

HEFEI STATEMENT
ON
THE TEN CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTEMPORARY
RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES
ANNOUNCED BY
AAU, LERU, GO8 AND C9



GROUP OF EIGHT



PURPOSE

The purpose of this statement is to identify the key characteristics that make research universities effective; and to promote a policy environment which protects, nurtures and cultivates the values, standards and behaviors which underlie these characteristics and which facilitates their development if they do not already exist. In the absence of a supportive environment, research universities will be unable to impart the major competitive advantage and global recognition that all nations seek from them.

The four signatory groups to this statement commit themselves to:

- *working together to advance and uphold these characteristics;*
- *working within their own members to ensure their realization; and*
- *promoting the foundational value of these characteristics in the development of higher education policy.*

There have been huge changes in the higher education systems of most countries over recent decades. In particular, and led at least in part by the economic restructuring that has seen the service sector growing ever more important and the knowledge economy continuing its productive growth, universities have increased in number and size. In many countries, they have also become more diverse, reflecting the need to provide cost-effective services that meet immediate national needs. One measure of this diversification has been to recognize research universities, which while relatively small in number, together account for a significant proportion of the nation's higher education research effort

As universities have developed from elite institutions catering to a small, select proportion of the population through organizations offering education for an increasingly large and more diverse cohort, to offering almost universal access, the policy environment in which universities operate also has changed. In particular, policy in many countries is taking an ever more instrumentalist view of universities, a view that ties their roles and purpose to producing the knowledge and skills necessary to operate in a modern economy and to performing research that supports national development.

While these clearly are desirable goals, the growing emphasis on them to the exclusion of other critical university roles has led research and higher education policies to a focus on short term, often highly specific outcomes which capture at best only a small portion of what universities contribute to society and general wellbeing and the ways in which they do this. Changes in national priorities have led to policy and program prescriptions that channel university activities towards meeting narrow national objectives but which put research universities in danger of losing what makes them unique participants in national innovation systems and major contributors to national wellbeing. Much of what governments and the broader community prize in universities derives from their deeper capabilities and more intangible outcomes that this kind of instrumentalist approach can devalue and even lose.

Universities around the world risk losing their effectiveness if the national and global policy environments continue to focus on the immediate rather than the long term, on the knowns rather than the unknowns, and on the narrow rather than the broad.

PREAMBLE

Research universities are distinguished by the quality, breadth and depth of their commitment to research. Nations increasingly rely upon research universities to drive national development and wellbeing. Graduates leave universities to work in government, business and the non-profit sector, taking with them the knowledge, skills, and understanding that make it possible for these sectors to work effectively, to respond to changing circumstances and to innovate. In their work and their social interactions, graduates draw on their university experience and the values that experience has developed to create a richer, more resilient and often more diverse and humane society. Research universities are centres for the development of new ideas and discoveries. They expand our understanding by testing and challenging existing knowledge. They are also centres of creativity that develop new technologies and new ways of doing things. Through education and scholarship, these institutions make significant contributions to the artistic and performance culture of their local communities, the nation as a whole and internationally. University research drives innovation, helps respond to major national and global problems, and provides the narratives that make it possible to understand a rapidly changing and increasingly volatile world. Research universities are focal points of international collaboration, providing access to multinational expertise and facilities that might not be available nationally. They add to the global reputation of their home country and attract talent from around the world. Importantly, universities also are storehouses of knowledge and broad capabilities that provide an underlying state of preparedness – a kind of information – and capacity-based insurance and broader vigilance – that business, government and communities can draw upon to help deal with the unexpected and unknown. This ability to respond quickly and creatively drawing on a

significant breadth of capabilities spanning disciplines and schools becomes more important as the volatility of the world increases and the unexpected becomes the norm.

WHAT WE MEAN BY A RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

Research universities are defined by their serious and pervasive commitment to research; the excellence, breadth and volume of their research outputs; and the way in which a research culture permeates all of their activities, from teaching and learning to their engagement with business, government and the broader community. Undergraduate education in research universities benefits greatly from the opportunities these institutions provide students to explore and learn in the classroom and in the lab with faculty and graduate students working at the frontiers of knowledge. Graduate education in research universities is enriched by the direct, intensive engagement of graduate students in the conduct of research, while the quality and productivity of university research benefits greatly from the creativity and energy of graduate students. Research universities typically make up only a small portion of a nation's colleges and universities but account for a substantial proportion of a nation's higher education research effort.

