Marita Aho

Marita Aho works for the Confederation of Finnish Industries EK since 1994. She is responsible for anticipation and foresight activities in the areas of corporate environment, skills needs, education and research and business development. She is a Senior Adviser in charge of relations with university education, as well. For most of the member companies of the Confederation of Finnish Industries EK the operational environment is international, if not global. That is why the international co-operation is a very important part of Marita's job, too. She is an active member of the Education Committee of the Business and Industry Advisory Committee of the OECD. She is also one of the evaluation experts for the EU education and training programmes. She finds it extremely important to share experience and knowledge. Sharing knowledge creates new ideas, innovations and win-win situations. "If You give, You gain".

In your view, what is the most probable or desirable future scenario for relations between business community and higher education?

I consider the Open networking scenario to be the best solution for ensuring a good environment for HE and business community cooperation. That scenario involves intensive networking among institutions, scholars, students and with other actors such as industry. It is a model based more on collaboration than on competition, sometimes on both at the same time. The geographical boundaries do not limit the intensivity nor extent of the networks.

This scenario serves best the interests of students, as well. The increased networking of institutions and the gradual harmonisation of systems allow students to choose their courses from the global post-secondary education network, and to design their own curricula and degrees. New technologies are important networking enanablers in this scenario. There is another important element in this scenario, important in the view of relations with businesses and industries: the fact that advanced vocational education institutions create similar international networks as universities and link with them – maybe this could be the beginning of true lifelong learning paths?

International collaborative research is also strengthened by the dense networking between and among institutions, driven by the availability of free and open knowledge. The development of open innovation and learning environments could become a reality.

I believe the open networking scenario is on its way, already. It has started its development in the areas of eLearning and networks of Open Educational Resources. The Open networking scenario will gradually replace the existing, institution- and nation-based governance models and become mainstream HE solutions by 2020.

In your opinion, what is or should be the most important objective for higher education in the future? Why?

I see HE as a vital partner in the development of sustainable, humane, and dynamic future for the global knowledge society. HE can not do this alone. I support all the efforts to create a better linkage between HE and businesses and industries. It is necessary to improve the capacity of tertiary education to respond to labour and skills demand. In addition, new skills, new theories,

models, concepts and actions need to be developed together, in partnerships with businesses, industries, and public sector. Networking is the key word. The better linkage between businesses and industries means, at policy level, that <u>education, innovation and growth policies are well coordinated</u> and linked, as well. I believe there is <u>a need for a common strategy for research, innovation and skills development</u> at different levels in the society (regional, national, international partnerships).

What do you consider to be the main future challenge(s) for higher education systems? Why?

I consider <u>Assuring and Improving Quality</u> as number one future challenge for HE systems. The quality assurance and development must cover all the actors in the HE model based on Open networks. Quality assurance and improvement is a prerequisite for the trust needed in the Open networking scenario to become a reality.

The quality assurance and improvement presents several "sub-challenges". How to build systems that serve continuous improvement, accountability as well as branding purposes? It is important to build capacity, to secure legitimacy and to make processes and <u>outcomes</u> transparent and visible for different categories of customers and stakeholders (students, employers, governments, funding providers and partners). A diversity of methods is needed, including self-evaluation. I would like to see <u>new indicators</u>, e.g. those measuring HE's capacity to build partnerships at national and international level, focusing at taking advantage of international complementarities and building international learning and research paths (indicators measuring a HE system's position on its way to the Open networking scenario).

In your opinion, what would be the worst, but possible, way to tackle these future challenges? Why?

The worst possible way to tackle the challenges of networking and quality would be to rely on "artificial" ranking systems, that lack hindsight, insight and foresight regarding the objectives of the HE systems in the society.

What do you consider to be the best possible way to tackle the above mentioned future challenges? Why?

The HE institutions themselves and important stakeholders such as funding partners, students and employers must be vital partners in building the quality assurance and improvement systems needed in the future. The quality assurance and improvements must be based on research and better understanding about learning: what is it that enhances learning, what hinders it? The quality assurance and improvement system must aknowledge the different elements of learning: non-formal, informal and formal. The quality assurance and improvement must be able to tackle both system-level and individual efficiency and learning outcomes.

I believe the most important un-known element in the Open networking scenario comes with the fact that HE policies are far less national than what they are today. The Open Research, Innovation and Education Environments need new governance and funding systems. What would these be, remains to be seen. It is self-evident, that the Open networking HE model must solve the possible challenges regarding equal opportunities for learning, as well. Support mechanisms are needed to avoid the risks regarding all kinds of inequity.