

## **Message from Professor Craig Calhoun, President of the US Social Science Research Council in New York**

The university is one of the most remarkable and important institutions human beings have created. It has been transformed through successive eras of European social change, sometimes seeming to lose its relevance and then reinventing itself to be central to a new age of innovation as well as a tradition of scholarship. Britain has been a leader since the early days of Oxford and Cambridge through the 19th century expansion of universities in the service of a new political economy and 20th century efforts to improve access – a phase in which the Open University was a crowning achievement.

Today not just individual universities but the institution itself is in crisis, not least in countries like Britain that have previously been leaders in higher education. Yet at the same time higher education is expanding and taking on new importance in Asia, Africa and on a global stage. In such times of transformation, higher education research is more important than ever. It can guide both refocusing in institutions of established strength and the creation of new universities in new settings.

To the members of universities, higher education research provides reflexive awareness of how outside pressures and administrative decisions are changing their institutions. It can guide clarification of new missions for a new era. Higher education research also matters for policy makers and academic leaders who seek both efficiency and effectiveness. It matters for students and their families as they seek both economic opportunities and access to knowledge that can enhance personal life and social understanding. It matters to taxpayers who wonder whether they are getting their money's worth. It matters to citizens who – whether they realize it or not – rely on universities for public knowledge to guide informed public decisions.

CHERI has been a leader in higher education research. It has contributed crucial knowledge across a host of issues from understanding effectiveness and improving accountability to grasping the distinctive contributions of different kinds of universities to different constituencies. This kind of knowledge should be guiding reform and indeed reinvention of universities today. The alternative is too often for politicians and academic leaders alike to act on hunches and ideological commitments, catch-phrases and cheap pitches for populist applause. CHERI will be missed most by those who know its research best, but it should be missed by everyone.