KEY RESULTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

"4TH GEN UNIVERSITIES: SHAPING FUTURE INNOVATION AND IMPACT"

Panellists: Alexandr Hobza (EU Commission, DE), Marianna Prokopi-Demetriades (RSL Revolutionary Labs, Theramir, CY, GR), Peter Schlosser (Arizona State University, US), Robert-Jans Smits (Eindhoven University of Technology, NL), Nick Fowler (Moderation)(Elsevier, BE)

Fourth-generation universities are mission-driven institutions that aim to extend beyond traditional education and research by directly engaging with local communities. Their goal is to foster innovation that rebuilds public trust in academia by demonstrating a tangible connection to real-world issues. These universities work within ecosystems of research institutions, private companies, and other partners to deliver community-focused solutions that can scale up to address global challenges. This collaborative model recognises that today's complex problems often require interdisciplinary solutions.

To achieve their mission, fourth-generation universities promote transdisciplinary education, training students to think beyond conventional academic boundaries and to draw on diverse knowledge systems, including indigenous practices and insights from the private sector. However, these institutions face unique challenges. For example, conventional metrics like publication counts do not adequately reflect their impact-driven approach. Instead, new indicators, such as co-owned patents with industry partners, provide a more accurate measure of progress, allowing these universities to demonstrate results and refine their strategies. Additionally, policy shifts—such as those expected in the US after the 2024 elections—emphasise the need for fourth-generation universities to diversify their funding sources so that they can continue to sustain their networks, deliver meaningful solutions, and thrive as transformative forces.

THE EXPERT PANEL ARTICULATES THE FOLLOWING CALLS TO ACTION:

Incorporate local research and development players.

1 — Actively engage local research and development (R&D) organisations, including universities, research institutions and private companies, to foster innovation that addresses specific challenges. This collaboration ensures that solutions are rooted in local priorities while contributing to global advancements.

Adopt new metrics for success.

2 — Transition from traditional academic metrics, like publication counts, to more impact-driven indicators, such as co-owned patents with industry partners and the development of scalable solutions.

Diversify funding sources.

3 — Ensure financial resilience by seeking funding from diverse sources. Diversified funding will help sustain transformative initiatives even amid policy changes or economic shifts.

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Showcase tangible results.

4 — Regularly communicate measurable impacts to the public and other stakeholders. Share examples of successful partnerships and innovations to reinforce the value of fourth-generation universities in addressing societal and global challenges.

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