2009/2099(INI)

25.2.2010

OPINION

of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy

for the Committee on Culture and Education

on University Business Dialogue: a new partnership for the modernisation of Europe’s universities
(2009/2099(INI))

Rapporteur (*): Teresa Riera Madurell

(*) Associated committee – Rule 50 of the Rules of Procedure
SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Industry, Research and Energy calls on the Committee on Culture and Education, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Welcomes the Commission’s communication, taking stock of the first three years of operation of the EU University-Business Forum and setting out the challenges for the future, such as supporting innovation, promoting research, creating entrepreneurship, enhancing knowledge transfer and attracting young researchers to the European labour market;

2. Recognises that the challenges identified in the communication are not new, and that they have not been addressed successfully to date; believes, however, that continuous dialogue and collaboration at local, regional, national and European level, including exchanges of best practice in relation to programmes and instruments, are vital in establishing closer links and partnerships between the university and business communities, thus overcoming possible cultural, institutional and operational barriers between them, as well as helping to create a knowledge-based society, develop applied research and improve graduates’ labour market prospects;

3. Recognises the fact that there are wide differences among European universities, with regard to their size, resources, disciplines, organisation, nationality and type; believes, however, that each of them could benefit in its own way from national and cross-border collaboration with the business community, provided that there is a clear awareness of the actual context in which their research and education capacities are developed; takes the view that a major contribution is also being made at regional level to boost collaboration between universities and the business community;

4. Emphasises the need for enterprises to increase their absorption capacity to use and transform the scientific knowledge generated by universities by fostering internal research, lifelong learning and continuing education and engaging in an active policy of communicating their needs to the academic community and recruiting doctoral and post-doctoral graduates and researchers;

5. Stresses the disparity increasingly observed between the qualifications of graduates and those being sought on the labour market, and urges the Commission and the Member States to draw up medium- and long-term forecasts regarding the skills required by the labour market, with a view to bringing educational curricula into line with economic trends;

6. Highlights the need for specialised staff at research institutions who are able to identify and manage knowledge resources with business potential;

7. Encourages not only the extension and expansion of individual mobility schemes such as Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs and Erasmus for Apprentices, but also the organisation of postgraduate European Masters of Excellence programmes, in cooperation with different universities and with the active participation of businesses, coupled with grants
for students and incentives for researchers; believes that such initiatives could also serve the goals of mobility, language learning and the acquisition of multicultural and entrepreneurial experience;

8. Stresses that dialogue and collaboration between universities and business should be based on reciprocity, trust, mutual respect and transparency, encouraging more entrepreneurial universities and more knowledge-driven companies; reiterates that this can be achieved, for example, through the introduction of a system of knowledge vouchers such as that currently in use in a number of Member States, enabling SMEs in particular to improve their research capacity without compromising the independence, autonomy and public character of universities;

9. Stresses that, in order to foster a spirit of enterprise among students, all those involved (academic staff, students and business people) should be properly informed about the tools and mechanisms they can use to develop more efficient, effective and mutually beneficial cooperation; believes it is essential, on the one hand, to enhance training for university academic staff in this sector through initiatives such as lifelong learning and, on the other hand, for universities to open their doors to businesses and employers so that they can make recommendations regarding teaching content and the training, knowledge and skills students should possess;

10. Stresses the need to provide more scope for stimulating continuous adaptation to the changing labour market – which is a priority for the European Union, especially in the current recession – by fostering lifelong learning, particularly through the development of distance learning courses specially adapted to the new technologies and courses for the over-45s, who are more vulnerable and at greater risk of social exclusion;

11. Attaches great importance to knowledge transfer in an open environment; acknowledges that there are different instruments for achieving this, such as publications and seminars, technology transfer offices, regional cooperation, support for start-ups and spin-offs, collaborative research and researcher mobility; believes, however, that the social and human dimension of interaction is extremely important; strongly supports, therefore, initiatives to foster face-to-face interaction between universities and business, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises;

