



## D7.15 SHORT POLICY BRIEF – YEAR 1

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# ERA POLICY BRIEF

CALL: H2020-IBA-SWAFS-SUPPORT-2-2020

TOPIC: SUPPORT FOR THE RESEARCH AND INNOVATION DIMENSION  
OF EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES (PART II)

PROJECT: PROFESSIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAMMES FOR BUSINESS AND SOCIETY  
(RUN-EU PLUS) NUMBER 101035816-[HTTPS://RUN-EU.EU/](https://run-eu.eu/)



## SCOPE OF THE POLICY BRIEF

In this policy brief, the European Universities pilot alliances report on the progress made through cooperation in selected R&I areas and provide a first set of recommendations to the European Commission for further policy development.

### **Policy background:**

In order to strengthen strategic partnerships across the EU amongst higher education institutions, the European Commission targets the emergence of “European Universities” by 2024 by funding alliances from across Europe. The ambitious mandate aims to trigger systemic, structural and sustainable institutionalized cooperation between higher education institutions. As a complement to the Erasmus+ action geared towards supporting higher education cooperation models, Horizon 2020 support is dedicated to contributing to the research and innovation dimension of the alliances between European universities, in line with their shared, integrated, long-term joint strategy and in synergy with their education dimension.

This initiative is one of the flagships of the [European strategy for universities](#) that aims at supporting and enabling universities to adapt to changing conditions, to thrive and to take a leading role in the recovery of Europe, and in making our society greener, more inclusive and more digital.

The adoption of this strategy was accompanied by a Commission [proposal for a Council recommendation on building bridges](#) for effective European higher education cooperation. In parallel, the [European Research Area Policy Agenda](#) sets out 20 voluntary actions for the period 2022-2024, including several of which are relevant for universities. The feedback from the alliances will help co-shape the design and implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022 – 2024, such as ERA actions 1 (sharing of data), 3 (reform of research management), 4 (strengthening careers), 5 (gender equality), 7 (knowledge valorisation), 8 (research infrastructures), 13 (empowering universities), 14 (engaging citizens), 15 (role in R&I ecosystem), 17 (research management capacity).

## FEEDBACK ON PROGRESS (MAX 1.5P)

*1. Please describe the **challenges** your Alliance encountered regarding cooperation between universities in the field of R&I in relation to the institutional change areas (transformation modules) foreseen.*

**Module 1 Developing a Common Research and Innovation Agenda.** Developing and implementing common R&I agenda and convergence action plan in synergy with education strategies and regional engagement was a key element of our project. **Challenge:** We needed to define the regional priority areas and define the roadmap for the development of Collaborative Professional Practice-based Research Degrees including a shared Action Plan for validation and accreditation. While the European Qualifications Framework aims to relate different countries national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework, within our alliance we identified challenges in the design of our university research degree framework in that legal regulations and accreditation of doctoral training are different from one country to the other and can also vary within each country across universities, faculties/departments or disciplines particularly when related to UAS's. This is particularly true in terms of regulatory accreditation systems for new programmes in certain members, descriptions of research masters degrees, and entry requirements for new research programmes.

**Module 2 Sharing research infrastructures.** Agreeing on best practices for sharing research infrastructures and other resources for implementation of the common R&I agenda was key to delivering a coherent research ecosystem. **Challenge** Necessity for a coordinated approach on best practice sharing between the consortium and a necessity for an integrated long-term agreed joint R&I strategy across the network and coordinated support systems linking our R&I outputs with societal challenges. Critical to sharing best practice was a requirement for a discussion forum across the European University network as a whole.

**Module 3 Reinforcing Academia-Business R&I Cooperation.** Developing and deploying strategies to reinforce the impact of university research and innovation engagement. **Challenge** Necessity for our European University campus to share services and customise of our R&I practices informed by our students and our societal and business stakeholders. This included development of coherent practices and training for the development of Intellectual property and knowledge transfer within our researcher community concerning projects developed with and for industry addressing clear and obvious societal challenges.

**Module 4 Strengthening human capital.** Developing and implementing strategies for strengthening human capital in research and innovation and for enabling balanced brain circulation. **Challenge** Valuing human research capital is evidential as a critical factor in reaping economic and societal rewards from investment in research. We required to implement a structured researcher career development plan identifying progression to employment for RUN-EU and provide clarity for academic progression pathways development opportunities and careers advisory services across the University.

