

Outlook opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'The role of universities in local and regional development within the context of a Europe of knowledge'

(2004/C 73/05)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the letter of 12 February 2003 from Commissioners Busquin, Reding and Vice-President de Palacio of the European Commission to President Bore inviting the CoR to prepare an Outlook Opinion on The role of universities in local and regional development within the context of a Europe of knowledge, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

having regard to the decision of its President of 19 March 2003 to instruct its Commission for Culture and Education to draw up an Outlook Opinion on this subject;

having regard to its draft Outlook Opinion (CdR 89/2003 rev. 3) adopted on 2 October 2003 by the Commission for Culture and Education (rapporteur: Mr Myllyvirta, Mayor of Mikkeli (FI/EPP));

having regard to the European Commission Communication on The role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge COM(2003) 58 final;

unanimously adopted the following Outlook Opinion at its 52nd plenary session, held on 19 and 20 November 2003 (meeting of 20 November).

1. The Committee of the Regions' views

The Committee of the Regions

1.1. welcomes the Commission's Communication on The Role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge. The Committee considers it important that this Communication was prepared by the Directorate General for Education and Culture jointly with the Directorate General for Research, research being a key activity of higher education. Europe needs excellence in its universities to optimise the processes which underpin the knowledge society and meet the target, set out by the European Council in Lisbon, of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world;

1.2. notes that the Communication on The role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge is timely. The fast-changing working environment, the knowledge-based economy and the accelerating pace of technological development present challenges for European higher education and research, but also offer new opportunities which it must be possible to harness effectively;

1.3. emphasises that the organisation and funding of higher education in Europe vary: in some countries responsibility lies with central government and in others with local and regional government;

1.4. stresses that full exploitation of Europe's development potential requires effective higher education networks with regional coverage;

1.5. notes that the higher education and university system is very diverse. In the Communication, the term 'university' denotes all types of higher education establishments. The Committee points out that the Bologna process constitutes an effort to organise the diversity within a more coherent compatible and transparent European framework;

1.6. notes that the Bologna process sets concrete and relevant objectives for developing higher education, with the aim of creating a European area of higher education by the year 2010. These concern adopting a system of comparable degrees, based on two-cycle credit systems, mobility, quality assurance and promotion of the European dimension;

1.7. notes that although education in the EU is the responsibility of the Member States, it is important that efforts be stepped up at European Union level to improve the quality and competitiveness of European higher education;

1.8. notes that the Communication on The role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge focuses strongly on economic aspects and contains insufficient discussion of the educational activities of universities and their role as crucial producers of knowledge;

1.9. feels that it is important with a view to improving the education system and quality as a whole to also address the issue of aligning the objectives and methods of secondary and university education, as well as the Copenhagen process;

1.10. points out that although it is useful to compare European higher education with the United States, the particular strengths of European society and higher education should be recognised. For example, the system for funding American universities cannot be applied in Europe as it is. The point of the discussion must be to reach a joint understanding of what type of higher education is desirable for Europe in the future and how it should be realised;

1.11. emphasises that future EU enlargement and deepening of ties with the other European countries will extend the frames of reference described above. The Committee of the Regions urges the new Member States to take an active part in the processes relating to higher education.

The role of higher education in the regions: regional development and cooperation with business

The Committee of the Regions

1.12. notes that realising the objectives of the Lisbon strategy and sustainable development in Europe requires that municipalities and regions be able to compete effectively in the global economy;

1.13. notes that, in a knowledge-based economy, knowledge, research and innovation are the prerequisites of economic competitiveness and emphasises that higher education establishments in particular are increasingly the cornerstones of prosperity in the regions and cities;

1.14. points out that a skilled workforce is a key competitive factor for municipalities and regions. The higher education system must be flexible and diverse enough to ensure that education provision meets the rapidly changing needs of regional and local business and working life;

