

## Preface

I take pride in introducing the second volume of the Council of Europe's new Higher Education Series. The Council of Europe's higher education programme has – through its Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR) – been addressing key issues of standards, policy and practice for a good number of years. While this work has been highly appreciated by the immediate beneficiaries, our experience has been less widely accessible to a broader public, and it is my fervent hope that this new publications series will help remedy this.

The topic of the publication – the public responsibility for higher education and research – shows the important role the Council of Europe can play in policy development and in putting issues on the agenda. The public responsibility is indeed an issue for all of Europe – and beyond. It is an issue for higher education, but also for the entire education system.

The public responsibility for higher education and research is a cornerstone of the European university heritage. Yet, our societies are changing rapidly, and clinging to old solutions will not further the very values that these solutions were originally designed to protect. The claim on public attention and public funds is growing, but public funds are not, or at least not at the same rate. While public funding of higher education and research is still important, the concept of public responsibility must be understood much more widely. It must also be nuanced by looking more closely at different degrees and levels of public responsibility as well as at the instruments available for exercising such responsibility.

This book is, I believe, an important contribution to what I see as a crucial debate for the future of Europe, and it is highly appropriate that it appears at a time when the Council of Europe is celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the European Cultural Convention. The book contributes to a highly political debate, and it draws on the strength of the CDESR as a pan-European forum of both academic and government representatives, and with the important addition of the student voice.

European ministers responsible for higher education have twice stated that higher education is a “public good and a public responsibility”. The aspect of public responsibility is the most operational part of the statement, but to make it truly operational rather than simply an expression of concern, we must define what public responsibility means in the complex societies that have just crossed the threshold to the twenty-first century. This book aims to do precisely that, and it is therefore important reading for education policy makers and practitioners alike.

The fact that the book is co-edited by Luc Weber, Vice-Chair of the CDESR, and Sjur Bergan, Head of the Council of Europe's Department of Higher Education and History Teaching, is significant, because it illustrates the close co-operation

between the elected members of the steering committee and the Secretariat, which is a prominent feature of our higher education programme. I would like to thank the editors, the authors and all members of the CDESR for putting this crucial issue on the European higher education agenda.

GABRIELE MAZZA

*Director of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education*

## **A word from the editors**

*Luc Weber and Sjur Bergan*

This book on the public responsibility for higher education and research, the second volume of the new Higher Education Series published by the Council of Europe, is a weighty contribution to the Bologna Process and, more generally, to the reinforcement of the European higher education and research sectors. Due to the globalisation process and to ambitious policies pushed forward in Europe, the European higher education and research sectors are facing a climate of rapidly increasing competition and are at the same time – which is not unusual in the sector – aiming at close co-operation between institutions and countries.

These new developments challenge the traditional provision of higher education and research in Europe and even some of its values, in particular the strong commitment to making higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of merit, whatever their social background, according to the Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and the high confidence in public institutions to provide education, even at the tertiary level, as well as to conduct fundamental research.

The rapid transformation of higher education and research raises many challenges for higher education institutions, in particular:

- the increasing difficulty for the public sector to provide a level of funding sufficient to keep the system internationally competitive;
- the increasing competition within Europe for students, academics and funding;
- the obvious domination of the leading North American institutions and the dazzling ascent of Asian and Oceanian institutions, in particular from China and Australia;
- the fast development of distance and in particular of cross-border education; and
- the rapidly increasing number of private for-profit institutions, in particular in central and eastern Europe.

These developments challenge the way higher education and research are provided, produced and financed in Europe. Obviously, some of the traditional values of higher education institutions could be at risk; it is therefore a responsibility for the European public authorities to promote them without, on the other hand, preventing the sector from implementing the important necessary changes to make Europe a leading Knowledge Society.

