

ASEM University-Business Seminar, Brussels, 4 March 2015

Introductory remarks by Paul Temple:

The questions posed for this seminar by the ASEM Ministers of Education include:

- How can higher education better contribute to social, economic and technological innovation?
- To what extent can trans-regional university-enterprise cooperation enhance innovation and its spread?
- What more needs to be done to ensure that graduates can operate effectively in international environments?

Universities have been international institutions, concerned with innovation, since their creation in 11th and 12th century Europe: universities such as Bologna, Paris and Oxford attracted students from across Europe and prepared them for professional careers. The international recruitment of both academic staff and students remains a key objective for universities today which wish to be vibrant, relevant institutions. Their international characters are important in allowing them to prepare their students for a changing, globalising world.

But both universities and employers need to be aware that a key function of university teaching is to prepare students for jobs that do not exist, working in companies that do not exist, yet. What universities can do is to give their students the intellectual foundations – being critical, analytical, empathetic, and so on – that will enable them to do these currently non-existent jobs. Personally, I'm delighted when a former student tells me how much they gained from their university days, and then gives me a totally mystifying account of their present job.

Universities are about both teaching and research – the mix of the two is what distinguishes them from other sorts of educational institutions. (The nature of the interaction between teaching and research is a source of continual academic debate.) Their research, as various studies (including one involving Professor Mora and me) have shown, can be greatly strengthened when it is carried out in conjunction with the enterprises which will be involved in applying the research: this is sometimes known as “Mode 2 knowledge”, in

contrast with Mode 1 knowledge, created in isolation from potential users. Knowledge can often actually be created by the to-and-fro exchange between university researchers and end-users in the enterprise. Both universities and enterprises have much to gain through such interactions – though their management can raise difficulties for both parties.

Let me make a few brief comments about the organisational form of the university (generalising wildly here). They are, or should be, deeply ethical institutions – because trust, and a belief that they will act in the wider interest, not just the narrow interest of the present leadership – is what gives them the right to be heard, and to support individual academics who may propose controversial ideas. As I mentioned they are international organisations – yet they are also regional ones, usually with strong regional roots, supporting regional economic and social development. These two contrasting roles should not be in conflict, but should be a source of synergy – just as teaching and research can complement each other.