1.15. notes that higher education establishments are not just centres of learning, but that they underpin regional development by being active in regional innovation networks;

1.16. therefore feels that it is important to link the development and goals of higher education with the objectives of local and regional development. The know-how and innovative capacity of higher education establishments should also be drawn upon in determining the objectives of local and regional development. Responsibility for long-term and strategic cooperation is mutual. Universities should actively evaluate and analyse their regional impact and provide a constant driving force for change and innovation; their role is to act as a bridge

between science and people. At the same time, however, regional and local authorities must also step up their efforts to enhance cooperation;

1.17. notes that disseminating new knowledge and publicising research results is important for regions and municipalities. Businesses in the knowledge-based economy locate near to innovative universities;

1.18. points out that the work of local and regional authorities in particular encourages networking of universities and local SMEs, as well as other businesses;

1.19. points out that local and regional authorities also coordinate local and regional networks, such as technology centres and science parks, and so create the conditions for regional innovation systems;

1.20. notes that as drivers of European competitiveness and growth, higher education and research can succeed only if around universities an environment and conditions are created that promote and produce innovation. The Committee of the Regions refers in this connection to the Commission communication on innovation policy ⁽¹⁾.

Broadening universities' international perspective and improving excellence

The Committee of the Regions

1.21. emphasises that the successful development of European higher education, research and innovation policy depends on the development of cooperation and interaction between higher education institutions at EU level, also involving third countries;

1.22. notes that only some universities can be world-class centres of excellence, but that all universities should aim to achieve the highest possible standards in research and teaching;

1.23. emphasises that universities need to create networks in two directions. Whether the objectives relating to higher education are achieved will depend on the development of cooperation and interaction between higher education institutions at EU level, also involving third countries. Universities are also local and regional nodes in global networks which can bring international knowledge to regional level and from regional level to international forums. Efforts to develop international and regional cooperation should be coordinated to support each other;

⁽¹⁾ COM(2003) 112 final.

1.24. points out that networks coordinated by local and regional authorities at local and regional level should be developed, so as to bring together local and regional economic and social actors on the one hand and higher education institutions on the other. The Committee of the Regions calls on the EU to support the promotion of such networks. It welcomes the pilot initiative European Networks to promote the local and regional dimension of lifelong learning (R3L initiative) (EAC/41/02), recently launched by the European Commission in close collaboration with the CoR, in which higher education institutions are actively involved in a number of cooperation projects with local and regional authorities to develop 'Learning regions';

1.25. wholeheartedly approves of the 'Regions of Knowledge' project and the university-driven action for regional development (Udard) initiative which is part of it;

1.26. believes it is important for there to be more investment in the mobility of teachers and researchers. The Committee of the Regions points out that when increasing mobility and international networking, care should be taken to ensure that host countries and regions have adequate facilities for receiving foreign teaching and research staff, as well as students.

Diversity of higher education

The Committee of the Regions

1.27. agrees with the view expressed in the Communication on The role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge that the distinction between basic and applied research is becoming blurred. Higher education and research establishments cannot be mechanically divided into two separate categories; new knowledge can be produced anywhere, in establishments of varying size and type. Even small institutions can produce knowledge of worldwide interest in restricted specialties, especially if they collaborate with high-technology businesses;

1.28. notes that the diversity of higher education makes specialisation possible. Universities that focus on their own strengths can effectively complement each other through networking. Increasing student numbers, as well as growing diversity and rapidly evolving job skills requirements, also necessitate a versatile and diverse higher education system;

1.29. notes that different universities have different briefs and different focuses of interest. The Committee of the Regions considers the diversity of the European higher education system to be an asset that among other things enhances the responsiveness of the research and education system;

1.30. notes that the diversity, autonomy and geographical decentralisation of higher education are important factors in increasing its regional impact. The Committee of the Regions believes that developing the administrative structures of local and regional authorities will also support the development of regional universities. This is particularly important in the new Member States that will be joining the Union, where developing decentralised administrative structures, as well as strengthening local and regional government, are key factors in ensuring the establishment of sustainable development at local and regional level;

1.31. points out that the increase in university student numbers, the role of higher education in regional development and the objectives of lifelong learning require a higher education system with broad regional coverage;

1.32. emphasises that diversity in higher education requires that the system be open and clearly defined. Compatibility, transparency and recognition of qualifications are key objectives for the higher education system, so that diversity can be maintained while the international competitiveness of European universities is also enhanced.

