

Palabras de Su Majestad el Rey en la Universidad de Oxford

Oxford, 14.07.2017

Please allow me to thank you for your warm welcome to the historic University of Oxford, at an event which, as you may know, marks the end of the three-day State Visit that Queen Letizia and I have paid to the United Kingdom.

I am particularly grateful to the Lord Chancellor. And I also wish to thank very especially Sir Rick Trainor, Rector of Exeter College, which hosts the Chair founded by my great-grandfather, King Alfonso XIII. A Chair in Spanish Studies of which my mother, Queen Sofía, is an honorary member, and which is, in fact, proudly celebrating its 90th anniversary this year.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To speak of the University of Oxford is to speak of one of your nation's oldest, most firmly established and admired institutions. In an environment that brings knowledge and beauty together, this University shows us the enormous benefits of upholding the key role of knowledge in any society and bestowing on high culture the prestige it deserves.

Thus, the University of Oxford has contributed to forging the soul of this great nation. But all of us have benefited from the scientists, scholars and writers who were aware that spearheading knowledge means expanding the horizon for humankind. With its unique blend of vanguard and tradition, Oxford is, indeed, not only an admirable British university, but one of the institutions that have contributed to shaping the heart and soul of Europe and of what we now call the West.

Oxford is the alma mater of countless British statesmen and scholars, and was also home to the wisdom of world-renowned Spaniards such as Luis Vives and Blanco White. This university has advanced and spread science and knowledge, in a fruitful dialogue with the world's scientific communities, such as Bologna, La Sorbonne, Coimbra and Salamanca, whose 800th anniversary we will commemorate next year.

This dialogue between Europe's oldest universities has created an entire system of values without which the Western World would not be what it is today. I am referring to principles such as freedom of speech and academic freedom, intellectual curiosity, and the prolific publication of their findings; and I am also referring to concepts such as community, participation and, more recently, equal opportunities. All of these ideals, no matter how ancient their roots, are nowadays thriving in the most advanced societies, and they are still, for the most part, the driving force of our progress.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Universities, today, continue to be nerve centres for generating, managing, transferring and disseminating knowledge. Throughout their history —and Oxford is a prime example— they have had to adapt and make substantial changes in order to respond to society's needs. Because the very being of universities acquires its full meaning when

they push forward the boundaries of human knowledge while at the same time addressing the social and economic needs of their time and their environment. Oxford has always been, and continues to be, an example of service to the community.

The more engaged universities are with their surrounding environment and society, the prouder they make their countries, and, by extension, the greater their service is to humankind.

That is why it is imperative for universities to create new disciplines, to be efficient, effective and creative, to attract talent, and to go beyond research in basic science — albeit without neglecting it— so as to contribute to their country's economic growth.

All of this needs to be done with a constructive two-pronged dialogue: on the one hand, with public decision-makers who design and implement national and regional strategies and plan growth, and on the other, with society's most dynamic production sectors.

The role of universities in this effort cannot, and must not, be passive. ¡Quite the opposite! The fact that you generate most of society's knowledge makes universities — in your capacity as institutions that create, preserve, impart and disseminate knowledge and culture— key players in the development and transformation of society. From Medieval philosophical speculation to today's cutting-edge technologies, Oxford's own history corroborates this.

Thus, universities fulfil their destiny by developing speculative science, well aware that this knowledge will someday open up new realities of understanding. At the same time, however, universities cannot opt out of participating actively in creating viable solutions for so many of the problems afflicting our post-industrial societies.

And, while this interaction between universities and societies is of the essence, this must not let us forget that universities are spaces for people's intellectual, moral, professional and civic education.

Indeed, the fact that their nature is both social and of public service makes it imperative for universities to contribute, with specific educational actions, to strengthening the all those principles that are shared by our western societies, namely, freedom, equal opportunities, gender equality, tolerance, solidarity and development aid, peace and the value of diversity. Only if universities uphold and promote these principles with active policies can our societies be not only wealthy, but also fair; made up of individuals who are not only technically skilled but who have moral values that enable them to exercise socially responsible leadership.

As I said earlier, universities have the duty to identify the problems that afflict our post-industrial societies even before the political class does, and to come up with solutions based on research and on knowledge.

From this standpoint, today no university can ignore realities such as an ageing population, climate change, environmental degradation, energy sustainability, widespread epidemics, the technological and economic North-South divide, wars and their causes, intolerance, and migration flows.

If universities ignore or revere off such realities, or if they do not put them at the top of their agendas, our societies and our democracies will suffer. And in times of uncertainty such as those of today, this moral pursuit of universities is more important than ever in order to combat phenomena such as xenophobia, racism and inequality.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please allow me to point out a final idea which I believe is woven into the very DNA of universities, and which we cannot afford to neglect, either. I would like to talk about the concept of the internationalization of our universities. This concept arises, precisely, from the fact that knowledge and science have always been global. Today it is more so than ever. After all, the very name “university” refers to that universal dimension, both for the areas of knowledge it must encompass, and for its geographic, linguistic and cultural representation.

The concepts of western culture and its values were forged, among others, through dialogue between philosophers and enlightened scholars from the Republic of Letters, with the work of academies and universities.

However, the concept of knowledge and progress that they employed and still employ is not a closed one; quite the opposite, it is, and must be, open and available to society. Knowledge is shared with students from all over the world. Concepts such as transnational scientific collaboration and the free sharing of ideas, as well as mobility and the free circulation of talent, are at the very essence of universities, and also constitute the foundations of modern-day knowledge management, and scientific advance or discovery.

In this regard, Spain and the United Kingdom are among the countries that most share their studies and academic findings—to such an extent that the United Kingdom is Spain’s second-largest partner in academic collaboration, and Spain is the United Kingdom’s eighth.

Moreover, this country in particular is a prime example of a network of global universities: 28% of the teaching staff at British universities is foreign, and 16% of them from the European Union. This University of Oxford is even more global than that, because 41% of its teaching staff is foreign and come from more than 100 different countries.

In other words, Oxford has been able, like no other, to attract talent from the world over and to nurture an international community where diverse cultures, languages and ideas converge, and knowledge of the highest level is generated. And attracting talent explains, to a great extent, its uninterrupted success and prestige throughout history.

Today, the development of new information and communication technologies has not only helped to disseminate knowledge at unprecedented speed and reach, but has also altered our research and teaching methods.

But new technologies have not been able to replace the real, direct relationship between teachers and students in the transmission of knowledge; nor have they been able to replace experimentation by scientists at universities and research centres. And attracting talent must continue to be a primary objective of any university of excellence.

However it may be achieved, whether with cutting-edge technologies or at the matchless setting of these Colleges and Halls, attracting talent will, in turn, be the best way for the University to garner further prestige and to help its mission flourish. Because if there is a lesson to be learned from historic universities such as Oxford, it is that their global nature has a direct impact on improving the standard of living of our citizens and on the progress of our societies.

Ladies and gentlemen, when this luncheon is over, the Queen and I will have concluded our State Visit to the United Kingdom, during which we have been able to meet the Government, the Parliament, outstanding economic actors and, last but not least, your scientific and academic world.

Rest assured that we will not forget these days during which we have felt the friendship of the British people and institutions towards Spain. Nor will we be able to forget that all this has been possible thanks to the generosity of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and Her family.

Thank you very much.