The Ministers of Education who met in 1999 in Bologna, where they approved the Bologna Declaration (1999), were conscious of that. They waited, however, until Prague (2001) to support “... the idea that higher education should be considered a

public good and is and will remain a public responsibility (regulations, etc.)". These concepts of "public responsibility" and "public good" are quite common – probably even too common; they are broadly accepted and do not raise many questions. However, if we look at them analytically, it is obvious that they merit great attention, in particular in order to define their nature and scope more precisely. Even if the nature and scope of the public responsibility for higher education will differ slightly from one country to another according to their governmental, as well as political, traditions and sensitivities, it is of utmost importance to higher education and research that we define what the state should do, and how it should do it, but also what it should not do. Lack of involvement as well as over-involvement, or badly conceived policies, will harm the sector. In particular, the fast changing environment requires a reappraisal of the nature and scope of the public responsibility for higher education and research as well as the instruments for exercising it. Moreover, the use of the concept of "public good" without defining it precisely is confusing and could also have negative consequences on the sector if taken *stricto sensu*.

This preamble explains why the Steering Committee on Higher Education and Research (CDESR) of the Council of Europe has considered it extremely important to make decision makers at all levels aware of the importance of the question and, it is hoped, to launch a broad discussion and further work on the subject.

The fourteen contributions assembled in this volume have been commissioned by a CDESR working party of renowned higher education leaders and scholars having a particular knowledge about and experience of the most relevant aspects of the topic. Moreover, these contributions were presented and broadly discussed at a two-day conference which took place in September 2004 at Council of Europe headquarters in Strasbourg. This favourable succession of events has also made it possible to commission a general report synthesising the multiple facets of the question as well as, for the participants, to approve a set of recommendations.

The volume is divided into three parts. Part one examines the context. The first two contributions, by Sjur Bergan and Luc Weber (the editors), broadly examine the question of the public responsibility for higher education and research, the former from a political as well as an institutional perspective, and the latter from the angle of public economics. In Chapter 3, Alain Schoenenberger offers a commented review of the literature on the subject, in particular the economic literature. Aleksander Shishlov concludes the first part with a political reflection on trends in society and public responsibility.

Part two covers the many facets of public responsibility for higher education and research. The first four contributions cover specific topics of a fundamental nature. Pavel Zgaga looks at the public responsibility regarding higher education for a democratic culture; Paolo Blasi stresses the importance of the contribution of higher education and research to the Knowledge Society; Roderick Floud looks at government and higher education approaches to regulation; and Jaak Aaviksoo raises the question of the public responsibility for research and access to research results.

The remaining five contributions in this part consider specific topics, all of great importance: the question of equal opportunities by Júlio Pedrosa de Jesús; financing by Carlo Salerno; new trends in higher education by Stephen Adam; preparation for the labour market by Guy Haug; and, last but not least, the public responsibility for information on higher education by Johan Almqvist and Martina Vukasović.

The third part is devoted to the conclusion and suggestions for further developments. The main constitutive element is the synthesis drafted by Eva Egron Polak: “The public responsibility for higher education and research – Conclusions and suggestions”. This not only synthesises the main findings of the contributions above as well as the result of the lively discussion during the conference, but also introduces the recommendations adopted by the conference participants.

We must emphasise that a book like this one is the product of a fantastic joint venture. Obviously, the authors must be thanked for their contributions which are the building blocks of this undertaking. Special thanks should also be addressed to the members of the working party, who highlighted the different points to address in order to cover this broad and complex subject as extensively as possible and identified the potential authors. We want also to express our gratitude to the staff of the Higher Education and Research Division of the Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education of the Council of Europe, in particular to Martina Vukasović, who very successfully ensured the contacts with the authors until the conference, to Josef Huber and Can Kaftancı, who took over in the phase of preparation of the book and to Sophie Ashmore and Mireille Wendling for valuable assistance throughout. We want also to express our gratitude to the language editors, who went through all contributions without betraying the views and intentions of the authors, in particular those – the majority – who are not native English speakers.

LUC WEBER AND SJUR BERGAN

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