Universities, social cohesion and lifelong learning

The Committee of the Regions

1.33. notes that the role of universities at local and regional level also extends to social and cultural factors. Universities play a key role in strengthening the social capital and cultural vitality of the regions and localities and in promoting social cohesion;

1.34. points out that lifelong learning applies to all forms of education, and that therefore higher education should also be included in lifelong learning strategies. Lifelong learning supports personal development as well as vocational skills;

1.35. notes that open university studies and continuing education offer adults a more flexible way of updating skills and knowledge than the type of traditional course that leads to a certificate.

Effective use of funding and resources

The Committee of the Regions

1.36. considers the objective of increasing research and development investment in Europe to 3 % of GDP to be important. Although this objective is ambitious for some countries, the resources needed to achieve it should be committed. The Committee of the Regions believes that EU research and development funding should also be increased. The Community decided as long ago as 1985 that 6 % of the overall budget should be earmarked for the R&D framework programme, but so far this has not been achieved;

1.37. notes the Commission's observation in its Communication on investing efficiently in education and training: an imperative for Europe ⁽¹⁾ that the EU invests significantly less overall in higher education than the United States. The Committee agrees with the Commission that the question should be addressed of how private investment in higher education can be increased and forms of funding for higher education diversified, bearing in mind that the main responsibility for funding lies with the state;

1.38. points out that increasing the commercial exploitation of innovation and diversifying forms of funding must not jeopardise universities' basic research. The social and economic implications of basic research may be unexpected and significant, but are only felt over the longer term;

1.39. endorses the objective of ensuring that Europe's higher education institutions have sufficient and sustained resources and that these are used effectively. At the same time it is important to note that in some European countries, local and regional authorities are responsible for the funding of higher education;

1.40. stresses that the high drop-out rate and overly comprehensive courses of study significantly undermine the efficient use of resources. The dissemination of best practice of relevant measures to address this problem, such as, for example, the tutoring system, should be supported;

1.41. feels that one method of developing the quality and efficiency of the university research system and its scientific and social relevance is to set up various network cooperation projects and to increase quality-based competition in the targeting of research funding, whilst ensuring that a steady flow of basic funding is directed towards research organisations;

1.42. feels that the regional dimension of education will be enhanced when the development of research, higher and other forms of education is incorporated in regional strategies;

1.43. feels that European projects and programmes should for their part improve scope for the development of regional clusters of expertise inter alia by supporting the networking of businesses and public knowledge producers, as well as international networks of such operators;

1.44. notes that the effective use of resources as well as the high quality of education and research can be improved by strengthening the independent evaluation of universities at regional, national and EU level.

2. The Committee of the Regions' recommendations

The Committee of the Regions

2.1. underlines the need, within the framework of the follow up to the Bologna process, for future orientations to focus on the role of higher education in local and regional development and the promotion of cooperation between higher education institutions and local and regional authorities, with the involvement also of local and regional economic and social players;

2.2. considers it important that local and regional authorities are involved in drawing up higher education policies at national and EU level;

2.3. regrets that the Communication on The role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge does not take adequate account of the diversity of higher education in Europe, despite the fact that national education policies, especially research policy, and priorities vary widely. For instance, the Communication does not pay enough attention to the role of the local and regional level;

2.4. takes the view that higher education institutions should be encouraged to get involved in economic and social activity, including the drawing up of regional development plans and implementation of innovation strategies;

2.5. stresses the need to coordinate education, research and higher education policy with regional development policy at national and EU level;

⁽¹⁾ COM(2002) 779 final.

