



Green Paper

Fostering and Measuring 'Third Mission'
in Higher Education Institutions



About this document

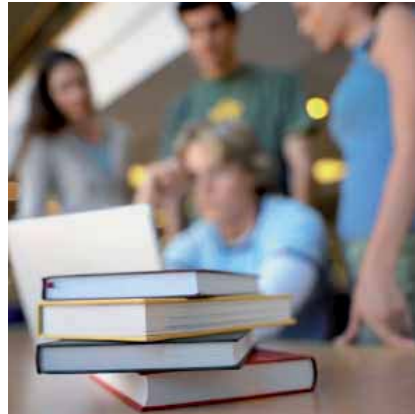
Context

This paper has been prepared by a partnership of Universities funded by the European Commission under the Lifelong Learning Programme.

The project was entitled: European Indicators and Ranking Methodology for University Third Mission. The objectives were to:

- * improve the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of education and training systems in Europe;
- * encourage and improve Higher Education Institutions' contribution to society;
- * foster the creation of a European area of higher education; and
- * stimulate excellence and improve the visibility of university activities focused on services to society and industry.

The document captures much of the learning achieved on the project, and has to do with the kinds of beneficial impact universities can have on their host societies, and the circumstances that influence the ability of universities to deliver those impacts.



Aim

Third Mission activity is a vitally important component of any university's role, whether it is pictured as a third mission or as integral to the core missions of education/teaching/learning and research/scholarship. It is as important for the university in countless ways as it is for society. It is not new, but narrower notions of research excellence have overshadowed it, and academics have in many instances drawn themselves into something of a caste apart. However, over the last decade the Third Mission has been revived.

It is time to recognise anew an old social compact between universities and their host societies; learn to foster and promote it in partnership and

collaboration; and, inter alia, to devise ways to monitor and report on it.

This Green Paper, then, is about practical ways to encourage the restoration of a mission to engage with society in meaningful and mutually beneficial dialogues and processes. These naturally centre on education and research, but they also exploit the potential each university represents by virtue of the extraordinary concentration in one place of so many vigorous and intelligent people, so much knowledge, and such impressive resources in the form of libraries, laboratories, museums, sports facilities and much more.

Third Mission activity is a vitally important component of any university's role...

As a Green Paper, this document is intended to stimulate informed debate, and in relevant cases to stimulate alternative courses of action:

by people in universities. In some quarters, where universities are already thoroughly effective at engaging their resources and capabilities with and for the benefit of society, the paper will represent little that is new. In many other areas, however, we believe the messages in this paper represent hopeful, productive and progressive ideas with the potential for significant beneficial social and economic impact.

by officials in government at different levels, and professionals and business people, who, by their actions and policy-making, can encourage and facilitate universities within their remit to engage optimally with society.

Finally the paper is intended to encourage the next necessary piece of development work on 'Third Mission Indicators and Metrics'.

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1. Introduction

what is Third Mission and why has it risen up the agenda?

1.1. Exploration of the notion of 'Third Mission'

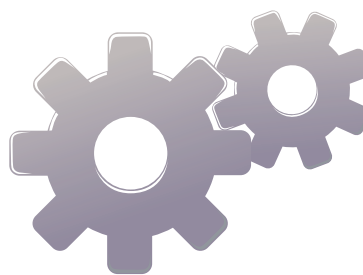
Origins and the drift apart

- 1.1.1. Since the middle ages, European universities have facilitated the learning of students by teaching; thus they have a mission to educate. Since those early beginnings, the senior members of such academic communities – those who would now be called academic staff – have engaged in scholarship. With the dawning of scientific method this component of their work, and thus a second mission, has become known generically as research. While the early universities nucleated somewhat spontaneously, driven by the social needs of the time, more recent foundations have been formed by governments and visionary benefactors with a variety of distinct social purposes in mind.
- 1.1.2. With many shades of colour and variations of form, and many notable exceptions, there has been a general tendency for universities and their academic staff, engaged as they are with what they perceive as the noble pursuits of education and research, to see themselves as somehow apart from the societies that host them; a very different posture from the intentions of their founders.
- 1.1.3. This Green Paper represents a small part of a widespread movement to restore the priority given to those social purposes – the diffuse and hard-to-characterise 'Third Mission', which is not a separate mission at all, but rather a way of doing, or a mind-set for accomplishing, the first two.

