

## Europe must invest (much) more in research and education collaboration

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Investment in research and education not only brings the highest European added value, it is also the most effective long-term, future-oriented commitment that the EU can make towards its citizens, writes Rolf Tarrach.



Europe must invest (much) more in research and education collaboration | *Photo credit: Adobe Stock*

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Once every seven years, there is one topic that trumps all others in Brussels: money. How much money should member states put into the overall European Union budget? What kinds of activities should it finance? And, importantly, how much should go back to each member?

Credit goes to the European Commission this time around, as it took the debate on the next multiannual financial framework to the public arena, arguing that policy choices must come before

horse-trading. And, notably, that the money must produce European added value.

With Brexit adding further constraints on the budget, there is no shortfall of challenges: energy, defence, borders, cohesion, agriculture and competitiveness are all high priorities. However, at Europe's universities we know that investment in research and education not only brings the highest European added value, it is also the most effective long-term, future-oriented commitment that the EU can make towards its citizens.

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As a university leader and President of the European University Association, I witness every day the positive impact of European support to research, innovation and education. This kind of spending means, first and foremost, investing in people - in particular, Europe's youth. It is the sine qua non condition to fulfil the ambition of turning the European Union into a world leader in innovation-driven growth and competitiveness.

What we do, ultimately, when investing together, is empower our societies to tackle common challenges and reach shared objectives regarding competitive innovation, societal growth, job creation, environmental protection and social inclusion.

It is also about efficiency. Research and innovation are a European public good. Investing in them creates synergies, economies of scale and a very high return. We know that every euro invested in research and innovation generates on average €13 in value added for business.

"As the multiannual financial framework is being designed, the university sector suggests doubling investment to boost Europe's competitiveness and sustainability"

Today, European research funding fails to support up to 75 per cent of the excellent ideas that are brought forward. Just think how much return on investment we could generate if we funded them all. However, we lack the money at the EU level and the mechanisms at the national level to support such ideas, in particular when they are developed by international project teams. This is unsustainable and not in Europe's best interest.

Furthermore, investing in research and education reinforces European awareness and identity through transnational collaboration and mobility. The EU's Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+ are unique in this respect and even more funding should go to the next generation of programmes.

Plus, investing in education, research and innovation is Europe's best foreign policy instrument.

Beyond academic exchanges, what we have developed, and must further strengthen, is a reliable space for dialogue with partners around the world. Not only do we tackle global challenges, we create concrete ties enabling scientists, students and innovators to work across borders, embedded in the quest for excellence and personal development.

For all these reasons, it is time for the member states to significantly step up their commitment to European research and education. As the multiannual financial framework is being designed, [the university sector suggests doubling investment](#) [7] to boost Europe's competitiveness and sustainability. Europe's leaders need to consider this and remember that universities have the potential to become a treasure chest of European added value.

## About the author

Rolf Tarrach is President of the European University Association, which represents more than 800 higher education institutions across Europe

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[Culture and Education](#) [9]

[European Commission](#) [10]

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