- 2.6. emphasises that Europe's potential for success cannot be fully exploited unless there is reasonable access to education and research in all parts and regions of Europe;
- 2.7. takes the view that a decentralised higher education system promotes equality of access to higher education opportunities for Europeans;
- 2.8. underlines that scientific creativity also requires motivation from within to blossom fully; this requires curiosity and doubt, as well as stimulating environments which provide recognition for scientific performance;
- 2.9. underlines that the Structural Funds play a part in developing centres of excellence based around industrial and university centres, in devising new teaching aids for higher education, adult education and other institutions in establishing research and technology-transfer centres which enable researchers to be more mobile. Structural Fund resources may also be used to support investment in higher education infrastructure and in the planning and start-up phase of university education and research;
- 2.10. believes that Structural Funds resources should also be used to promote international cooperation between technology centres and science parks;
- 2.11. feels that more support should be targeted towards the initiative European Networks to promote the local and regional dimension of lifelong learning ('R3L initiative'), which should be integrated within the mainstream EU Socrates/Leonardo framework programmes in order to ensure continuity;
- 2.12. emphasises the importance of identifying both labour market needs and students' needs in developing quality higher education, by ensuring that information on existing training and employment opportunities is disseminated at grassroots level, in the interests of better guidance. The needs of part-time and mature students must not be overlooked, particularly in the context of lifelong learning where challenges can include access, cost issues and practical supports.
- 2.13. believes that advantage must be taken of modern inter-active telecommunication methods to facilitate distance and outreach learning particularly in rural areas and urges that the necessary infrastructures (particularly broadband) are prioritised.
- 2.14. considers it important that more attention be paid to the mismatch between skills supply and demand. In anticipating skills demand, cooperation should be established with local and regional authorities at both national and EU level;
- 2.15. believes that regional and local authorities must encourage the forging of regional, interregional and cross-border links between research centres, higher education institutions and industry for the exchange of knowledge;
- 2.16. calls for support to be given to higher education institutions to take part in various Community initiatives in the areas of research and development. The sixth framework programme for research and technological development (2002-2006) must be geared to promoting competitive world-class research in cities and regions throughout the Union;
- 2.17. feels that efforts should be stepped up to ensure that scientific communities play a greater role in the creation of innovative businesses by means of suitable vehicles (business incubators, technology centres, science parks, venture funding for start-ups, etc.);
- 2.18. stresses that the obstacles preventing better exploitation of higher education research results should be identified so that they can be removed more effectively;
- 2.19. recommends efforts be made to increase the mobility of students, teachers and researchers, both within Europe and elsewhere in the world, through Erasmus exchanges under the Socrates programme as well as other relevant measures under the Leonardo programme and sixth framework programme for research;
- 2.20. supports the European Commission's proposal to produce a study on the funding of European universities in order to ascertain the main trends in this area and identify examples of best practice. The CoR calls for the guidelines for this study to be drawn up in cooperation with local and regional authorities;
- 2.21. refers to the studies by the Commission on the regional dimension of the European research area and urges the Commission to draw up a report on the role of universities in local and regional development. The Committee of the Regions urges the Commission to take note of the descriptions of best practice appended to this Outlook Opinion;

2.22. urges the EU Member States to make use of examples of best practice in enhancing the regional impact of higher education;

2.23. calls on the governments, higher education institutions and local and regional authorities of the EU Member States to support the interaction of higher education and local and regional authorities so as to enhance the role of higher education in a Europe of skills and knowledge.

Brussels, 20 November 2003.

*The President
of the Committee of the Regions*

Albert BORE

APPENDIX

to the Committee of the Regions' outlook opinion

(Summary of the contributions submitted to the questionnaire on examples of best practice)

THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the process of drawing up the CoR's outlook opinion on this subject, CoR members were asked for examples of best practice illustrating the role of universities in local and regional development.