Taxonomy and essential concepts

- 1.1.4. We refer throughout to universities or, interchangeably to Institutions of Higher Education, as if this were unproblematic. It is true that there is the most enormous variety in this sector; but we do not explore or attempt to deconstruct this variety. We ignore it because we take the view that every institution of Higher Education should:
 - * have an active Third Mission portfolio, and
 - * pursue a broadly based educational missionthat is adapted to its circumstances and that articulates its role in the social and economic development of the wider society. This requires a culture appropriate to sustaining a truly educational mission, rather than a narrower culture of preparing students for the world of work. It also requires sufficient resources.
- 1.1.5. The time when universities could assume that they will be funded, no questions asked, is long past. Entrepreneurship and new ways of engaging will be required at every level to bring in the necessary resources (financial, collaborations, access to facilities, etc.) from different sources. Rich and multiple mutually beneficial engagements with society are essential for all kinds of university in this context, and success in this endeavor can be both profoundly motivating and liberating.

1.1.6. We have adopted a classification of this 'Third Mission' into activities related to research (technology transfer and innovation, etc.), to education (lifelong learning/ continuing education, training, etc.), and to social engagement (public access to museums, concerts and lectures; voluntary work and consultancy by staff and students, etc.) – a variety of activities that involves many constituent parts of universities.



1.1.7. Several preconditions are necessary for a university to achieve its potential in this kind of activity: a suitable culture and mindset; different people with specialised skill-sets; and supporting structures and mechanisms. We explore the nature of the activities within each dimension, and the preconditions, in the following sections of this document.

1.1.8. Throughout, we refer to Third Mission activity. This carries significance in two distinct ways. First, as there is no distinct 'Third Mission', all that can be found to evidence delivery against the social purposes mentioned above is a wide range of activities – ways of going about education and research that put human and other resources to work, and that respect and engage with society. The second driver for focusing on activity relates to our aim to develop measures that characterise Third Mission performance. In Section 3 we explain why the measurement of 'impact' is nearly impossible (as for many activities is also the measurement of quality) and all that is available for reliable measurement is activity. While activity measures cannot directly assess the quality or impact of work done, they can, in relevant circumstances, serve as suitable proxies.

1.1.9. We also use the word engagement as a way of coding for the idea, deeply embedded in the notion of a social purpose for universities, of two-way processes, of dialogue, of co-creation and mutual learning. It means ensuring that some research is led by an understanding of the needs of the society; that some educational programmes will be so well focussed on the ambition to foster access to higher education for the disadvantaged, that creative forms of programme will be trialled, departing perhaps significantly from the style of teaching habitually used for the mainstream population of full-time students. Indeed this kind of creativity often stimulates a new look at how the formal teaching is conducted, resulting in an enhanced mind-set of engagement and collaboration between academic staff and mainstream students.

1.1.10. And finally, we use the word society. We picture a University as a multifaceted social organism with a discrete ecology that is connected in many ways, recognised and unrecognised, to the wider social ecosystems of its city, its region, nation state and, for some universities, other national communities and supra-national institutions. The scope of connectedness will depend upon the nature of the university, and the ways in which it is funded. In the case of research results with potential for commercial exploitation, the need is to get them 'out there' to whichever body is best equipped, wherever in the world; allowing a suitable share of proceeds to the inventors and to their university. At the other end of the scale, social engagement is usually related to ties of mutual benefit at a local level, between university members and communities within its home city and region. We use the word society to cover all levels of human organisation outside the university itself.

The balance of advantage

1.1.11. In conclusion, universities have been asked to optimise their roles as key players within society, but this should not for one moment be seen as an additional imposition. First it should be recognised as a modern articulation of the founding social purposes behind nearly all institutions. And secondly, Third Mission activity brings significant advantages:

Universities have been asked to optimise their roles as key players within society ...

