PROPOSING VALUES FOR

THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY OF THE FUTURE

OVERVIEW

This report is a summary of the work undertaken by the Future UniLab Values Visionaries group, part of the Una Europa project. Assembling for the first time in September 2020, we were assigned the task of proposing the essence of the European University of the Future. Across four online meetings we had a wide-ranging conversation about the value of higher education, considering the past and present, but most readily looking to the future. The pages that follow present the results of our work in three ways:

VALUES where we set out what we feel to be the existing values of European higher education that need to be protected and sustained, followed by a forward-looking vision for positively transforming our social surroundings and our relationship with the natural world.

ACTIONS where we present 12 proposals that might enact our values and enable them to become established within the European University of the Future.

TENSIONS where we identify key challenges and conflicts that will potentially work against the values that we wish to characterise the European University of the Future.

By presenting our work in this way we have intended to provide colleagues within the Implementation Visionaries group with an indication of the actions to be taken forward, alongside the thinking that led us towards these proposals.

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VALUES

As a guardian of the past, present and future, the European University of the Future must preserve values including the scientific method, freedom of research, and research-informed teaching, while at the same time positively transforming society and how we interact with our natural world. Through the implementation of these values the European University of the Future will be a dynamic agent for social change and a protector of the ecological environment, thereby strengthening Europe's position in the world.

VALUES THAT WILL SUSTAIN AND PRESERVE THE WORK OF THE UNIVERSITY

- The advancement of knowledge
- The sharing of knowledge and truth for the benefit of society
- Debate around the freedom to express divergent academic ideas, including those that are unorthodox and disruptive
- Open-mindedness, decency and respect for different perspectives
- The ability to teach and undertake research beyond the influence of government or commerce
- Academic rigour
- Curiosity and critical inquiry
- Inventiveness and provocation
- Diversification within the university sector, where the work of different types of institution is valued
- The availability of appropriate funding, and consideration of material factors, to support student mobility

VALUES THAT WILL ENABLE THE UNIVERSITY TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD

- Acting as a conscious social agent, alleviating suffering, establishing sustainable well-being and prosperity, and creating a fairer society
- Promoting equality and diversity among our communities of staff and students
- Widening access to educational opportunity by recognising talent from outside of traditionally represented groups
- Collaborating across, between and beyond higher education, working with different interests and ideas
- Designing questions, pedagogies and research methods that seek to anticipate and respond to the future
- Responding to the profound ecological crisis in all aspects of university work, including through Green Growth

ACTIONS

EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY Devise strategies for recruiting, supporting and rewarding students and staff in ways that broaden the range of voices that are heard in higher education, thus recognising that academic talent exists across society and cultural contexts.

COLLABORATION ACROSS CONTEXTS Develop incentives that encourage and reward research and teaching that transcends traditional boundaries, enabling scholars to collaborate with citizens, professionals and organisations in the pursuit of social and ecological good.

NETWORKS ACROSS SOCIETY Create hubs and networks that stimulate collaboration between universities and different groups and stakeholders across society, including active community management to spread and sustain impact.

SHARED LANGUAGE Develop a common verbal and visual vocabulary to support effective collaboration with individuals and organisations outside the university.

PROTECTED SPACES Establish safer and more supportive environments and moments where disruptive and diverging ideas, experiences, research, pedagogies and practices can flourish.

CREDIT-BEARING STUDENT PROJECTS Provide every undergraduate student with the opportunity to participate in a credit-bearing, interdisciplinary, European project that positively impacts upon our social or natural world.

ANTICIPATE THE FUTURE Establish ways of anticipating and working with challenges that exist in the future, for instance through provocative questions, disruptive pedagogies, experimental methods and other approaches that involve developing futures scenarios.

CURIOUSITY-DRIVEN RESEARCH Establish practical ways of nurturing and rewarding original, creative and speculative research approaches.

SAFEGUARD THE ENVIRONMENT Create strategies that place climate crisis and other profound ecological (and societal) challenges at the core of the university's work, and establish ways of monitoring how successfully this is being achieved.

RESIST THE COMMODIFICATION OF LEARNING Create ways of protecting the status of the student as a learner (rather than a customer), the diploma as a recognition of achievement (and not a commodity), and the university as a centre of learning (over a place for commerce). An investment in student learning, skill and knowledge is a societal as well as an individual investment.

WORK WITH TECHNOLOGIES Establish strategies that encourage universities to work with the complexities of digital resources, rather than seeing technologies as instruments for realising educational outcomes or strategic objectives.

RETHINK THE CAMPUS Actively begin a conversation around how the physical and networked spaces of the university can be reimagined to support mobility, equality, sustainability and our other values.

TENSIONS

- The commercialisation and marketisation of higher education, where universities disproportionately allocate resources towards competing for students and to improve their ranking in league tables.

- The commodification and instrumentalisation of the degree programme, where an over-emphasis on employability, the needs of industry, and the potential for future wealth creation compromises the importance of critical thought and the construction of knowledge.

- A limited understanding of scientific knowledge and the works, practices and standards of academic staff and institutions, influenced by disinformation and inaccurate stereotyping within and beyond the media, and leading to attacks on researchers.

- The politicisation of higher education, potentially jeopardising academic independence, alongside the privileging of a narrow field of research and study through decisions around funding.

- A misconception that widening participation in higher education to include a broader range of students and teachers represents a lowering of standards.

- The temptation to spread the function of the university too broadly, thereby diluting the emphasis on expertise, knowledge and higher-level education that makes the academic institution distinct.

- The 'elitisation' of spearhead initiatives and programmes, meaning that the intended broad and sustainable impact of the university becomes undermined.

- A repackaging of existing programmes in ways that lack coherence and create little extra impact and leverage.

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