The examples of best practice can only be listed here in condensed form. But complete descriptions of these will be sent to the Commission for information.

Strategic cooperation between local and regional authorities and universities

Long-term strategic cooperation between universities and local and regional authorities includes having university representatives sit on local and regional authority bodies, setting up cooperation forums or regional development initiatives and projects aimed at developing a particular area of business or science.

At national level, cooperation may be supported through legislation, by incorporating universities when implementing regional development policy and by fostering their regional impact economically. A region's universities may also draw up a joint regional strategy.

- Copenhagen University is a member of the city's commercial council, which provides scope for dialogue with the municipal authorities, businesses, the social partners and other research and education institutions.
- The Södertörns Rådslag (Södertörn Council) serves as a body for cooperation between local and regional authorities and universities in the Stockholm region. The Södertörns Utvecklingscentrum and the region's universities and colleges have contributed to the success of projects championed by local politicians on the council.
- There is strategic cooperation between Gävle University (Sweden) and local and regional authorities under the terms of a regional growth agreement (-programme). Gävle University has also established a networking organisation ('Kontaktörget') and 'hubs' have been set up in the municipalities to encourage and launch cooperation between the university and the local community.

- Innova Gotland (Sweden) provides a link between the university and the local community, developing and maintaining cooperation between the university and the community. The Viking Plus project is a tourism project based on the Viking theme which came into being in the context of regional growth agreements. Gotland Interactive Park aims at creating a centre for development of knowledge, exchange of ideas and business.
- The regional government of Murcia (Spain) has developed the Lorca University Vocational Campus project on the basis of cooperation between different institutions. The region's two public universities are part of a consortium managing the campus along with the regional government of Murcia, the municipality of Lorca and business organisations.
- In Finland, polytechnics have a regional development remit enshrined in law. Every two years, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council selects centres of expertise in polytechnics on the basis of their regional development impact. The centre of expertise proposals are also used as one criterion in the allocation of results-based funding by the Ministry of Education.
- In Italy the Campus One project, which involves 70 Italian university faculties and 270 degree courses aims to strengthen links with the labour markets and the regional context in which universities operate.
- The aim of the Student City Project is to integrate student communities into urban development and to reap the benefits of this. The project involves a number of European cities.
- The project entitled 'Skills and know-how in Northern Finland — Building regional cooperation at tertiary level' is intended to further develop and intensify cooperation between institutions of higher learning in the North. The project will act as a guideline when developing sub-regional tertiary level educational strategies, Regional Centre Development Programmes and Centre of Expertise Programmes in Northern Finland.
- The joint regional impact strategy of higher education institutions in Lapland is built on a network-based model bringing together the region's universities and polytechnics, called the Regional institution of higher education in Lapland. The aim of the strategy is the balanced development of the province.
- The town of Mikkeli has a university centre formed jointly by four state universities with operations in the town, the municipal polytechnic of Mikkeli, which is part of the town's service consortium, and the farming and foodstuff research centre. The centre is part funded by the Ministry of Education and its aim is to enhance the regional impact of universities and R&D work. The university centre has close links with the Mikkeli technology centre and business incubators. In one particular hi-tech field, materials technology (composites and treatments), Mikkeli is a part of the nationwide centre of expertise programme. In other fields there is close cooperation with hi-tech businesses in the region.
- The Entrepreneurship and Small Business Research Institute of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Stockholm every month invites politicians and officials from the worlds of business, education, research, innovation and regional policy to a meeting with guest professors and researchers from around the world. Many ideas for regional growth and development are discussed at these meetings.
- The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is being implemented throughout Scotland's education and training sectors. The project has been developed by a partnership involving universities, the Scottish Executive, the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the Scottish Office of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.
- In the Blekinge region of south-eastern Sweden the Blekinge Institute of Technology has offered the regional authority the chance to take part in creating a 'Development Office'.
- In Emilia-Romagna, centres of knowledge have been strengthened by creating databases shared by universities, regional agencies, Confindustria, SME and business groupings. In Emilia-Romagna, there are two science-technology parks: one in Parma and the other in Bologna.