Governments provide critical support for research universities through a combination of block and merit-based, competitively allocated funding for research and graduate education but also through recognizing and supporting their status through appropriate regulatory environments. Government fiat alone cannot create a research university, however. Such institutions are built from within, by university administrations having the strategic vision and operational excellence necessary to secure from multiple sources the funding needed to build the facilities and to recruit, across a broad range of disciplines, the talented research faculty which in turn attract the exceptional graduate students who themselves become magnets for new faculty. The status of a research university is ratified by its capacity to win competitive research funds, by its production of internationally recognized research and scholarship, and by the caliber of its undergraduate and graduate students. These achievements create the demand from other universities for research collaboration, staff exchange and sustainable strategic relationships. A research university is part of a global, collaborating network of similar universities, makes a significant and worthwhile contribution to the global research effort, and is integrated into the international community because its recognised excellence attracts attention, partners and support.

Despite their pervasive and critical influence, there are signs that the higher education policy environment and the broader public are starting to take these universities and the breadth of their contributions for granted. The focus of university research is on expanding knowledge, leading to new understandings, products and processes that strengthen national economies, improve the quality of life of the nation's citizens and enrich its culture. The benefits of advancing knowledge are extraordinary but the path to exploiting this new knowledge is often long. Research universities are increasingly under pressure to shift from fundamental to applied research to produce short-term benefits and to narrow their curricula in pursuit of increasingly instrumental educational objectives. It is critical that all relevant policies recognize the broad, pervasive and long-term benefits of university research and education and provide the support and environment that will ensure that these institutions continue to flourish; sustaining the foundational characteristics that make research universities an invaluable part of any national infrastructure.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

1. The pursuit of excellence across all its operations, calibrated though informed, independent, disinterested assessments from peer organisations and individuals from outside the university; and a commitment to transparent, meritocratic systems for selecting faculty, staff and students, creating an internal environment that nurtures learning, creativity and discovery, and will unleash and develop the potential of its staff and students, both undergraduate and (post)graduate.
2. A major research effort which has both depth and breadth, producing internationally recognized research results which are broadly disseminated through publication, teaching and community engagement.
3. A commitment to research training, especially through PhD programs, which provides a continuing flow of highly competent and respected graduates (as assessed by researchers of international standing) who are able to advance the frontiers of knowledge and understanding and to contribute to national and international innovation and development across all sectors.
4. A commitment to teaching at both the undergraduate and (post)graduate levels, to produce broadly educated graduates able to contribute to the national welfare across a wide range of activities.
5. A dedication to the highest standards of research integrity and its associated ethical obligations, which ensures the probity of data collection, assessment and analysis independent of any considerations of funding source or of personal or institutional benefit, and which is supported by explicit and effective processes to investigate and respond to any allegations or perceptions of unethical research or behaviour.
6. The responsible exercise of academic freedom by faculty to produce and disseminate knowledge through research, teaching and service without undue constraint within a research culture based on open inquiry and the continued testing of current understanding, and which extends beyond the vocational or instrumental, sees beyond immediate needs and seeks to develop the understanding, skills and expertise necessary to fashion the future and help interpret our changing world.
7. A tolerance, recognition and welcoming of competing views, perspectives, frameworks and positions as being necessary to support progress, along with a commitment to civil debate and discussion to advance understanding and produce new knowledge and technologies.
8. The right to set its own priorities, on academic grounds, for what and how it will teach and research based on its mission, its strategic development plans, and its assessment of society's current and future needs; and the right to determine who it will hire and admit, including an ability to recruit internationally to attract the best people to achieve these priorities.
9. A commitment to support its local and national communities and contribute to international wellbeing by taking actions and developing a culture which works to maximise the short and long-term benefits of the research and education it performs.
10. An open and transparent set of governance arrangements which protect and support a continuing commitment to the characteristics that define and sustain world-class research universities, and, at the same time, assure that the institution meets its public responsibilities.

Dated on October 10th, 2013

Association of American Universities

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Group of Eight

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