our idea, more fully, is to re-envision entrenched patterns and cultures of communication – both inter- and intra-university – as the key to integration between our institutions. Our vision is for a forward-looking inter-university communication space to examine critical issues that are actively defining what 21st century European universities will look like. Change requires more than critique and in this spirit we propose a new body to facilitate the vision of real communication and imaginative joint thought.

Principles

In exploring the themes, the visionary team considered three key concepts of university integration, which underpin and lead to our proposed idea:

Integration vs collaboration. There is often an implication – even in the way 'collaboration' is framed for discussion under the Una Europa Integration Cluster – that collaboration *is* integration, or that the one follows automatically from the other. However, we see a fundamental difference between the two.

Collaboration could be superficial, partial, short-term, or limited to a particular moment or group or unit within an institution. *Integration*, on the other hand, is a much deeper and more far-reaching idea, implying interdependence, permanence, mutual reliability, and potential for compromise in pursuit of the collective good.

The envisioned integration of member universities of Una Europa resembles a federation (or even a confederation) of universities: each university preserves its own identity while at the same time all are committed to a common vision and shared responsibility. Ultimately, it involves the emergence of a shared identity, perhaps around principles of exchange, mutual understanding and allegiance to a common value background. So, a vision for integration is more than an interest in innovative collaboration. The question then becomes: *what makes it more?*

Communication – back to first principles. Communication is often taken for granted in higher education contexts. Universities tend to say of ourselves that we need to be better at communication, or joke that it is our Achilles heel (complex institutions that we are). But, ultimately, we are uni-versities. Communication, in various guises, is what we do and have done for hundreds of years.

And yet, a view formed by the Visionary Team of cross-university communication as it tends to happen internally within our institutions is that it very rarely gets past entrenched divides between academic faculty and administrators; it very rarely includes a balanced and representative range of perspectives; and it is very rarely sustainable beyond a project and tends not to extend to longer term impact on decision-making.

For example, the visionary team noticed that in the paradigm of decision-making and performance-driven strategies, university management is often concerned that the academic community does not adequately understand proposed plans and strategies. However, to the extent that there is warrant for that view, a key reason for such a lack of understanding on the part of academics is perhaps that the sheer promulgation of plans and strategies is often mistaken for communication with the appropriate communities. In short, the necessary processes of mutual exploration of issues are often absent. But then, if our capacity for communication inside our universities - and by implication for mutual understanding - is unsound, how can we expect to fulfil a vision of real integration, cooperation and mutual understanding *between and across* our institutions?

Integration based on mutual understanding must, therefore, start with communication and *collective* consideration of issues. We consider a return to real open communication to be an indispensable part of the process of community-building since there could be no intra- or inter-university integration without actual and effective communication.

In articulating its vision, a key question for the Visionary Team was whether there is a need to create a genuinely new space for communication or merely to propose the integration and enhancement of existing communication structures (e.g., university Senate, faculty boards, etc.) into something more efficient and sustainable, and without existing 'struggle for power' patterns.

Senates and faculty boards, honed and evolved over hundreds of years do have their place at the heart of universities. Our instinct is not to dismantle or tinker around the edges of existing communication mechanisms through minor technical amendments (our institutions are in any case already, in our various ways, involved in efforts to improve internal processes). Rather it is to create a new communication space that can shape and enhance the wider and deeper culture of communication in such a way as to begin to draw our separate institutions together.

Structured serendipity. Although our deliberations have focussed largely on fundamental issues and values, we feel it is important to also recognise the more mundane and human dimensions: the spaces that force people to bump into each other, encouraging serendipitous interactions. A problem of modern multi-complex universities is that members of the academy have little idea as to how their colleagues view the world nor even what they are working on.

Related to this is a tendency to pre-determine outcomes as a result of over-management of meetings. It is tempting, in major decision-making, to turn to heads of particular areas and the colleagues already recognized as experts and managers, who normally provide the perspectives and solutions from within a conventional frame. A more radical approach might be to open up communications within our universities beyond our conventional structures and expected participants. More radical still might be to do this across our eight institutions.