- In Perugia TUCEP, an association of universities, companies, local authorities and sectoral associations, is a centre for long-term cooperation. There are also regional grants, which are established on the basis of request from companies.
- The University of Catania in Sicily sees that universities could for example encourage the establishment of task forces and working groups with expertise in advising businesses and local authorities. Small companies especially may need additional injections of know-how to make knowledge a key factor in competitiveness.

Local and regional innovation networks and inter-regional cooperation networks

Innovation networks help to increase regional expertise. A network linking universities and businesses can act as a forum for the exchange of knowledge or focus on developing a particular area of expertise or business sector. Separate programmes can be used to promote the commercialisation of innovations.

- In the county of Gävleborg in Sweden, networks have been set up to supply skills in the region and create forums for exchanges of experience. Examples of such networks include the GIS Institute in Gävle, Creative Media Lab (CML), the Group for Interactive Affairs and the Penta-Plus cooperation project.
- The i10 Project aims to capitalise on the opportunities for knowledge sharing and collaboration between the ten partner institutions in the East of England and regional businesses and industry. Its purpose is to create a supportive environment for the processes of innovation, technology/knowledge transfer and entrepreneurship.
- The Science Centre is being applied as a teaching method in Södertälje, Sweden. The Tom tits experiment is an education project providing teacher training, research and an international network.
- A 'proof of concept fund' has been set up in Scotland to address the pre-seed funding gap in Scotland which is restricting the flow of technology from the laboratories to the market place.
- The Siljansutbildarna is an organisation set up by municipalities in the Siljan region (Sweden) which has inter alia established higher education learning centres. There is a nationwide network for municipal learning centres called Nitus.

Matching training provision and labour needs from the point of view of the regions and localities

Labour needs are anticipated by collaborative regional bodies bringing together local and regional authorities, business representatives and universities. Local and regional authorities are in a key position when training provision in a region is to be matched to business needs.

- In centres of expertise in Sweden, agreement can be reached between regional and local authorities, representatives of business and universities on meeting training needs. In the county of Gävleborg, matching and adapting education provision to labour market needs takes place in a regional training council. The council is developing an early warning system to establish actual needs and frame relevant programmes to meet them.
- The Combined Universities in Cornwall (CUC) initiative aims to transform higher education in Cornwall. The CUC will support the development of those areas of industrial, business and professional activity that are emerging in Cornwall by offering university courses at a number of locations across the region, fostering research and business support activities and promoting knowledge and technology-transfer activities. Three new centres of excellence will be created within the CUC.
- The Futureskills Scotland project helps people, employers and others to make decisions using labour-market intelligence.

The internationalisation of universities and consolidating high-level expertise

In the process of internationalising universities, local and regional authorities can act as the coordinators of measures to raise their profile, as well as gearing internationalisation towards meeting the needs of the region.

- The aim of the Studying in Stockholm project is to attract students and researchers from the Baltic states and other countries around the Baltic Sea area to spend some time studying in one of Stockholm's universities.
- Gävle University has an international secretariat, which is part of a network that includes the universities of Örebro, Mälardalen and Dalarna. GU plays an active role in the international pillar of growth agreement.
- Education UK Scotland coordinates the promotion of Scottish education and training overseas. It works together with education providers and other bodies to ensure that new market-focused initiatives are tailored effectively to the needs of the sector.
- The Scottish Networks International programme aims to enhance the educational experience of selected international postgraduates and broaden their experience of Scotland while bringing international expertise to Scottish companies and organisations.
- The Scottish Enterprise/Royal Society of Edinburgh Enterprise Fellowships programme addresses the need to commercialise the output of leading research conducted within Scotland's universities and public research institutes by awarding fellowships for the development of commercial opportunities.

