

Introduction to the IAU Conference

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Welcome to Utrecht! Welcome to the heart of The Netherlands! And to the 13th General Conference of the International Association of Universities (IAU).

Sixty years ago the universities of the world embarked upon an exciting adventure. A joint venture into a common future: aiming to help each other to continuously improve their performance; to serve all our societies better at the local, national, regional and global levels. To help improve the quality of life of all people and to ensure that we can all enjoy a sustainable future!

We can now look back, assess what we have achieved, but more importantly: we need to look forward to further improve our contributions to the betterment of humankind.

To do this we have prepared a programme which reflects the multi-faceted character of our present world and the diverse work of its universities and other higher education institutions, as we prepare for a challenging and promising future.

How can the universities, everywhere, strengthen their roles as centres of creativity and innovation? How can they best address local and global needs? What must they do to preserve values and ethics through knowledge development, preservation, transfer and application?

We have prepared a programme with interesting, excellent speakers and with time for your own contributions and interactions. We are extremely happy that almost all speakers that were invited for this conference immediately agreed, with extremely few exceptions. We, now, would sincerely appreciate your active participation, as this will be crucial for the substance and quality of the outcomes of this landmark conference.

We have made every effort to create a programme, which is attractive, challenging and can help gain a better understanding of the condition and position of our universities around the world, of their challenges and opportunities today and in the near future.

Starting with the opening dialogue on the "University as a Local and Global Actor" tomorrow morning, and ending with the special forum on "Comparing, Classifying and Ranking Education Institutions" on Friday, we will address many important topics in the three thematic plenary sessions on:

- (1) Higher Education - Serving and Shaping Society
- (2) Higher Education and Innovation - The Good, the Bad and the Unknown
- (3) Institutional Reform in Higher Education to Meet New Goals

and in no less than sixteen topical workshops. We, really, count on your active participation, throughout this whole program.

We have made an effort to jointly with you all, not to get stuck in just one or two issues, but rather to make a broad, and at the same time in-depth, exploration of the issues we will have to cope with today already, and in the foreseeable future. Not to get stuck in just some opinions or beliefs, but to address in an open-minded way the many issues universities and the societies that created and support them, are confronted with.

--- There is no relevance, when there is no quality, and quality without any relevance is not very useful,

--- there is no development when there is no sustainability and sustainability without development is unacceptable in a world in which so many still suffer from hunger, disease and unhealthy lives, lack of shelter, and all kinds of disasters,

--- equitable access is not very useful, when there is no fair chance to be successful, once you have entered an institution of higher education,

--- and quality education and research are impossible without quality management, whilst quality management without quality education and research is pretty useless.

In our globalized world we will have to prepare for increased mobility and competition but also for cultural diversity locally and globally, for a strengthening of research, the innovative capacity of universities and role for the humanities in higher education, for the many opportunities that come with complementarities, which can be realized through cooperation, which come with creating an information society, which is really 'open to all', with open standards, open software, and open courseware.

All these issues and more are on the table in the next three days.

We have made all the necessary preparations, including for the necessary business sessions, the attractive social and cultural programmes and opening and closing sessions.

We do sincerely hope that together we will enjoy an exciting and fruitful conference!

Hans van Ginkel

Former Rector, United Nations University, Utrecht University

Former President, International Association of Universities