

Magna Charta Observatory

Report of the Secretary General 2021

While the pandemic has posed challenges for the MCO and caused us to develop new ways of doing things, we have not let it prevent us from pressing forward with our agenda. Indeed, some of the new ways of working have provided opportunities to work more closely with our partners and have resulted in very large audiences for a greater number of virtual events. This report covers the 18 months from November 2019.

The pandemic did not delay the final stages of developing the **new Magna Charta Universitatum (MCU 2020)** and this was formally adopted by the Council in March 2020. It did however frustrate our wish to have a large global celebration of university values as we had hoped to launch it in the same style as the original before the world's press in Bologna. Hence, after one postponement we opted for a virtual launch in June 2021 so that its impact in practice was not further delayed. We are grateful to the 200 or so people who responded so helpfully to our invitations for inputs and comments and to the globally diverse drafting group for their care, insight and commitment. MCU 2020 removes nothing from the values set out in the original MCU but is more specific about various challenges which universities now face and their responsibilities in responding to them. MCU 2020 will feature extensively in the MCO's programme going forward with the purpose of strengthening the role of universities in the preservation of the planet and promoting health, prosperity and enlightenment around the world. We have been pleased by the number of signatories of the 1988 MCU who have already declared their support for the 2020 edition and it is our hope that all will do so and will join with our community to achieve the aim of strengthening the role of universities.

We moved on-line and delivered 6 webinars on topics related to MCU 2020, all of them in partnership with kindred regional or global bodies. Being virtual they could be more global and were typically attended by 4 or 5 times as many participants as our previous in-person events. We anticipate a continuing virtual programme in addition to in-person workshops and events.

In 2020 the MCO's strategy was up for review and that review took place virtually over an extended period. It included analysis of the changing environment which universities were facing and an honest assessment of our achievements and weaknesses. The previous plan had resulted in a firm base to build on. The number of signatories was up to 906 (from 366 in 1988 and 775 in 2015), MCU 2020 had been prepared, there were more events, in more countries, organised with more partners which were attracting more participants. The Living Values project had been developed and 16 universities around the world were involved in piloting it with the assistance of a new group of 'Ambassadors' who increased greatly the MCO's ability to engage more closely with MCU signatories. The project was found to be valuable in a number of different settings and made the putting into practice of values more meaningful and impactful. Of course, there were things that we wanted to do more of and improve still further including our communications with our signatories and the development of our research capacity.

For the period to 2025 the MCO will continue to seek to engage all signatory universities in its work. The Observatory's over-arching objectives are to: strengthen the network of universities that share the principles set out in the MCU; disseminate the values set out in MCU 2020 and promote their application in practice; promote and communicate the Observatory's activities and its mission; increase the number of universities applying to sign the MCU and engage more closely with more kindred national, regional and global organisations.

More details about how this is to be achieved can be found on our website at <http://www.magna-charta.org/about-us/strategic-plan> We plan to improve the website so that it is more useful as a source of information on fundamental values in practice. We are developing the Living Values project by building on the experience which we have gained from the pilot sites. The new elements of MCU 2020 provide fertile ground for research, webinars, regional workshops and rich content for conferences. It will be a priority to encourage signatories of the 1988 MCU who have not yet done so to sign the 2020 edition.

We will be implementing a communications strategy and are grateful to Queen's University Canada for making available a communications specialist, Mary Beth Gauthier, to work with us in doing this. We welcome Mary Beth and will encourage the involvement of our signatories in all that we do. That involvement is the strength of our otherwise small organisation.

We are grateful to the Rector of the University of Bologna for working with the MCO to develop a longer-term agreement which provides greater financial certainty and for all the support which the university has given to the MCO. We are dependent on the majority of our funding coming from sources other than UNIBO but have been humbled by the way in which voluntary donations from signatories are holding up despite the severe stress which the pandemic has placed on university finances. We thank warmly those universities who have supported us. The 2021 list can be found at <http://www.magna-charta.org/about-us/magna-charta-supporters-2019-1> We will however need to achieve greater income to fulfil our new plan but we believe that if we do the things which signatories value the funds will be forthcoming.

Finally, the MCO has been led by an outstanding Governing Council, many members of which have now come to the end of the period for which they are allowed to serve. It was the quality of this Council and the spirit in which the members worked together which enabled us to achieve so much under the difficult circumstances which the pandemic imposed on us. I would like to formally acknowledge the exceptional leadership which has been shown by Dr Sijbolt Noorda, the outgoing President of the Governing Council, Professor Agneta Bladh, the outgoing Vice-President and Professor Jean-Pierre Finance, the outgoing Chair of our Admissions Committee as well as Eva Egron Polak whose term also ended during the year. We thank them warmly for all that they have done for the Observatory.

After an international search and evaluation process we were delighted to announce that Dr. Patrick Deane, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University, Canada, had agreed to become the next President and Professor Astrid Söderberg Widding, President of

Stockholm University, had agreed to become Vice-President starting from 14 June 2021. Professor Inga Bostad of the University of Oslo has taken over as chair of the important Admissions Committee and Professor Giga Zedania, Rector of Ilia State University, Georgia, has agreed to lead the establishment of the Research Committee and the development of that strategy. We also welcome Professor Narend Baijnath, Professor Chiara Elefante, Professor Marcin Palyse, Professor Marcelo Knobel and Peter Kwasi Kodjie as new members of the Council. We hope that the pandemic will abate soon so that the new group can meet in person and get to work on the exciting but challenging agenda which has been set.

As always, the Observatory values the role played by our administrator Carla Pazzaglia. But above all it is the support, engagement and action of the signatory universities which is most cherished. Thank you for all that you have done to enable the Observatory to progress to this stage and thank you, in anticipation, for all that we hope you will do to realise our aim to enable universities to play an even stronger role in society in the future.

David J. Lock
Secretary General
June 2021.