Centres of expertise and cooperation between universities and businesses specialising in knowledge generation and transfer

To facilitate the operation of centres of expertise, various development units or cooperation bodies may be set up which are designed to bring together universities, local and regional authorities and business in close cooperation.

- The Finnish national Centres of Expertise Programme supports regional strengths, specialisation between regions and cooperation between different centres of expertise. Access to catalytic funding from the government requires a contribution from the region concerned towards implementation of the programme. Culminatium Ltd Oy is an example of a Centre of Expertise programme manager. It is a development company owned by the Uusimaa Regional Council, the cities of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, and the universities, polytechnics, research institutes and business community of the Helsinki region.
- Univa AB initiates and coordinates commercial R&D tasks in Lund (Sweden), acting as a broker between university institutions and the business world.
- Within Øresund University (a virtual university consisting of 12 universities in the region) four so-called 'scientific platforms' have been set up involving universities and industry.
- The Intermediary Technology Institutes (ITI) project is intended to increase the development of technology companies and to foster those already existing in Scotland. Under the project, research will be commissioned from inter alia the Scottish higher education sector.
- The aim of the urban studies project of the University of Helsinki and the Helsinki University of Technology is to support the development of the Greater Helsinki Region and to promote urban studies as a scientific field of research. The project also involves the Ministry of Education and cities in the region.

- The 'Get Up' initiative in the Free State of Thuringia, Germany, is a start-up scheme for technology-oriented businesses. Jena College of Higher Education has a Technology Transfer Office which is the first port of call for establishing contacts between the college and businesses. The OphthalmInnovation Thüringen centre of expertise is one of the winning projects selected by the Federal Ministry of Education. The Thuringia education portal is a forum for the region's higher education institutions.
- Gävle University in Sweden also devotes resources to a job-placement scheme, which is an instrument developed for locating and filling research-based jobs.

The diversity of higher education and local and regional level cooperation

Universities can engage in cooperation inter alia by entering into joint development cooperation or by pooling expertise and resources for a common purpose. By pooling resources, a wider range of courses can be provided. The consolidation of high-level expertise requires specialisation by universities and the coordination of course provision.

- Stockholm University and the Kungl. Tekniska Högskolan have set up the AlbaNova University Centre, a centre for physics, astronomy and biotechnology, where the researcher training and undergraduate teaching of four different institutions are brought together under one roof. The building houses inter alia scientific libraries, laboratories, staff and IT networks which are shared by the universities.
- The Food Science Centre is a cooperation project between Lund University and the food industry in Skåne (Sweden) aimed at developing the food sector.
- The universities of Bremen, Greifswald, Hamburg, Kiel, Oldenburg and Rostock in Germany have formed the Consortium of Universities in Northern Germany. The main focus of the Consortium's activities is the jointly conducted evaluation of studies and teaching. The participating universities' multimedia teams meet regularly to agree on blueprints for centres of expertise and educational software developments. There are also meetings between those responsible for EU affairs at the various universities. Another example of cooperation in the Consortium is the interdisciplinary master's programme for applied polar and marine sciences (POMOR) at the Faculty of Geography of St Petersburg State University.
- The UHI Millennium Institute (UHI) is an educational partnership of colleges and research institutions, along with a network of over 50 outreach learning centres, providing access to university-level courses in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Universities Scotland is a membership organisation representing higher education institutions.
- The Technical University of Cartagena (Spain) is specialised in technical education, following in the local tradition of existing universities providing engineering-related courses. The university is situated in a traditionally industrial area of Murcia and also has links with agriculture in the area. The University of Murcia complements the courses offered at Cartagena. The regional government coordinates the universities and promotes their specialisation.
- SLU Omvärld is an organisation set up by the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) to establish cooperation projects with industry. Ideon Agro Food is a foundation which engages in research with SLU and Lund University on developing innovations. A programme called 'Innovation in border areas' has also been launched in the Alnarp region.

