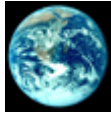


GLOBAL: Universities plan for sustainable energy

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University presidents and vice-chancellors from the G8 and G20 countries agreed at a meeting in Vancouver last week on an action plan ahead of next month's summits in Canada. The third in a succession of university conferences, held since 2008 in the run up to the economic summits, focused on sustainability in three areas - energy, health and higher education.

Research universities from 13 of the G8-G20 countries were represented at the conference: seven from Canada, two each from France, Italy and Japan, and one each from Germany, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, the UK and the US.

Their leaders distilled recommendations for action down to two sets of goals - internal and external. The internal goals were ones they set for the sustainability of universities, the external goals were aimed at ensuring the sustainability of human society.

The university leaders agreed that to meet the demand for sustainable energy, the universities' built environment had to stand up to new scrutiny and be designed to reduce the ecological footprint.

On sustainable health, they agreed that university campuses and communities would establish principles of fair access, equity, and respect for the values of diversity.

For sustainable higher education, they resolved that universities should seek more effective solutions to meet the challenges presented by constraints in public funding and worldwide economic upheaval. Universities would provide opportunities for leadership development and a shared focus on excellence and innovation in teaching and learning.

With the external goals, there was agreement that universities had to generate and organise knowledge on sustainable energy so it contributed to the establishment of a sustainable world, preserving its natural environments for future generations while meeting current needs.

On health, they proposed the effects of local and global demographic change - urbanisation and aging populations - must be brought into balance.

And they concluded that "sustainable higher education must help our young people learn to be global citizens with an international perspective in every field of study".

The preamble to the statement of action says: "Universities exist for social benefit. By providing the highest level of educational opportunities and research resources, universities will help to create the next generation of leaders: exceptional people with the capacity to challenge problems on a global scale and to support sustainable and healthy societies.

"These leaders are increasingly required to understand global problems and act locally and globally. Thus, the role of education in a global environment has never been more significant.

"The university environment must be more globally engaged so that it promotes shared understanding by breaking down barriers among people and fields of study. As the challenges of sustainability are interconnected, so are the solutions."

The university leaders accepted that across the world their institutions were facing profound challenges relating to their sustainability and regulation.

"These challenges are great and multi-dimensional, especially in developing educational systems. While the challenges in various contexts may be different, they are also intrinsically linked. They will not be effectively met by universities working in isolation.

"In order to secure a sustainable future, universities will need to work in partnership with government, the private sector and civil society. We will work together to find solutions on the campus and beyond to problems such as scarcity of resources, development and mobility of intellectual capacity, aging or inadequate infrastructure, and changing social demographics."

The leaders acknowledged the role expected of universities in leading change: "Universities have an important role in creating and providing new knowledge to drive the development and implementation of innovative and sustainable solutions to global challenges. To be relevant to all of our communities, universities act as living laboratories to demonstrate change, and lead by example in all dimensions of sustainability.

"As members of a global society with complex problems we should adapt institutional structures to value and support multi-disciplinary viewpoints, empowering socially responsible leaders to undertake transformative change. Effective reporting systems are needed in order to measure success and improve strategies for the future."

Dr Indira Samarasekera, President of the University of Alberta, which co-hosted the conference with the University of British Columbia, said the summit built on the results of summits in Japan and Italy, enabling university leaders to refine ideas and action plans over time, making them stronger and more effective.

"The G8 University President Summit demonstrates how universities across the world are working to develop

connections, unite efforts, and share knowledge," Samarasekera said. "The ultimate goal is to speed the way to solutions, innovations, and policies that work."

The associated students' summit, held earlier this month in Banff, Alberta, proposed annual published reporting on universities' sustainability "with an ultimate goal of net zero footprint".

The students suggested universities should be used as living laboratories for emerging social and technological approaches to sustainability.

The G8 summit is to be held in Huntsville in Ontario from 25-27 June. It will be immediately followed by the G20 summit in Toronto.

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