**Module 5 Mainstreaming of Open Science practises and Module 6 Embedding Citizens and Society.** **Challenges:** In order to mainstream comprehensive Open Science practices, we needed to overcome differently coordinated management and governance systems within our Universities for open educational resources and open science research networking inclusive of innovative learning practices. We also required to implement processes for involving and engaging society in RUN-EU research and innovation activities through a dedicated dissemination strategy and platform structure to identify opportunities for co-learning.

*2. Please describe how you tackled or intend to **tackle these challenges**. Based on your project's experience so far (and if applicable), outline case(s) you consider as **good practice** and of interest to other universities or to policy-makers.*

The RUN European University Innovation Ecosystem underpins a knowledge sharing approach and knowledge transfer capacity, valorising the entrepreneurial mind-set amongst our researchers and innovators. We undertook a detailed review of the current innovation capacity of the RUN-EU partner institutions, and have proposed an innovation capacity programme and a governance structure as a vehicle of regional development informed by the regional development plans of the areas in which our University members are resident. The RUN-EU Innovation Ecosystem is managed a central oversight committee and offers a centralised RUN-EU technology transfer function and creates a portfolio of innovation/technology offerings which it will promote to RUN-EU regional stakeholders. The strategic research priorities report of RUN-EU PLUS presents an overview of the regional research interests and regional priorities of the RUN-EU partners leveraged in the creation of Professional Practice-based Research Degree Programmes which will attract the support of business/society. The priority domains relevant to the RUN European University have driven the formation of collaborative action teams to support the development of the necessary specialist research degrees. Our project task relating to 'Roadmap Building', addressed approaches the development of 'Hybrid' practice-based research degrees that are primarily aligned with societal transformations and change in practice. It was possible to propose a basic structure with admission and assessment guidelines for the general design for joint research PhD and masters programmes across the alliance. Our industry co-designed research degree programmes incorporate the structured elements of the practice-based master's qualification and articulation requirements of the Doctoral programme, providing a clear transfer pathway to the higher degree. In certain instances, we envisage that some of the master's level research projects will generate sufficient innovation to allow transfer to the PhD programme register. This will be

accomplished using recognition of prior learning practices to allow the transfer of master's students to PhD registers amongst and between consortium partners. We have also developed and implemented a collective and collaborative cloud of knowledge portal. This equips our researchers with a combination of pedagogical and research skills training workshops and will provide for a research career evaluation system to reward researchers and research excellence at all career development stages. We mainstream Open Science practices and skills within the RUN-EU R&I platforms, through the delivery and adoption of new and innovative programmes and initiatives across the alliance.

*3. Please describe the **tangible progress** that individual partners as well as the Alliance as a whole have made in terms of introducing changes in their entities as a result of this project. Please elaborate on whether the inclusive and integrated cooperation approach of your alliance helps accelerate institutional change of all partners (e.g. through sharing of practices from institutions with strong expertise or infrastructure in specific areas to institutions without).*

RUN-EU PLUS's primary aim(s) is to complement our RUN-EU European University action plans, in developing an integrated long-term strategy for a Common Research and Innovation Agenda and Collaborative Action Plan. The RUN-EU Innovation Ecosystem proposed an innovation capacity programme and a governance structure as a vehicle of regional development. Ambassador networks have been established to mainstream open science, research & innovation and gender & diversity best practices across the alliance. The project has identified a number of the transformation modules in order to achieve our aims. The individual partners of the RUN-EU alliance are all at different points on the pathway in training and degree delivery provision for researchers. The developed Research Career Development Training Programme supporting our research degree framework for masters and PhD researchers, along with the Cloud of Knowledge Portal and the Research and Career Evaluation System, will adhere to the principles as set out in the European Charter and Code to support our researchers in identifying their current researcher skills, development needs and clear personal career paths which will encourage inter-sectoral, interdisciplinary and international mobility during their careers. The Researcher Career Development Training Programme will support RUN-EU researcher mobility and internship programmes. The programme aims to prepare our researchers with skill sets for a variety of careers in the public and private sector in research and non-research roles. We have defined a long-term Researcher Career Development Training Programme, overlapping principles for it and for the content, and also practical guidelines for implementing the programme. In addressing the challenge to coordinate all events in a way that they will be reach our target groups we have designed and begun implementation of a RUN-EU PLUS Cloud of Knowledge Portal. It is designed to support researchers with their skills development and will be a repository for all training material and therefore a support tool to all researchers.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS (MAX 3P)

