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Inaugural Speech on taking office as
President of ICA
at the ICA General Assembly 2020

Colleagues,



It is an honour for me to serve as the 10th President of ICA. This will be far from an easy task, as with the now past President Marek Szyndel standards for a President have been set at a very high level. Marek, you have served for 4 years as our President and have been a President for all members. Definitely one of the highlights of your presidency was ICA's 30th anniversary in 2018. I speak on behalf of all member when I thank you for your immense work in keeping our organisation in good shape. Let me also include the Vice-President Alex Evans in these thanks.

Alex, you have been a major motor behind many of the successful Rectors and Deans Forums, and behind raising new ideas and activities. Thank you for that, on behalf of all members.

ICA was established in 1988 as the *Interfaculty Committee Agraria* (hence its abbreviation), aimed to facilitate cooperation between faculties of Agriculture in Europe. It went through a number of name changes before it adopted its current name in 2006: *Association for European Life Science Universities*. This latest change reflects ICA's ambitions as a modern European association addressing all disciplines and challenges related to agriculture, forestry, food, natural resources, the bio-based sector, rural development and the environment. I do think the current name is still a very appropriate name and domain description.

ICA is in pretty good shape. It has a stable membership of 50-60 universities, coming from almost every European country, including countries that are not member of the EU. Its flagships are the annual Forum of Rectors and Deans as well as the two active ICA Board committees, the Bioeconomy Committee (ICA-Bio) and the Committee for

innovation in life science higher education (ICA-Edu). In addition ICA supports under its umbrella several very active ICA Standing Committees including Agrinatura, CASEE and IROICA. All led by committed and active leadership, and supported by the ICA Board.

Rethinking the role, position and functioning of ICA

Nevertheless, I believe there are a number of developments that force us to rethink the role, position and functioning of ICA. In rethinking ICA I want to underline that we should not change the strength of ICA, but rather add to that so that ICA becomes better placed in current times. Allow me to share a few of my thoughts and indicate where I think there are further opportunities for ICA.

First, while back in the eighties the landscape of European university and research associations in the field of natural resources, forestry, agri-food value chains, and the environment was quite empty, this is completely different these days. There are now multiple university and research associations working on or closely related to our domain, and ICA has to identify clearly its niche and strength to bring value to our members. Second, although the number of members of ICA has been quite stable over the past years, and its strength is that its members represent all edges of the European continent, a significant number of (also very good) life science universities in Europe is not member. And we see that not all members engage actively in ICA's flagship activities, such as the Rectors and Deans Forum or its committee activities. Third, Europe and the European Union have become of increasing relevance for academic research, innovation and education in the substantive domains we as life sciences universities are working upon (such as the CAP, farm-to-fork strategy, the biodiversity strategy, the bioeconomy strategy, Horizon Europe, etc). This counts also for the life science universities in non-EU member states. And EU policymakers increasingly invite universities (and other stakeholders) to provide input in these policies and plans. Especially representative, fact-based organisations like ICA can play a major role in influencing EU agenda-setting.

Following these observations I see major opportunities and a bright future for ICA. However, to tap into these opportunities ICA needs to adapt to the new circumstances. I would like to share four interrelated ideas on the direction I think ICA could take, and which I would like to discuss with the ICA Board and with all ICA members.

Framing the future direction of ICA

First, we have to further increase the relevance of ICA. It is essential to increase ICA's relevance for our members (the European life sciences universities) so that we maintain a healthy and active group of member universities. But we also have to increase the relevance of ICA for others working in our domain (e.g. policy makers, other university and research associations within and outside our domain, the private sector, INGOs). In doing so we will increase the influence of life science universities and so bring added value to you, our ICA members.

Second, the Rectors and Deans Forum is a great way to engage the top level management of our member organisation and we definitely need to continue that. In addition, we need to stronger engage and bring together experts of our member institutions, as we now do in an excellent way through the ICA Board Committees and through the ICA Standing Committees. We could organise other discipline focused or thematic committees, but we could also bring together expert groups from our ICA members on an ad-hoc basis to write position papers on new developments such as online examination, virtual labwork, open science and data management, citizens science, scientific integrity, the new EU Horizon Europe framework program, EU farm-to-fork strategy etc. Such position papers can start an open discussion between our members, but also importantly stimulate reflection and interaction with organisations in Brussels.

Third, with the ever increasing importance of EU institutions for our members we should have a stronger engagement with the institutions of the European Union and a stronger presence in Brussels. In doing so we can better serve our members through business intelligence on policies, EU developments and calls. And we can better serve (and thus increase our relevance for) the institutions of the EU with our joint expertise and representativeness of life science universities. The establishment of the Task Force earlier this year is a good first step in this direction. I have full trust that the Task Force will come with relevant ideas and advice on how we can better engage with the EU Commission, the EU Parliament and other organisations in or related to Brussels, such as EUA, EuropaBio, Food and Drink Europe and the European Landowners Organisation ELO, all for the benefit of you, our members.

Fourth, in order to move on the road indicated by the former three points we need more resources and a stronger secretariat. This is also what we see at other European university associations. If we compare ICA

membership fees (now between 650 and 1300 Euro) with that of many of the other European university and research associations, we are really on the very low side. The EUA has a membership fee that is four times higher (between 2,600-6,000 Euro), CESAER (Conference of European Schools for Advanced Engineering Education and Research) has a flat annual fee of 12,000 Euro, and LERU (the League of European Research Universities) has even an annual membership fee of 50,000 Euro. If we want to maintain and even increase our relevance I think we need to start a discussion on membership fees. Wherever this takes us, I think it is vital to maintain a progressive membership fee system, where the richest and largest universities contribute the most.

Dear colleagues, one of the major assets of ICA is that we form an organisation without any major conflicts and where every member's voice is being heard and taken serious. It is vital to maintain this culture of respect, trust and inclusiveness. So in rethinking the role, position and functioning of ICA, for instance along the above mentioned lines, we will have to maintain this fantastic culture of respect and inclusion in our organisation.

Thank you once again for putting trust in me as your President. Together with our board I look very much forward working with you over the coming three years.

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