

Keynote speech of the IV Rectors' Meeting in Salamanca

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Your Majesty, Your Excellency, Mr President of Portugal, Mr President of Castile and León, Minister, General Secretary of the OECD, Vice Chancellor of the University of Salamanca, Vice Chancellors and honored guests, thank you all for attending the Fourth Universia Meeting.

I would like to express my particular gratitude His Majesty The King for his attendance. He and Her Majesty the Queen have always shown a strong commitment to education, to universities and to the Ibero-American academic community.

Agradeço a presença do Presidente de Portugal, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa. Obrigada, Sua Excelência, por nos-acompanhar hoje. Os avanços de Portugal no ensino superior nos últimos anos são um exemplo para todos nós.

We are also joined by OECD Secretary-General Ángel Gurría, whose presence today confirms his commitment to education and to the Ibero-American community.

Finally, I would also like to thank President Herrera for welcoming us to this marvellous city, Salamanca.

I am very pleased to be here with you all today.

Salamanca is **one of the oldest universities in Western Europe**, together with Bologna, Oxford, Cambridge and Paris, and is a pioneer of the values that still define it 800 years after its founding.

The University of Salamanca is **innovative**. It was the first university to have a public library. It was here that the mathematical error regarding the Julian calendar was identified, and

where the calculations were made to allow us to connect the various rhythms of the sun and moon, giving rise to the Gregorian calendar that we use today.

Since it was founded, Salamanca has been a **global** university: classes were conducted in Latin (the “English” of the time), in order to facilitate the international mobility of professors and students.

Salamanca has always been **multidisciplinary**. As its former motto stated: “The principles of all sciences are taught at the University of Salamanca”. The members of the School of Salamanca laid down the foundations of civil and international law and of modern economic science, and made significant contributions to mathematics, navigation and astronomy.

Salamanca was also a pioneer in recognizing **diversity and equality**. This is where the educator and humanist Beatriz Galindo was taught, the Iberian Peninsula’s most learned and erudite **woman** of the 15th century. She in turn taught three queens: the Queen of Spain, the Queen of Portugal and the Queen of England.

Innovative, global, interdisciplinary, diverse: these have been the values of the University of Salamanca for 800 years.

And these are the values that continue to make the University a vital benchmark for our society.

Every generation, either explicitly or implicitly, re-writes the social contract which underpins the relationship between a university and the society it serves.

This contract includes the contributions made to teaching, to research and, increasingly, to innovation and entrepreneurship.

Like universities, businesses need to re-write this contract and articulate their purpose – their reason for being.

At Santander, we want to help people and businesses prosper in a way that is simple, personal and fair.

New social contracts must be re-written each day, because the world as we know it is being transformed faster than ever. In large part this is due to the digital revolution which is a powerful driver for economic, social, political and cultural change.

A rapid change that presents us with major challenges, and which forces us to contemplate new objectives, like the four we at Santander aspire to meet:

- earning people's trust through ethical conduct and responsible business;
- meeting the social needs generated by digital transformation;
- promoting inclusive growth, so that more and more people can participate in prosperity; and
- building sustainable growth, addressing climate change and keeping pace of demographic change.

The way in which we all address these challenges will determine our capacity to contribute to building a better world, and to the well-being and comprehensive development of its citizens.

Allow me to share a brief reflection on the new social contract between universities and society.

I often say: **education isn't everything, but it's almost everything.**

Education transforms us: personally, emotionally, culturally and, of course, financially. It is not only key to resolving the technological and financial challenges we will face over the next few decades, but it will also be essential for building more inclusive, prosperous and resilient societies.

This is why we began and still have an ongoing commitment to education.

We are experiencing a time of technological disruption. It is not the first such time and it won't be the last, but this is one most profound disruptions that we have ever known.

We see it in all types of activities. Technology has radically changed our relationship with the users of our services: they expect to have immediate access at any given time or place. They expect a personalised service, and not only through good customer service, but also through mobile channels, personalised at a level that would have been inconceivable even just a few years ago. This obligates us to think about them constantly.

The same is happening in the world of higher education. Even though the relationship between professor and student has its own peculiarities, it is also increasingly mediated by technology, placing students at the centre of our activity. This is my second observation.

All of us here can appreciate the important role a university has in promoting personal growth and social mobility. At Santander, we share your aspiration to offer as many people as possible the opportunity to experience higher education. However, we should also view universities as part of the solution for training global citizens, by preventing excessively local and inward-looking views that may obstruct international cooperation. This is my third observation.

I would like to clarify the following, as it is important: universities show us that knowledge, science and human experience have no borders. We are all part of a much larger community. This is one of the transformative powers of a university education which we should never lose sight of.

However, all of this cannot be at the expense of neglecting the less fortunate members of our society. We must promote open higher education, and make sure that this education also promotes universal values, tolerance and social inclusion.

Which University does the student of the digital era aspire to attend?

Technological change raises important questions about how we learn: today we cannot assume that what we learn between age 18 and 23 is going to be sufficient for our entire life.

How can we attract adults to ongoing education throughout their lives? How can we help further educate those who are already working? How to train for jobs that do not exist today.

One of the functions of university education should be teaching how to learn, that is, offering the tools that will allow the students of today to develop the new skills they need for the future.

[The future of Universities]

Our Rio 2014 Charter tried to answer these and other key questions.

This document, which was approved by many of you here today, detailed the aspiration of Ibero-American Universities to become a driving force of economic development and the foundation of a society based on knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurship.

It also made (makes, because they are still highly relevant) some recommendations.

- **It underscores the importance of university autonomy, with effective oversight and accountability.**
- **It invites us to consider an institutional framework that allows for alternative governance options, tailored to circumstances, vocation and capacities of each institution.**
- **It stresses the importance of having universities with different vocations: some that are more dedicated to their specific location, others to global or regional leadership; some with a primary focus on education and transfer of knowledge and on the development of professional skills and capacities; and still other universities with greater focus on research and on the generation of knowledge.**

I would like to suggest that, as well as continuous improvement for everyone, **the university system's aspiration to generate excellence** should be discussed over the next few days.

An excellence which is understood as an aspiration to also train the best, those who are going to be our future points of reference in every respect: social and economic, scientific and technological, artistic and cultural.

Informing them that being part of those groups of excellence should be, above all, a responsibility and a commitment, governed by the strictest ethical standards and codes of conduct. Achieving excellence and becoming, or continuing to be, points of reference should be an aspiration for us all.

Aspiring to excellence does not mean aspiring to exclusivity. Quite the opposite, in fact. Excellence must be inclusive and contribute to the general interest and to equity.

Your Majesty, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

I believe in a higher education that always involves humanist, transversal and multidisciplinary teaching that prepares for the jobs of today and tomorrow. That teaches how to learn.

And I believe in a University that is, as is the University of Salamanca and all those inspired by it, a source of innovation, critical thinking and social awareness.

It is very rare to find a forum with as much talent and passion as we have convened here at this meeting: 600 university leaders from around the world. Many of you have come from various cities in Spain, but most of you, more than 500, have travelled from Latin America, the US, and Europe — and as far as China and Africa too.

Thank you to everyone for taking part in this important discussion about education and the future.

I am confident that we will provide an accurate diagnosis and tell society what to expect from us.

The 10 million students you represent need our full support. Many of them will be the great leaders of the future, the drivers of prosperity, sustainable and inclusive growth, equality and justice.

Over the next two days, we will listen to your ideas on how we can put these aspirations into practice in order to contribute to the progress of society.

Thank you very much.