Making more efficient use of resources and the role of local and regional authorities in university funding

Although the state has prime responsibility for higher education funding, regional and local authorities contribute to this funding in many ways. Local funding may be a precondition for other funding. The regional impact of professorships funded by local businesses and/or local authorities can be considerable. The principles of funding may also be organised in such a way that the regional impact is enhanced.

- The salaries of Finnish professors are mostly paid from the state budget. Sponsored professorships are an exception to this. There are currently an estimated one hundred sponsored professorships in Finland. The sponsors are for the most part companies and municipalities.

- Gävle University's development areas have been funded by both the county council and other stakeholders. Because of this, it has been easier for the university to obtain funding from the EU Structural Funds. Recently, the National Land Registry and GU decided to jointly recruit a professor in geomatics. The university, in close cooperation with teaching centres in the region, has invested heavily in expanding distance-learning courses. Some 25 % of students now study by distance learning.
- Stockholm county council has supported the development of science parks and the establishment of a new university attached to the Huddinge Teaching Hospital. The City of Stockholm has supported the development of activities in Kista. Both areas now include comprehensive education and research activities.
- In May 2002 an agreement was reached between the regional government of Murcia and its universities to introduce a model of university financing that would include a system and various mechanisms of funding provision based on achieving objectives relating to socio-economic issues relevant to regional development. The system dovetails with the universities' internal quality systems.

Contributions received from:

- Alnarp, Sweden
- Blekinge, Sweden
- Copenhagen, Denmark
- Cornwall, UK
- East of England, UK
- Emilia — Romagna, Italy
- Gävleborgs län, Sweden
- Gotland, Sweden
- Greater London Enterprise, UK
- Hamburg, Germany
- Helsinki, Finland
- Lapland University, Finland
- London, UK
- Lund, Sweden
- Malmö, Sweden
- Mikkeli, Finland
- Murcia, Spain
- Örebro, Sweden
- Oulu, Finland
- Perugia, Italy
- Rotterdam, Netherlands
- Scotland, UK

- Sicily, Italy
- Siljan region, Sweden
- South West Region, UK
- Stockholm, Sweden
- Thuringia, Germany.

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the ‘Communication from the Commission on Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004-2006’

(2004/C 73/06)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the European Commission Communication on Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004-2006 (COM(2003) 449 final);

having regard to the letter of the European Commission of 24 July 2003 to consult it on this subject, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

having regard to the decision of its Bureau of 1 July 2003 to instruct its Commission for Culture and Education to draw up an opinion on this subject;

having regard to the Commission Staff Working Paper: Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity — Consultation (SEC(2002) 1234);

having regard to the report from the Commission to the Council — The Concrete Future Objectives of Education Systems (COM(2001) 59 final) and the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe;

having regard to its opinion on the Report from the Commission to the Council — The Concrete Future Objectives of Education Systems (CdR 89/2001 fin) ⁽¹⁾;

having regarding to its opinion on the Promotion and Protection of Regional and Minority Languages (CdR 86/2001 fin) ⁽²⁾;

having regard to its opinion on the European Year of Languages 2001 (CdR 465/1999 fin) ⁽³⁾;

having regard to the Resolution of the Council of Education and Youth Affairs of 14 February 2002 on the promotion of linguistic diversity and language learning in the framework of the implementation of the objectives of the European Year of Languages 2001;

having regard to its draft opinion CdR 248/2003 rev. adopted on 2 October 2003 by the Commission for Culture and Education (rapporteur: Mrs Annette McNamara, Member of Cork County Council and the South West Regional Authority (IE/EA);

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 19, 22.1.2002, p. 23.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 357, 14.12.2001, p. 33.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 156, 6.6.2000, p. 33.