

# CREATING NOW THE UNIVERSITY OF TOMORROW

## CIRCLE U. NATIONAL CONFERENCE – KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

24 10 2023

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a summary of the key insights and recommendations from the Circle U. National Conference, “Creating Now the University of Tomorrow – Looking Back to Move Ahead with Circle U. and the Alliances”, which was organized by UCLouvain at the Palais des Academies in Brussels on 24 October 2023. Starting with a recorded message from Iliana Ivanova, the European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, the conference was structured around two keynote speeches and two panels bringing together a mix of speakers from the university sector including the student voice and stakeholders and policymakers from the institutional, the national and the European level. Together they were invited to reflect on the following question: To what extent are Alliances of European Universities actually transforming higher education and research? In order to tackle this question, the aim of the conference was to look back at the achievements of Circle U. as European University Alliance to take stock, look forward and move ahead with the future of the Alliances and hence create the University of Tomorrow. The insights and recommendations below are synthesized from contributions by speakers and participants of the conference (see [programme and recording from the event](#)).

## KEY INSIGHTS

Alliances in general and Circle U. in particular have achieved:

- New ways of bringing students together: not anymore in classrooms or via the traditional Erasmus scheme, but with interactive sessions, simulations, short mobilities coupled with virtual exchanges, and many other promising initiatives.
- New ways of bringing interdisciplinary in our teaching and research programmes: from the traditional university structure based on disciplines, university alliances can structure themselves around – global – challenges.
- New ways of bringing – many – people together: serving a community of half a million students and many more alumni, Circle U. is an adventure made of approximately 65,000 faculty and staff members, which is a real day-to-day challenge but that can enable giant collective leaps forward.

The University of Tomorrow should foster sustainable education. What is sustainable education? We understand it as a learning approach that fosters the understanding of interconnectedness and interdependencies of disciplines, with the aim to provide learners with the knowledge and skills that are necessary for the betterment of society.

In this perspective, enabling “self” agency is key: not only student’s agency but also teacher’s agency. This should rely on self-understanding and self-regulation that can lead to co-creation, including with Artificial Intelligence that will become a companion to all university actors.

Circle U.’s mission is to empower students and staff to mobilize knowledge for impact in order to make the world a better place. It has been doing so through multifaceted initiatives at various levels (for students, staff, academics and researchers). There are now lots of promising activities and initiatives developed within the alliance framework: how can they be scaled up from the perspectives of students, universities, national and European institutions?

Just to give one example from the Female Founders workshops geared towards women leaders, successful founders of start-ups, women in science and academia. The goal of these activities was to help build skills and confidence by providing a space for reflection and exchange on self-purpose and overcoming barriers along the path to entrepreneurship.

The common thread of these initiatives is that they aim to empower the university community to become a proactive and aware changemaker, to go beyond the university's walls and act as a catalyst for change, whether through innovation, science and/or policy making. Trans- and inter-disciplinarity constitute the background in which this learning occurs.

## KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these insights:

- Create opportunities to bring together health professionals, social scientists, people in the humanities and in technical disciplines together both in teaching and in research activities.
- Integrate representatives from non-academic institutions in the academic teaching of global challenges and above all in developing collective responses to these challenges.
- Build awareness regarding the legacies of the colonial past and more generally systemic inequalities across the world and in our societies in order to understand, feel, and eventually overcome structural, political, and economic asymmetries.
- Encourage partnerships between academic institutions across the globe to build on equal terms to override existing inequalities related to funding, research opportunities, travel opportunities, access to authorship and many remaining barriers in all facets of the academic world.
- Adapt the legal framework: we urge policymakers to adapt the legal framework to the University of Tomorrow, in particular to ease joint degrees between universities from different countries, and above all facilitate international collaborations.