## 1. Policy topic 1: facilitating transnational cooperation

- *Knowing that the Commission proposed a [Council recommendation to facilitate transnational collaboration between universities](#), which action should be prioritised to address the challenges you encountered as an Alliance in sharing capacities, infrastructures, resources or staff in R&I?*

*'Achieving the European Education Area by 2025 means creating a European space of learning which benefits all learners, academics and other education staff who can move freely to study and work across the EU.'* RUN-EU European University Initiative envisages RUN-EU as a European and global hub critical to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), creating a RUN-EU EHEA based on international co-operation and academic exchange. In the RUN-EU PLUS our new student-centred Collaborative Professional Practice-based postgraduate research degree programmes are being created by using module building blocks of all the partners, thus allowing students the opportunity to select the structured elements of their research programme curriculum. We aim to strengthen mobility of researchers and the flow of knowledge using a research co-supervision model and a sharing on individual institutional research infrastructure, equipment and knowledge, incentivising investment in research by engaging with our regional industry partners in identifying our regional challenges informing the design of the research programmes and enhancing transnational innovation and knowledge cooperation within our research ecosystem. These degrees drive the RUN-EU collaborative applied research activities within our innovation ecosystem and ensure students are prepared to successfully address future societal challenges in the areas of sustainability, digitisation and social innovation and inclusion. Within RUN-EU PLUS our biggest challenge has been identifying strategic pathways and a framework to address legal and administrative challenges in designing, registering, funding (different fee structures) and approving the research degree structural requirements following the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) satisfactory to all members and their state legislative requirements. An EU mechanism which would allow alliances to navigate more quickly through these potential roadblocks would be very progressive towards the streamlined establishment of joint RUN-EU European research degree programmes. Collaborative degrees and the legal status of European Universities to overcome regional problems (like no PhD awarding competences at Universities of Applied Sciences) are crucial. It has to be ensured that a degree of a European University is equally accepted by industry and academia.

## 2. Policy topic 2: Strengthening careers

- *Is there a need to develop a model tenure-track system at European level to contribute to solving precariousness of early career researchers? If you believe so, how do you think it should be structured?*

Researchers are a critical asset of the RUN-EU research ecosystem. One essential goal in RUN-EU PLUS is that the researchers will develop strong competences in research and transferable skills and the ability to plan their future career and learning paths. International reports demonstrate that conditions afforded to researchers have a strong positive correlation on the quality of their research outputs. Valuing human research capital is evidential as a critical factor in reaping economic and societal rewards from investment in research. The broad stream trend towards less secure contracts and conditions for researchers is highlighted as counterproductive. A considerable population of researchers currently hold temporary positions without any commitment to renew their positions or transform those positions into long-term or permanent contracts. An overall decline in the capacity of research systems to attract and retain the best national and international talent is widely reported. The researcher career possibilities are often dependent on externally funded short-term contracts and researchers must put a lot of time into the preparation of funding proposals to ensure continuity of their employment. This repeated uncertainty regarding the continuity of contract brings extra burden and significant stress for researchers. However, we must also be cognizant that the majority of researchers undertaking research degree programmes may not necessarily remain within the academic structures but will work outside academia. These are an equally valuable researcher cohort as they have direct and important impact on how research knowledge is transferred to and understood in society and are important mediators in building a continuous dialogue between the academic and non-academic sectors. We strongly believe that an accelerated tenure track system would facilitate in relieving this stress but also ensure retention of the best and brightest of our researcher community ensuring sustainable research informed societally impactful research increasing the global competitiveness of the EU. However, within the overall researcher career framework plan we also need to pay attention to the other multi-variant career paths which our researchers will take rather than only concentrating on the academic career choice. In RUN-EU PLUS our goal is that all researchers, and also research services, have a broadest understanding of possible researcher career paths, both in academia and in non-academic environments and we will deliver our researcher training programmes to address these multi-variant researcher career choices.

