

Presidency summary - 2018 University Business Forum

The 10th anniversary of the University-Business Forum (UB Forum) was marked on 22 and 23 February in the framework of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council to the European Union. The Forum was organised by the European Commission in partnership with the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science and the Bulgarian Industrial Association. It emphasised that **strengthening university-business cooperation (UBC) will be crucial to boost the EU's social and economic innovation potential**, which in turn will be key to securing its global competitiveness and fostering social cohesion. Therefore further efforts to be establish incentives and where appropriate regulatory modernisation for university-business cooperation uptake are necessary.

It was underlined that **collaborative platforms** as the Forum are crucial for all actors in the 'quadruple helix' to build trust and a common understanding of how they can 'work together' to build effective regional and national innovation ecosystems.

Key messages from the University Business Forum 2018 in Sofia

1. 'Think big' – Leadership, management and governance

- In order to drive sustainable institutional change, it is important to ensure the **interconnection of strategies, structures and culture**. Any kind of change should build and 'find allies' in all these areas.
- Including **external stakeholders (i.e. businesses, regional authorities and wider civil society) in university governing bodies** helps to maintain a valuable link with society and inspire societal responsibility. Moreover, it complements the more structural managerial knowledge with up-to-date practical experience from the field;
- **Students can be a powerful enabler for change**. Effective governance is also about generating support from all key stakeholders affected – especially students. By embedding cooperation with business and wider civil society in the university's strategy, **students and alumni can be more readily mobilised as a driving force for innovation**.

2. 'Act local' – Driving regional innovation and development

- Successful regional development requires three key ingredients: **a long-term vision, networks, and leadership** among all different stakeholders whether higher education institutions, regional and local governments or business.
- Access to qualified human capital through higher education is the main key success factor for regional innovation, and regional innovation policies should contain **measures for higher education that go beyond teaching but fostering research and innovation;**
- **Regions and cities could play a key role in building ecosystems**, where different groups and actors collaborate to achieve a balance between economic activities, human-scale living environments and synergistic innovation processes. The focus would be on platforms for testing the concepts and technological solutions for sustainable development
- The proposal was made to launch a **call to action for radical collaboration between business and higher education**, making sure that higher education institutions can work as a 'connecting tissue' to link all key stakeholders (local councils, businesses, innovation centres, entrepreneurs, students, etc.), so as to ensure impact at both local and global level.

3. 'From thinking to acting' – Entrepreneurship education and development

- The UB Forum emphasised that **high-quality and innovative teaching and learning** in higher education, which fosters innovative and entrepreneurial skills development should be no less important than research and development (R&D). **Both aspects – research and teaching - should be recognised and rewarded for academic careers.**
- The participants highlighted the importance of further **developing entrepreneurial education to drive regional development and innovation**. Rather than transmitting an 'established body of knowledge' inside the university as an ivory tower, entrepreneurial learning is about creating a university environment which fosters trans-disciplinary collaboration *inside* the academic community as well as cross-sectoral cooperation *between* higher education, business, (local) government and wider civil society, and which values innovative ideas of students and staff, thereby empowering them to not only think, but also 'act outside the (university) box'.