

Vienna

SiS Catalyst & EUCU.NET
Joint Conference Vienna
10th-12th September 2014

Declaration

The Vienna Declaration on Social Mobility through 'Science in Society'

Education is a fundamental right of all people and should therefore be equally and unrestrictedly accessible for all. Higher education is a key driver of social, economic and cultural development in modern societies and is critical in shaping individual life paths. Continued participation in education determines social mobility through employment and career opportunities. It also encourages active citizenship by enabling individuals to engage in civil, social, economic, political and cultural processes. However, a global rise in participation in higher education in recent decades has not equally benefitted all groups in society. Gaps continue in rates of participation and success. Education returns vary greatly between people with – for example – different racial, national, religious, gender and socio-economic backgrounds.

These gaps are reproduced in higher education, and in society at large, through implicit biases and more direct forms of discrimination. Exclusion mechanisms at play in society influence educational practices that still privilege some while marginalizing and shutting out others. In a time of unprecedented population diversity in industrialised countries the failure of higher education to reflect this diversity represents a huge loss of human potential, critical thinking and innovation – especially in the case of knowledge and economic development, social cohesion and social justice. Industrialising parts of the world also depend on developing the untapped potential of all their people. Making "excellence inclusive" is thus a global issue.

Higher education institutions worldwide have a responsibility to contribute to greater equality, social mobility and well-being in their societies. We urge them to recognise and foster the dreams and aspirations of children for higher education as early as possible. This especially applies to children from groups currently under-represented among their students and staff, i.e. "locally defined minorities" (LDM).

LDMs can feel alienated from university often because of a lack of belonging. Outreach activities, such as Children's Universities, spark children's curiosity about the possibilities of education, research and science. They provide a holistic opportunity to tackle exclusion mechanisms and to engage all individuals. Experience shows that early outreach programs have the potential to increase both enrolment and attainment in higher education among under-represented groups in the long-term. They need to be carefully designed by devoting attention to young peoples' voices – otherwise exclusion mechanisms can still be reinforced unintentionally.

To be effective, science engagement activities must be tailored to connect with the lived histories and experiences of the children. For example, mentoring by older peers with similar backgrounds can both inspire and boost self-esteem. Creating inclusive spaces where children CAN develop their potential unhindered by stereotypes and discrimination is critical. Encouraging children to develop their own views on scientific knowledge can promote ownership of knowledge and thus have an empowering effect.

The core principle of "inclusive excellence" is to connect the concepts of diversity and potential for excellence, nullifying any links between ideas of diversity and deficiency.

All human beings are potentially able to excel in environments that allow them to prosper. Creating these environments requires innovation in academic teaching and learning and in public engagement. Higher education institutions that commit this change will also reap internal benefits through organizational learning. Opportunities for systemic change leading to more inclusive higher education will be unleashed through Children's Universities and other new approaches.



universität
wien



CATALYST

eucunet

