

**EAN 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference**  
***Access to Higher Education: is it a right, a privilege or a necessity?***  
***(Affordability, Quality, Equity & Diversity)***

**Theme**

For centuries, universities and institutions of higher learning had been places where many of the rich and powerful acquired knowledge as a matter of course while the small number of very bright but poor or disadvantaged who could find their way there did it with considerable effort. That privilege was challenged and in 1948 the right to education was affirmed in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which further underlined that education is not only a human right, it is also a prerequisite for the development of society and the individual. Yet evidence has consistently shown that education continues to be a privilege rather than a right. UNESCO's 'Education for All' Global Monitoring Report 2011 found that education access is still a worldwide problem, due to the complex nature of inequalities associated with gender, ethnicity, wealth and location. Universities with a commitment to equity and diversity are still grappling with issues such as how to reconcile access and quality, and the impact on rankings; and in countries where higher education is not free, how to impose fees without reducing participation and diversity. But this is not to say that measures taken to address demographic, social, economic and technological changes have not transformed higher education, making it more accessible and available to a wider group of learners. The question is: how much more needs to be done bearing in mind that by 2025 two-thirds of jobs will require some form of higher qualification, making access to higher education even more of a necessity than ever before?

For Europe, the 'Europe 2020' strategy stresses the importance of investing efficiently in high quality, modernised and reformed education and training. It sees education and training as key to prosperity and sets targets to reduce early school leavers to less than 10% and increase the proportion of 30-34 year olds having completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40%, some through the provision of 'second chance' education. Europe 2020 further aims to improve "the responsiveness of education and training systems to new demands and trends, in order to better meet the skills needs of the labour market and the social and cultural challenges of a globalised world." This requires us not only to prepare students with skills and competences for the work place but also to equip them with values, attitudes, knowledge and confidence to be global citizens. How will we rise up to the challenge to achieve the goals?

**Objectives**

1. To discuss the notion of education as a basic human right, and explore ways as to how such a right can be exercised in practical terms through governmental, institutional and societal actions.
2. To investigate the impact of fees (or funding cuts) and identify the mechanisms or matrices of funding that will ensure the affordability of higher education for diverse groups of students.
3. To promote cooperation and strengthen the links between higher education and secondary schools to tackle early school leaving and prepare pupils adequately for transition to post-secondary education.
4. To share successful strategies on the 'in-through-out' student life-cycle: i.e. accessibility and preparation for entry; attainment and completion; employability skills for the labour market and global citizenship qualities.
5. To share good practices for creating institutional profiles based on three essential attributes of quality, equity and diversity.
6. To investigate and discuss the impact of rankings on diversity, quality and equity in higher education and to share ideas on how to improve ranking criteria.