- * Benefits of many kinds – enhanced research opportunities and outcomes; generation of ideas, jobs and companies; a much broader group of students of the university; enhanced engagement with the community; and it can bring in additional money. Such benefits serve as positive stimuli for the development of the more traditional missions of universities: teaching and basic research.
- * Help to develop research that is more focused on social needs. It is obvious that in the long perspective, basic research is inalienable from universities. Applied research will be more adapted to social needs if the users are involved in the process.
- * Help to develop teaching and learning modes that address the needs of a broader range of learners - indeed that engage with the societal need for lifelong-learning more generally - than the narrow band of school-leavers universities have traditionally restricted themselves to teaching.
- * Development of graduates who are well suited to participate in professional life, and are aware of their social context.



1.2. Exploration of the dimensions of Third Mission

- 1.2.1. As will be seen from what follows, it is conceptually difficult to separate these three dimensions. There are many overlaps, but the dimensions each have a distinct flavour and culture. Much of this activity is, at its best, highly collaborative, characterised by sharing and co-creation, rather than the university broadcasting, or doing things to others.

Third Mission activities related particularly to research

- 1.2.2. With many shades of colour and variations of form, and many notable exceptions, there has been a general tendency for universities and their academic staff, engaged as they are with what they perceive as the noble pursuits of education and research, to see themselves as somehow apart from the societies that host them; a very different posture from the intentions of their founders.



- 1.2.3. This Green Paper represents a small part of a widespread movement to restore the priority given to those social purposes – the diffuse and hard-to-characterise ‘Third Mission’, which is not a separate mission at all, but rather a way of doing, or a mind-set for accomplishing, the first two.
- 1.2.4. The policy of generosity – to offer technology transfer services nearly at cost and not to try to make large revenues for the university out of research exploitation – is important. The university, largely publicly-funded, transfers technology in a commercially responsible way, to serve society, and to encourage its own people.
- 1.2.5. Alongside this essentially commercial activity (official and unofficial) there are likely to be many kinds of non-commercial activity (some formal and some informal) that are open to, or that engage with sections of the public. At the formal end of the spectrum, (and overlapping with the lifelong learning dimension) universities, or individual staff members, often offer public lectures, debates or think-tanks where their areas of expertise overlap with areas of public interest or concern. Science Festivals may draw in thousands of primarily young people. Less formally, groups of academics might engage in collaborative social research (sometimes called co-creation of knowledge) with interested groups in the community, and so on ...

Third Mission activities related particularly to education

1.2.6. How is the university's expertise used to extend the education of non-traditional learner groups? How can the university realise its potential to be one of the natural fora in the locality for educating the public and debating (not overtly political) matters of concern, and the development of consensus?

1.2.7. At the formal, official end of the spectrum, many universities run programmes of continuing education courses, some for leisure and some related to professional interests; some accredited and some not. This kind of activity tends to become obsessed by its own business aspects – achieving enough attendance on courses to cover the costs of the staff involved.



1.2.8. The greatest variety of programmes and events is to be found at the informal end of the spectrum: programmes more oriented to learning than to teaching; work-based and experiential learning; programmes aimed at extending educational access to higher education to targeted disadvantaged groups; programmes aimed at engaging university members and local residents in informed debate about matters of common and current interest; public lectures; festivals of science and of ideas ... the list is long, and is typically labelled lifelong-learning in contrast to the more 'establishment' continuing education.

Third Mission activities related to engaging the intellectual, human and physical resources of the university – Social Engagement

1.2.9. How does the University exploit, in the service of society, the fact that it constitutes a large group (typically thousands) of fit, creative and intelligent people in one academic community, who could contribute in the local community, but also nationally and internationally, to problem-solving and development on a massive scale, if they were so minded, and if they were both empowered and enabled? The canvas for this dimension of Third Mission activity is extremely broad, and it overlaps the previous two. The core of the activity is volunteering.

1.2.10. The following taxonomy of activity within this dimension has proved useful:

- * Social consultancy – using expertise to solve problems pro bono;
- * Educational outreach – running the more informal kind of learning programmes;
- * Services and facilities – putting resources to work for society.