The idea

The Visionary Team came to the conclusion that the major issue for both the sustainability of the alliance, integration between our institutions and the idea of the European University is that of organizing a space that can integrate people from universities across Europe (and potentially beyond Europe), a space to breathe new air into proceedings and enable people to really communicate.

The Team proposes the establishment of a special body[1] for the future European University, aimed at discussing key cross-institutional themes and issues. It would be a body that seeks integration at a level beneath that usually adopted, namely to reach deeply into the communities of the universities. A key concern is that any new approach to communication risks amounting to yet another layer of already

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[1] During our discussions we referred to such body using various names: People's Parliament, Federatorium, University Board, etc. but we have decided that the institution is far more important than a name and we do not want to limit Implementers in their imagination, hence use of the term "the Body" in the report.

complex matrices of university decision-making process. We do not want to replicate any existing university, and we do not want to establish yet another formal body within existing arrangements.

The Body should include representatives of all groups of stakeholders: faculty, students, administration, and wider society, while being small enough to work expeditiously and effectively. It should reach out to different voices, and this requires that such a body should be independent, with resources (albeit limited) of its own.

The Body should be a forum to air and to integrate voices, both vertically (various groups of stakeholders) and horizontally (representatives of various universities). The Body should not be involved in direct managerial responsibilities, but it should have the capacity to influence the horizons and understanding of the leadership team(s) of Una Europa as an alliance and member universities of the alliance.

In creating a culture of free and open communication between our universities, the body could – in time – influence deeply-rooted cultures of communication inside our institutions, fulfilling the potential of internationalisation to lead institutional enhancement. Eventually – and by virtue of its uniqueness – it might aspire to have indirect influence on the European Commission and EU higher education policies.

Principles:

The forum would adhere to the following principles:

- Cross-Una Europa. It would work across the 8 universities, and have an eye to the character of each university but would seek to effect a horizon that unifies the universities.
- Openness: It would work openly, using modern media where practicable.
- Transparency
- Its work based both in reason and on evidence (heeding the academic literature)
- Inclusivity: it would make every effort to reach out to relevant voices. (If it was looking at student issues, it would engage directly with students.)
- Decisiveness. (It would not be a 'talk-shop' but would work expeditiously and not desist from making trenchant observations or producing challenging findings.)

We see the proposed body as having five principal virtues. It would look to:

- Orchestrate and enhance a conversational community across the eight universities
- Raise the level of mutual understanding of complex issues
- Facilitate interaction with the wider society in heightening understanding of issues (which may be controversial) in such a way as to enlarge civic trust in the university sector
- Prompt awareness of universities' responsibilities and possibilities in the twenty-first century
- Widen understanding as to what it may mean to be a European university.

The clout and the power to shape and influence outcomes would flow from the unique mix of its stakeholders and the significance of the issues under discussion; that the stakeholder participants cross institutional boundaries and can hold each other to account in considering issues that are rarely considered collectively across university boundaries in a systematic way; and the pre-agreed commitment by university leaderships from the member universities to consider and respond to the forum's proposals.

Indicative issues

Although the composition of the body is of great importance for its sustainability and ability to influence our universities and policymakers, it is perhaps equally important to indicate the fundamental issues the body should discuss. We list the issues below both to illustrate the nature of themes likely to lead to integration and understanding through a deeper level of communication, and because we consider them to be particularly urgent - the profound collective questions of our time in front of universities generally and European universities in particular:

- ***Transdisciplinarity***: how to bring it about on a sustainable basis and in ways that lessen hierarchy across the disciplines and bring each university collectively to address complex matters of global significance?