12. Emphasises that improved dialogue and collaboration between universities and business will offer increased opportunities to gain mutual benefits that not only stimulate economic growth, but are also useful in a wider social sense in that they contribute to an ever-improving knowledge-based society;

13. Welcomes the Commission’s willingness to develop a web space for sharing and disseminating best practices, and points out the importance of using new technologies to foster closer cooperation between the university and business communities;

14. Welcomes the launch of a single European network of business and innovation centres, incorporating the services currently provided by Euro Info Centres (EICs) and Innovation Relay Centres (IRCs);

15. Sees greater researcher mobility – in both the short and long term, across nations and
between academia and business, with due regard to the non-discrimination principle – as imperative in enhancing knowledge transfer; calls on the Member States and the Commission, in this connection, to review thoroughly the existing legal and financial framework and to eliminate unnecessary barriers to mobility, paying special attention to the recognition of academic qualifications and the reduction of bureaucracy; calls on universities to introduce more flexible and dual career paths for staff;

16. Emphasises that the benefits of improved dialogue and collaboration between universities and business in this context would be equally relevant in terms of enhancing dialogue and collaboration between universities and national, European and international institutions and civil society organisations, as well as improving the interaction between universities and society at large;

17. Encourages the Commission to create incentives for the development of a competitive EU market for intellectual property rights (IPR), which would allow universities, public research organisations and SMEs to find partners and investors for their IPR, skills and knowledge; points out that the management of IPR could be more professional at most universities;

18. Emphasises the need to speed up efforts to promote a Single European Patent ensuring low-cost, efficient, effective and high-quality legal protection for innovative products and services, especially for SMEs, and a harmonised European patent litigation system;

19. Acknowledges that education and research need to adopt a more multidisciplinary approach to knowledge, and believes, therefore, that both universities and business could benefit from jointly developing multi- and interdisciplinary and entrepreneurial skills and flexibly adapting fields of study, specialties and specialisations to the needs of the economy, including those of small and medium-sized enterprises; highlights successful initiatives such as internships for students and staff, the use of entrepreneurs as visiting professors, dual courses and joint staff;

20. Points out that the joint participation of universities and business in public-private partnerships, such as European Technology Platforms, Joint Technology Initiatives and Knowledge and Innovation Communities, could enhance the exploitation of knowledge and help the EU to address the major challenges it faces; points, in this connection, to the existing Responsible Partnering Guidelines;

21. Calls on national, regional and local authorities to continue, in association with the private sector, to explore and fund processes that enhance the interaction between universities and business, and to remove the administrative obstacles that impede them; points out that the Structural Fund regulation offers the possibility of funding support measures for SMEs along the lines of the system of knowledge vouchers currently in use in a number of Member States;

22. While acknowledging that each collaboration requires a tailored approach and that there are different types of cooperation mechanism, believes that lessons can be learned from successful structures, examples, showcases and role models, and that the dissemination of, and access to, examples of good practice and success stories should be enhanced; especially emphasises the need to take account of good practices implemented by
innovative enterprises, as well as knowledge gained as part of the Sixth Framework Programme for Research in relation to collaborative doctoral education;

23. Believes that, if closer links are to be sought between the business and research communities and universities, the Member States and the Commission must facilitate the joint involvement of foundations, hospitals and public and private universities in the education process and the promotion of research.
RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

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<th>Date adopted</th>
<th>23.2.2010</th>
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| Result of final vote | +: 48  
|                       | −: 0  
|                       | 0: 3  |
| Substitute(s) present for the final vote | António F. Correia De Campos, Ilda Figueiredo, Yannick Jadot, Oriol Junqueras Vies, Ivailo Kalfin, Silvana Koch-Mehrin, Bernd Lange, Alajos Mészáros, Tiziano Motti, Vladko Todorov Panayotov, Silvia-Adriana Țicău, Hermann Winkler |