2. Decisive Factors

2.1. Institutional policy and governance issues

2.1.1. The form taken by Third Mission activities depends on the detailed context of each institution and there are few entirely common approaches across the sector and across countries. The list of factors that might be thought to determine success, and that therefore need to be thought about in any study of metrics and indicators, is unsurprisingly long and contestable:

- * The style of governance and leadership within the institution plays an important role in the development (successful or otherwise) of Third Mission activities.
- * Likewise, the extent to which the institution operates with a predominant climate of departmental and individual autonomy, flexibility and trust plays an important role. When institutional flexibility is limited because of regulations or adverse culture, some Third Mission activities can still flourish through the agency of external institutions, sometimes even wholly-owned by the university. However when individual flexibility is tightly limited by institutional rules, Third Mission activity is likely to remain rather meagre.
- * Continuity is important both in policy and in funding - unpredictable changes will severely discourage performance, though a strong thread of self-financing through entrepreneurial behaviour is intrinsic to successful and sustainable Third Mission activity.
- * Successful Third Mission development requires mutual trust and commitment between the University and its leadership on the one hand, and local/regional authorities, enterprises and the community in general, on the other. This does not come easily to a university that has traditionally stood apart from its community.
- * For effective engagement to be achieved, reducing or eliminating this sense of apartness, university leaders may need:
 - to revise their public relations priorities;
 - explicitly to value 'Third Mission' activity more or less on a par with the achievement of academic status, in all those matters that influence the attitudes and behaviour of academic staff, not least in considerations of promotion and remuneration.
- * Different visions for Third Mission activity may emerge and these may co-exist harmoniously or they may be difficult to reconcile. Taking lifelong learning as an example, there may be those who wish to mount formal courses that they believe people will want to attend, while others are passionate about peer and experiential learning programmes co-developed with representatives of disadvantaged groups in the locality - the first being essentially a vision of broadcasting the university's expertise more widely; and the second, more experimental and less sure of achieving initially-conceived outcomes, majoring on access for the disadvantaged, co-responsibility and shared learning.

2.1.2. We conclude that the determining factor is the extent to which individuals within a university (academic staff and students particularly but also certain other key support staff, about whom more later) are themselves motivated and enabled, in the sense of entrepreneurs, openly to initiate and pursue activities that benefit and link their university to society.

Mission statements and strategy documents

2.1.3. A university's commitment to 'Third Mission' should be articulated at the highest possible level – in the university's Mission Statement, but probably not by mention of these two words. What is important is that the university commits itself to engagement with and service to society. This implies not that it will make a few gestures towards the communities outside its campus, but that it will go about its business of education, learning, research, critique and debate in such a way as to promote engagement and linkage with society, and put its intellectual and other assets to work.

What is important is that the university commits itself to engagement with and service to society.

2.1.4. A general recognition in the Mission Statement - that the University exists to serve and engage with society through education, research and related activities - enables and permits activity at the interface with society quite generally, thus giving free rein to individual staff members' and students' creativity; whereas selective definition of specific university-led programmes can be seen as a constraint, resulting in less than full-hearted support. The territory needs air to breathe; scope for entrepreneurship.

Permissiveness and enablement

2.1.5. University leadership needs to reflect upon why it is important, if indeed it is important, to develop a Third Mission profile: might it help the institution develop its performance in teaching and research, for example? Then they need to ask how this should translate into reasons why individuals might want to direct a portion of their time and effort to bringing about such improvement. It is a much more compelling proposition to offer personal advantage, than the abstract notion that an activity will benefit the University. Academics will perform best in Third Mission activity if they are doing it because they want to. They will want to do it, if it helps meet their other objectives (recognition of excellence and impact in teaching and research; remuneration and promotion).

2.1.6. The emphasis here has been on permissiveness and enablement. We are persuaded that Third Mission activity does not benefit from being tightly managed, or indeed from being over-supported in a paternalistic top-down way. But it does need to be:

- * explicitly encouraged by the University leadership, for example by the symbolic appointment of a vice-Rector for Third Mission promotion (NB. not management);
- * enabled by expert, capable and empowered support staff;
- * supported by an adequate budget allocation; and
- * generally valued and recognised for making the real contribution it does, when opportunities arise for celebrating or evaluating individual and group performance and contribution.

2.2. The Actors

Academic Staff and Students

2.2.1. Academic staff members frequently take significant roles in Third Mission activity, and they may well also be involved as advisers in student-led projects. Much attention has been given to them in this paper because the culture they inhabit; the rules that control what they may and may not do; and the extent to which they enjoy an ambience of trust and support from the university's leadership, determines to a very great extent the efficacy, creativity and extent of Third Mission activity.