- ***Doctoral study***: how might doctoral programmes be completely reimagined/ redesigned/reframed so that doctoral study is adequate to the 21st century and is, in particular, far less specialised?
- ***Humanities***: how might the humanities be repositioned such that their potential for the 21st century is realised, and such that there might be significant levels of interchange between STEM subjects and the humanities?
- ***Ecology***: What might it mean to be an ecological university and how might it be realised - not least in understanding the idea of ecology in the broadest possible way?
- ***Epistemic citizenship***: How can the university both maximise societal trust in the university and also help to develop epistemic citizenship in society (so that citizens generally are better equipped to participate in democratic debate and decision-making)?
- ***Public goods***: What are or might be the public goods of universities in the 21st century and how can they be both maximised and demonstrated?
- ***Free speech***: What is the role of freedom of speech: should universities be defending it or should they be defended from it?
- ***Research and teaching***: How might the relationships between research and teaching be improved so that each informs the other and so that neither has supremacy?
- ***UN's Sustainability Development Goals***: Which of the 17 Goals are the eight Una Europa universities already addressing and in which ways? And how might Una Europa universities collectively advance their contributions on this front?
- ***The Civic University***: How might international research-oriented universities strengthen their roles as civic universities?
- ***Values***: Are there key values that the European universities have particular responsibilities in upholding, especially (in some cases) given their imperial and cultural backgrounds? How address the historical roles of universities in supporting slavery and other forms of inequality?
- ***Wellbeing***: What steps might universities take to advance the wellbeing of all of their members - all staff (academic and professional and support staff) and all students?
- ***The student experience***: How might the student experience (with all of its variety across disciplines and student backgrounds and its digital components) be maximised in the 21st century? Is *Bildung* still a useful concept or should it be abandoned?
- ***Culture***: How might universities understand themselves not just as centres of culture but as sites for cultural reimagining and re-development in an instrumental age? What roles are opening for universities in a context of societal culture wars?
- ***The digital revolution***: What is the role of higher education in using, promoting and creating digital tools? What is the role of the universities in promoting digital culture, digital justice and digital ecologies? Is 'posthumanism' to be welcomed?

Composition

A key question in organising the body is how to balance different groups of stakeholders and the universities themselves without making the body too big to be efficient and effective. This question we pass humbly to the Implementation Team, according to Future UniLab method. However, in the spirit of free and open communication we do offer some thoughts (here and in Annex A) on how this might work. One of the possibilities we were considering was based on the structure of FED Banks' boards of directors, as follows:

For each university there should be three nominating groups:
- Academic community (faculty, staff, and students)
- University alumni
- Regional/local government

and three types of members:
- Representatives of the university's academic community
- Representatives of business/industry
- Representatives of governmental agencies and NGOs

Each University should also apply the rule that there is one representative of each of the academic community group (faculty, staff/administration/management, and students), there is at least one person being alumnus/alumna of the University, and at least one person representing NGOs.

A space to freely discuss profound and pressing issues, resulting in the creation of outputs like this present report, could have a substantial impact on our universities as separate entities, and as an integrated inter-university environment. The example of the UK Parliamentary Committees (which influence but are without direct political power) demonstrates how the space for discussing significant issues could have great impact on university strategy formation and decision-making.

Mode of working:

The Body would devise its own procedure according to the topic being investigated. Its methods would include:

- Literature reviews
- Calling expert witnesses - and not only from the academic community but, as appropriate, from well beyond in the wider society
- Taking oral evidence
- Commission small-scale studies
- Going into relevant communities
- Seeking written submissions.

The forum would aim to produce sharply written reports arising from each inquiry. Those reports would be written in an accessible style and be oriented both to widening understandings and to action. Each report would make a series of recommendations and identify the body or person(s) implicated in the recommended actions.

Budget:

This Body would neither need nor desire a great superstructure for it would want to be agile and slim. It would, however, require a modest budget to enable it to fulfil the terms of reference implied here and to fund a small secretariat. We imagine that the best way of doing this would be by means of a defined annual contribution from each of the Una Europa universities.

Summary statement:

The formation of Una Europa, as a collective of eight strong and well-established institutions, each with its own identity and yet as universities within Europe with its traditions of reasoned debate, presents an extraordinary opportunity to design a new collective space to consider weighty matters of what it is to be a European university in the twenty-first century, and which might help to realise the potential that lies in Una Europa for mutual thought, consideration and communication at all levels of academic life. Our proposals here seek to realise all of these hopes.

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