

GLOBAL: New model for UK-US university collaboration

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University leaders in the United Kingdom and United States have argued for a new model for UK-US collaboration to help the two countries retain their primacy in higher education in an increasingly competitive world. Their report **Higher Education and Collaboration in Global Context: Building a global civil society** - commissioned by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and published last week - suggests developing multilateral partnerships and bringing longstanding trans-Atlantic partnerships between the countries to bear in other nations.

Specifically, the report proposes the creation of an 'Atlantic Trust' - "an ambitious and substantial trust to support students, research and global service, resting on a foundation of UK-US collaboration, and reaching out to the world".

The report was written by a group headed by Professor Rick Trainor, Principal of King's College London and President of the vice-chancellor's group Universities UK, and Professor John Sexton, president of New York University. At the behest of Gordon Brown, it worked over six months to produce a white paper analysing the position of UK and US universities in the emerging global environment, and proposing routes to stronger relationships between them and ways to enhance their global positions and contributions.

The long tradition of bilateral ties between UK and US higher education provided the rationale for drawing together universities from the two countries, says the report. Indeed, it argues, in many ways these educational ties have been a basis for the so-called 'special relationship' between the two countries. From the start, the group unanimously agreed that its recommendations could not afford to be simply 'more of the same'.

"Now, more than ever, collaboration across borders among our leading universities is absolutely necessary. The strength of the UK-US partnership, the longstanding pre-eminence of the two countries in the higher education sector, and, more recently, the unfolding of the global economy, validate the case for deepened - and internationalised - collaboration," says the report summary.

Furthering the UK-US higher education collaboration could no longer see mobility and partnership as its sole goals - nor the advancement only of UK and US interests.

"The biggest challenge ahead is to focus on ways of extending the UK-US model to third locations. This will enrich immensely the universities of both countries, foster the growth of open, competitive and accessible higher education in other nations, and constitutes a vitally important form of soft diplomacy and power. Most critically, it will foster - if framed by ambitious initiatives - the development of a 'global civil society' which will bind universities and countries together through common values and principles, and counter the centripetal forces of the globalised era."

At the heart of the group's proposal is the 'Atlantic Trust' which, it says, "will invest in global civil society through multilateral international collaborations built on the foundation of the UK-US partnership". It describes a Trust with three principal goals and three corresponding constituencies:

- * The long-term incubation of global civil society through the cultivation of talented students, at home and worldwide.
- * The leveraging of collective research strength to address the world's big multidisciplinary problems, through teams of researchers engaged collaboratively and with an international frame.
- * Global service through faculty, staff and students who commit to internships and other forms of service worldwide.

The group recommends, among other things, that the Atlantic Trust: creates a prestigious Atlantic Scholarship programme targeting students from third countries for study at UK and US universities and promoting the flow of UK and US students across the Atlantic; provides substantial support for research through international, multidisciplinary teams involving at least one UK, US and third country institution; and an Atlantic Partners scheme under which UK and US students would be encouraged to spend a period working with an NGO or other community service in a developing country, funded by the Trust and institutions.

Funding for the Trust, the report concludes, should be sourced from four streams - government, the private sector, foundations and philanthropists, and universities. "The primary source, however, must be government: the core rationale behind this proposal is, again, to constitute a public acknowledgement and assertion that higher education lies at the very heart of the long-term health and stability of our societies."

* The group's other members from the UK are: Janet Finch, Vice-Chancellor of Keele University; Christopher Snowden, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Surrey; Eric Thomas, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bristol; and Nigel Thrift, Vice-Chancellor of Warwick University. US members are: Robert Berdahl, President of the Association of American Universities; Molly Corbett Broad, President of the American Council on Education; Katherine Fleming, Vice-Chancellor of New York University; Jane D McAuliffe, President, of Byn Mawr College; and Shirley Tilghman, President of Princeton University.

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