2.2.2. This notwithstanding, the prime actors in Third Mission activity are often students, who have so much to give, and who can benefit greatly from systematic engagement with society.

2.2.3. Finally, joint involvement in Third Mission activity can build bridges between staff and students, massively enhancing the overall culture of the institution.

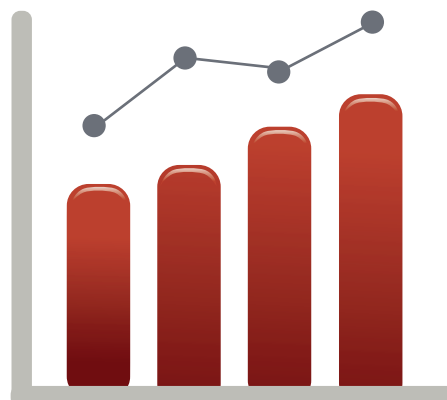
Support staff

2.2.4. The range of skills and work involved in the full range of Third Mission activity is exceptionally broad, extending from coordination, needs analysis, programme design and delivery; through public relations and marketing; to contract negotiation and the management of intellectual property portfolios. For the sake of effectiveness as well as efficiency, institutions usually find it appropriate to recruit non-academic staff to work alongside and support academics and students in the conduct of their Third Mission activity. Such staff should be placed where they are needed, not generally co-located in a centralised facility, but encouraged to support each other. Their quality is of paramount importance, but so too is another feature that is more difficult to manage.

- 2.2.5. In some universities there is an assumption, whether implicit or explicit, that only academic staff should be empowered to take significant decisions that bind the institution. Successful Third Mission work requires an adjustment to such attitudes, and the development of sophisticated and trusting teamwork between academic staff and skilled specialized 'administrative' staff, who handle often highly entrepreneurial interface functions.
- 2.2.6. As we remarked above, in connection with the relationships between staff and students, non-hierarchical, trusting teamwork between academic and support staff can enhance the culture of the entire institution, significantly influencing the scope of what it can achieve.
- 2.2.7. Inadequate or inadequately empowered staff in interface roles can be a potent brake on the development of Third Mission activities. It should always be remembered that a bridge can also become a bottleneck!
- 2.2.8. It is important that Universities allocate sufficient budget, where it is needed, and that they allow staff members to retain sufficient of any money raised through their Third Mission activity, to resource and pay for support staff of the necessary calibre.

2.3. Finance

- 2.3.1. Funding mechanisms are a key issue in the development of a successful Third Mission portfolio. There may be a transition between government-stimulated start-up, through to an internally financed sustainable steady state. Stability of funding is crucial.
- 2.3.2. Vital are attitudes and mechanisms to allow academics to take control (we have referred elsewhere to the need to allow staff and students significant autonomy) and to participate financially, particularly in Third Mission activities relating to the exploitation of research results (licensing, patenting, company formation) but also the exploitation of knowledge and know-how (consultancy, professional continuing education courses, etc.). In all cases individual inventors and creators should be able to take a majority share in intellectual property, even though the creation or invention may have been accomplished in contracted time and using university facilities.
- 2.3.3. In institutions where achievement of targets plays an important role in determining levels of funding, it is important that these include suitable Third Mission targets, for the institution as a whole and perhaps also for its component parts.



2.4. Quality

2.4.1. Third Mission activity conducted 'officially', as is frequently the case (technology transfer negotiations, continuing education programmes, public lectures, etc., etc.), should be subject to the university's normal quality assurance procedures, which normally have at their core a process of critique by a group of peers. It is important that anything run unofficially (and there will be a great deal, whether officially sanctioned or not – independent consultancy, courses, volunteer programmes, company start-ups, etc.) that might carry the university's name implicitly or explicitly, should be subject to similar scrutiny. In a culture of trust it is normally sufficient for there to be a simple set of guidelines that staff and students are expected to abide by.

2.5. Effective Communication

2.5.1. Effective communication of Third Mission activities is important. Good communication helps enhance the status of such activity in those universities where it is insufficiently focused. It also helps fight against the typical reluctance of academic cultures to be active in fields other than narrowly defined teaching and research.

