

**HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE  
BEYOND 2010:  
RESOLVING CONFLICTING SOCIAL  
AND ECONOMIC EXPECTATIONS**

Higher education institutions are being subjected to a variety of pressures that seek, primarily, to enhance higher education's contribution to the successful creation of so-called 'knowledge societies', together with, and receiving only slightly less emphasis, the achievement of greater equity and social justice. This Forward Look will examine the relevant higher education research literature in terms of its underlying conceptual approaches and empirical findings across a number of selected sub-themes in order to derive a future research agenda that will address scientific questions of long term strategic concern to the future of higher education.

All European countries are witnessing rapid changes to, and expansion of, their higher education systems and institutions. These changes have been accompanied by policy interventions at institutional, national and international levels which have challenged traditional academic cultures and relationships while bringing new social dynamics to higher education systems and institutions. These developments have produced a substantial research literature, much of it policy driven and relatively narrowly focused. The aim of this Forward Look is to examine this literature in terms of its underlying conceptual approaches and empirical findings across a number of selected sub-themes in order to derive a future research agenda that will address scientific questions of long term strategic concern to the future of higher education.

Reshaping higher education systems has become a topical question across Europe and this, in turn, is raising issues and research questions concerning, not least, its role, functions and outcomes. Higher education is expected to actively contribute to the reinforcement of national and regional competitiveness within the global knowledge economy, while its educational missions are being required to foster both excellence and democracy. In other words, increasing expectations and even contradictory demands are being made of higher education. An examination of the resulting tensions lies at the heart of this Forward Look.

The higher education research literature will be explored by the Forward Look through the examination of five related themes:

- (1) Higher education and the needs of the knowledge society;
- (2) Higher education and the achievement of equity and social justice;
- (3) Higher education and its communities: interconnections and interdependencies;
- (4) Steering and governance of higher education;
- (5) Differentiation and diversity of institutional forms and professional roles.



Workshops are being organised on each of these themes. At each of the workshops, a 'state of the art' review of research on the relevant theme will be presented for critique by a small group of scholars in the field. These theme papers will then be revised and synthesised for presentation to broader groups of scholars and policy makers at conferences during 2007.

**ESF Forward Looks**

ESF Forward Looks provide medium to long-term authoritative visions on science perspectives in broad areas of research bringing together ESF Member Organisations, other research organisations and the scientific community in creative interaction. Forward Look reports and other outputs such as ESF Policy Briefings assist policy makers and researchers in defining optimal research agendas and in setting priorities. Quality assurance mechanisms, based on peer review where appropriate, are applied at every stage of the development and delivery of a Forward Look to ensure its credibility and impact.

[www.esf.org/flooks](http://www.esf.org/flooks)

## Timeline of activities

- **4 April 2006 - Strasbourg, France**  
**Organising Committee meeting.**
- **11-12 September 2006 - Kassel, Germany**  
**Workshop 1:** Discussion and critique of initial drafts of overview papers on themes 2 and 5  
**Organising Committee meeting.**
- **24 November 2006 - Helsinki, Finland**  
**Workshop 2:** Discussion and critique of overview paper on theme 1.
- **18-20 January 2007 - Paris, France**  
**Workshop 3:** Discussion and critique of overview papers on themes 3 and 4.  
**Organising Committee meeting.**
- **15-16 March 2007 (tbc) - Brussels, Belgium**  
**Interim Conference:** Discussion of the five overview papers with policy-makers and researchers in the field and development of research agenda.
- **Autumn 2007 - London, UK**  
**Final conference:** Discussion of research agenda with key policy bodies and researchers.
- **End 2007**  
The final report will be released.

## Organising Committee

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Joint activity between the Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH) and the Standing Committee for the Social Sciences (SCSS).

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For the latest information on this Forward Look consult the following website: [www.esf.org/helf](http://www.esf.org/helf)