

1. Beyond the 2010 decade: the vision and the challenges

This chapter scopes the vision and the challenges for universities and open universities in particular, for the post 2010 decade. It introduces a context and background for discussion (section 1.1), provides a tale for the reader in order to explicate the problem at hand (section 1.2), pictures the role of entrepreneurship in economies and societies (section 1.3), subscribes to a Europe in transition (section 1.4), asks the question to deliver students: educated, employable or entrepreneurial? (section 1.5), puts forward university strategies and institutional profiling support (section 1.6), outlines the practices to help support institutional profiling (section 1.7), postulates the prerequisite of university costing transparency (section 1.8), and finally, describes the road ahead: towards adding more value (section 1.9).

1.1 Introduction

The end of the decade is approaching. Europe's universities are getting ready to materialise their strategies for post-2010. How well equipped are today's universities for tomorrow's demands? In face of enormous socio-economic and demographic challenges, Europe requires more advanced educational performance, which better contributes to innovation, competitiveness and economic growth. Educational systems and associated business models must be agile enough to respond to, and survive, the changing external factors. Universities are faced with high demand from STEM occupations, against lagging student numbers and unpleasant changes in national funding schemes. Ascertaining one's role and place within the knowledge society is pivotal not only for conventional (research-based) universities, but also for open and distance teaching universities (education-based). Whereas traditional universities commence strategies on serving the lifelong learner, open and distance teaching universities learn that sole education delivery without acts of innovation and entrepreneurship is draining. To be ready for the next decade, universities must search to create added value and accordingly innovate their business models. The year 2009, proclaimed to be the year of creativity and innovation by the European Commission, should lead the exploration of new entrepreneurial possibilities. In this chapter, the open and distance teaching universities in particular, are assessed on their potential to innovate beyond flexible education: generating new modes of academic and commercial entrepreneurship including the launch of new generation (networked) business incubation. It is evident that universities cannot do without creativity and innovation: it is the engine of (long-term) prosperity not only for universities, but for enterprises, economy and society as a whole.