2.5.2. Communication is a vital instrument to promote awareness - internally and externally - of the various ways in which the institution fulfills its obligations to the society that supports its existence:

- * Good communication facilitates the internal politics that determine appropriate allocation and distribution of funding of Third Mission activities; the attribution and maintenance of organizational autonomy to different structures and individuals pursuing those of activities; and the provision of light but sufficient governance and oversight.
- * Good public dialogue will become increasingly important as funding becomes scarcer, and the University as a whole is more explicitly competing to maintain its priority for funding.

2.6. Human Resources

2.6.1. Some entrepreneurial activity offers individual staff members or students the opportunity to earn money, either for themselves or for their projects. While this should be welcomed, it is not the case for most kinds of Third Mission engagement. In such circumstances, institutions may find the question of how to 'incentivise' Third Mission activities problematic, given that it is rarely possible to pay people extra for engaging in it.

2.6.2. The quality and impact achieved through participation in Third Mission activities should be taken into account when considering promotion and career development and, as mentioned

above, successful contributions, indicative of two-way benefit, should be widely communicated and celebrated. The necessary motivation will derive from the realisation that the institution expects engagement with society, and that the work is appreciated and enjoyable.

- 2.6.3. Much has been made in this document of the need for an entrepreneurial mindset and considerable autonomy of action. This may generate a new and unfamiliar set of demands on a university's Human Resources (Personnel) department, which may need careful and sustained support from the university's senior team.

2.7. Issues influencing individual motivation

- 2.7.1. This topic received some attention above under the sub-heading "Permissiveness and enablement".
- 2.7.2. Most successful initiatives build spontaneously on individuals, or networks of people, with enthusiasm and an entrepreneurial vision and attitude, both to their academic work and to Third Mission activity, whether this be through the exploitation of results, the co-creation of educational programmes, or something else. In most cases the key person is an individual with academic prestige and leadership, but who is also able to develop a strong network with external authorities, business people and the like. Universities generally have no shortage of such vigorous intelligent people.
- 2.7.3. Given the predominance of individual initiative in Third Mission activity, it is vitally important that Universities trust and empower their staff to take initiative, granting them substantial autonomy, under only light surveillance.
- 2.7.4. No single issue splits opinion as this one does, with managed institutions on one side and institutions that are, in one way or another, academic-led, on the other. In respect of the first category, the issue is relatively straightforward: one of good leadership and management. In respect to the latter, arguably more complex organizations, Third Mission activities should in the main be voluntary, both for academic staff and for students. Considerable space should thus be left for serendipity; for individual motivation, judgment and entrepreneurship; fostered and strongly supported where possible (by the university's leadership and by the professional non-academic support staff mentioned above), but only loosely managed and under light but appropriate governance, oversight and quality assurance regimes.
- 2.7.5. Universities that allow their staff considerable autonomy should nevertheless articulate broad-brush strategies for the growth and development of

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Third Mission activity. Such strategies should be clearly informed by the activities of staff and students, as much as guiding them. Such strategies should stop short of prescription at the individual level.

2.7.6. In summary, other than trust and autonomy, critical incentives include:

- * taking into consideration the quality and impact of academic staff involvement in Third Mission activities (including the status they may achieve through their activities beyond the university's walls) for their assessment, promotion and academic recognition;
- * maintaining generous intellectual property regulations (technology transfer activities should not be motivated primarily by any desire to generate money for the institution);
- * covering overheads related to Third Mission activities and the provision of suitable support staff.

2.8. Projects and Institutionalisation

2.8.1. Third Mission projects do not thrive within a project cycle, much beloved of funding agencies. On the contrary, they need to be run according to their own logic, but effectively and with integrity.

2.8.2. Universities should only try to institutionalize initiatives after they reach a certain stage of development; but some projects should never be institutionalized at all. Even then, projects still typically need a strong leader who speaks the language of the external world, is respected in academia, and is competent in networking.

2.8.3. Support staff members need to work with initiatives throughout their evolution, not forcing the pace towards institutionalization, but being ready for it.

3. Measuring Third Mission: Indicators, Metrics and Ranking

3.1. Definitions

3.1.1. We have frequently been led to observe how the terms indicator and metric are unhelpfully treated as interchangeable, whereas they stand for different concepts:

- * Indicators are devices, like traffic lights (red for danger, amber for “be watchful” and green for “everything is OK”), or like the security-alert state in a prison (elevated, high, severe, etc.) that indicate the extent to which managers need to worry about the feature. The indication (orange; low threat level) may be arrived at by a process of applying expert judgment to a basket of measures and qualitative reports.
- * Metrics are precisely defined quantitative assessments of the state of a particular parameter that is postulated to be reliable and robust. Examples might include the altitude read-out on the dashboard of an aeroplane, or the youth unemployment figure for a region. Intelligent and truthful interpretation of a reading from a metric generally requires some contextual knowledge and a sense of the history of the readings through different circumstances over time; the more so, the more complex the phenomenon the metric purports to quantify.
- * We use ‘measures’ to include both metrics and indicators.
- * If expertly conducted, qualitative descriptions and judgments can be as valuable as, or more valuable than measurements; in complex multifactorial circumstances, metrics can be misleading.



3.2. Indicators and Metrics for Third Mission activity

3.2.1. In the context of a university, good indicators and metrics can serve to provide a handle on things that were previously hard to grasp; they render such activities monitorable and to an extent influenceable or manageable. But therein also lie dangers. The temptation, once one has a metric, is to start to believe things about what it is saying – things that may not be true. If funding is ever attached to a metric then its visibility is immediately increased, often resulting in severe distortions. Fundamentally important here is that metrics should only be selected if enhancement of their value assists the organization to achieve its strategy. If this is not the case, they are likely to result in unintended consequences.

- 3.2.2. Good indicators and metrics, well and responsibly handled, can offer a dashboard for the first time, allowing managers to take informed decisions. They can allow previously largely hidden work to achieve more prominence, and perhaps, once measured, to attract funding. They can allow strategic planners to work with other institutions, and to learn from each other.
- 3.2.3. Efforts to measure Third Mission activity may initially be greeted with mistrust, but if trust is established, then much of the previously hidden activity will be revealed and can be celebrated and reported. As we have suggested elsewhere in this paper, even the attempt to facilitate Third Mission activity and raise its profile may be greeted with suspicion, depending upon the culture of the institution, and the basis upon which the approach is being made.
- 3.2.4. Third Mission activities are difficult to identify and to track within universities, not least because administrations may, in the past, have unwittingly driven such activity underground. There has until recently been little call to collect and display data to track Third Mission activities and there will be a cost attached to the introduction of new metrics.
- 3.2.5. Third Mission activities can be grouped into processes which can be considered common, regardless of the organisational structure each institution has to carry them out. The E3M project website (www.e3mproject.eu) lists the processes to be developed in each of the three dimensions included in the Third Mission, as well as information about how they have been defined.
- 3.2.6. If the intention is faithfully to record the richness and scope of third mission activity in an institution, probably dozens of finely-tuned indicators and metrics will be needed. On the other hand, if the intention is to rank institutions in terms of their Third Mission performance, a very short set of measures will be needed, carefully selected as before, but with different criteria. At the limit, senior managers and policy-makers might require display of a maximum of three or four 'strategic metrics or indicators' that act as proxies for the many more detailed measures. These approaches are inevitably somewhat in conflict, and display different fallibilities. How to manage those issues is one of the main themes of the companion report.

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3.3. Impact

- 3.3.1. No account of metrics and indicators, however summary, would be complete without mention of the extreme difficulty (familiar to economists) of measuring the impact of any particular university activity (it is nearly impossible to attribute causation; impacts are realized haphazardly over space and time; etc.). All that is possible is to select relatively reliable and robust activity indicators as proxies (stand-ins) for impacts.

- 3.3.2. It has to be accepted that such proxies cannot of themselves measure quality. But such reservations apply to most metrics in most walks of life – the important is to be aware of the limitations and to hold back from unreasonable reliance upon them. Well-chosen proxies can become reliable guides to performance in a broad area, as their limitations become known and widely recognised.
- 3.3.3. Mention was made above of the utility of qualitative descriptions. Very often the best way practically to evaluate the impact of a project or initiative is to undertake and write up a thorough analytical case study.

3.4. Rankings

- 3.4.1. We have stood back from developing a ranking methodology for production of a European league table of Third Mission performance, as to do so generally would fall foul of the extraordinary diversity and variability in mission, profile and quality, evident among the universities on the continent of Europe, let alone the rest of the world. General rankings can move attention from the impact one is achieving as an institution, to competing, perhaps superficially in metrics rather than in substance, with other institutions.
- 3.4.2. We see significant potential for the use of Third Mission metrics, however, to provide comparisons for small groups of comparable institutions, typically called ‘benchmarking’. In this case they would select baskets of metrics (carefully selected sets) that support their particular missions and strategies.
- 3.4.3. We imagine that governments might come, in time, to seek scorecards from the universities they fund that give a comprehensible account of their ‘Third Mission’ impact. This would form part of the Balance Sheet - an increasingly explicit part of the social contract between state and institution – we fund you, but you must deliver impact and value for money, as well as academic high-culture. By that time, there would be no further need of the term ‘Third Mission’.

4. Closing Remarks; the need for further work

- 4.1. We believe that this Green paper goes some way towards sharing ideas and increasing transparency in regard to Third Mission vision, management and conduct.
- 4.2. However, this project does not complete the work of devising and testing Third Mission indicators and metrics – rather it seeks to engage an intelligent debate by offering a conceptual framework and a set of metrics that have been subjected to a high degree of scrutiny and contestation. The time has come for these to be debated and contested in wider fora. We are convinced that it will be routine, in several decades’ time, to record and measure Third Mission activity, while coordinating and facilitating it lightly.
- 4.3. Progress should not be hurried, as it could be more damaging to measure the wrong thing than not to measure anything at all. All measurements generate unintended consequences, particularly if they are used to drive funding. The process should be taken moderately and intelligently forward, nonetheless, and despite the risks, because the prize for getting it right will be considerable – more self-confident and productive universities, more thoroughly engaged in the cultural and economic development of their host societies.
- 4.4. The social engagement of universities should be a commitment rather than a competition. Well-chosen metrics and indicators can provide effective tools for decision-making, based on each institution’s strategic goals rather than a global conception of what an excellent university should be. The commitment of many socially-engaged universities is needed, working together on metrics, rankings and the PR-front rather than in competition, to create the conditions for the true extent, value and impact of the university-sector’s contribution to society truly to be appreciated by policy-makers and the public. If rankings are to be used, then they need to be within coherent sets of comparable universities, and choosing baskets of metrics, from the full set, that accurately reflect the nature of their engagements with society.

We believe that this Green paper goes some way towards sharing ideas and increasing transparency in regard to Third Mission vision, management and conduct.

5. Recommendations

Institutions and their leaders might like to consider:

- * revitalizing their social contract with society by building commitment to Third Mission activity into mission statements and strategic documents;
- * following this up by supporting and celebrating the activity, and by engaging with local authorities and the other high-level institutions of society;
- * influencing the culture of the institution so that academic staff and students are as readily motivated to engage with society as they are to achieve academic recognition - one sure way to move in this direction would be to allow meritorious involvement by academic staff in these activities to be considered as justification for promotion;
- * protecting meritorious initiatives where possible from random detrimental variations in funding or policy;
- * fostering a trusting ambiance that allows considerable freedom, under light but appropriate governance arrangements.

Academic staff might like to consider:

- * realising their own personal share of the Third Mission social contract with society - as senior members of the university and dependent upon their strengths and interests;
- * behaving entrepreneurially both academically and through external engagement;
- * engaging in trusting relationships and activities with non-academic people, including both expert support staff within, and people outside the university.

Business people and others in public roles in society might like to consider:

- * trusting, engaging and working with university people, looking for inputs of innovation and energy, knowledge and skills;
- * making allowances for the particular culture within universities, which typically differs markedly from that found in the commercial world, but is not 'worse';
- * adopting a medium-term horizon for the timing of projects.

Public officials and politicians might like to consider:

- * facilitating the recovery of the social contract between universities and society through Third Mission activity, using whatever (financial and other) instruments they have at their disposal
- * abstaining from rapid and/or repeated changes in funding or policy regimes.

All the stakeholders should:

- * combine forces to promote and support the difficult, but important, work of developing suitable metrics and indicators to represent the range of Third Mission activity - without causing woeful unintended consequences - over a reasonable timescale: neither long nor hurried.



6. Project participants

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