- *In light of the [policy process on the reform of assessment](#) of research and institutions, what are your recommendations on how to address academic/researcher career assessment?*

Research quality and impact along with researcher performance are fundamental criteria assessed by universities during the recruitment, promotion, or reward of research personnel. Within RUN-EU PLUS an essential goal is that

RUN-EU researchers will develop strong competencies in research and transferable skills and the ability to plan their future career and learning paths. The researcher evaluation system, that we are developing in the RUN-EU PLUS, will support these general goals. We will follow the recommendations described in the EU report ‘Towards a Reform of the Research Assessment (2021)’ with the aim to develop research and researcher evaluation systems that is based on intrinsic merits and performance. The RUN-EU PLUS researcher evaluation system aims to be flexible to recognise the diversity of research disciplines and of researcher maturity levels and career paths in addition to RUN-EU partner research missions and cultures. We in RUN-EU PLUS have defined our first concrete goals for the researcher evaluation system as the following:

- support researcher career development on all researcher career stages,
- support researcher competences especially in the features of practice-based research,
- focus particularly on recognising team performances,
- emphasise the quality of work,
- include assessment of teamwork, Open Science, and research quality markers,
- support the development of RUN-EU researcher recruitment and collaboration practices,
- support trainers of RUN-EU researchers to plan and implement their training based on the general objectives of RUN-EU,
- support the assessment and development of the RUN-EU researcher training.

### **3. Policy topic 3: digital transition**

- *What are the specific needs of the alliances to accelerate their digital transition in the R&I dimension, and how can this be addressed at the EU level?*

European University infrastructure includes not only physical infrastructure, but critically e-infrastructures for administrative activities e.g., such as research and knowledge and technology transfer offices. This shared digital infrastructure will be the critical element of successful European University alliances involving storage and exchange of data in accordance with European data regulation requirements. Within RUN-EU PLUS we have designed and are currently implementing a digital cloud of knowledge portal. The development of a unified ‘Cloud of knowledge portal’ will facilitate international collaboration through common approaches to research skills, intellectual property, ethics, research integrity and impact assessment.

The cloud of knowledge portal shared platform will facilitate the creation of ‘ecosystems of learning’ including students, researchers, public and private sector, regional and social partners where multidisciplinary teams will address societal challenges. This cloud key digital instrument with an array of functions and following the project’s principles of open access, mainstreaming and inclusion, this digital portal will:

- include different resources (texts, policy documents, informative and training materials, infographics, videos, etc),
- address various topics, e.g.: resilience and independent working, communication skills, networking and influencing skills, project management, personal development, strategic career planning, time management, writing and publishing skills,
- provide a research career evaluation system to reward researchers and research excellence at all career development stages,
- gather contributions from all partners and institutions outside the consortium,
- host cross-disciplinary and cross-sector collaboration with stakeholders outside academia,
- facilitate international collaboration through common approaches to research skills, intellectual property, ethics, research integrity and impact assessment,
- showcase excellent and impactful research.

- *In particular, do you see a need for additional dedicated e-infrastructures for data storage and management that are distributed and interoperable? Please take into account progress regarding development of the federated e-infrastructure for research outputs (EOSC, see [ERA Policy Agenda](#)), and the implementation of a digital platform for cooperation in higher education (see the [European strategy for universities](#)).*

‘Advancing Open Science to accelerate the creation of new knowledge, inspire education, spur innovation and promote accessibility and transparency’ is a critical element of the EOSC Association, European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) and RUN-EU PLUS and we agree that this will be a critically important element in delivering on the principles of our university. The underlying principles of the Open Science and Citizen Science agendas are already embedded throughout the alliance, our European University has committed to creating systems to underpin open educational resources and open science research networks. As part of the RUN-EU PLUS project, we will further develop of our mainstreaming of open science practices and skills within our R&I platforms through the delivery of new programmes in open science principles including a comprehensive data management plan. We will map the gaps in training and education on open science skills and support the development of new practices for

students, researchers, and managers, at all career stages. RUN-EU PLUS will develop an open science training programme aimed at a network of new Open Science Ambassadors (OSA) to support the open science agenda across our network to exchange best practice and mutual learning within the alliance. These ambassadors will be local resources for increasing conversations around open science, cultivating awareness, fostering openness, and equipping RUN-EU PLUS researchers and innovators with the necessary tools to champion the open science agenda.

#### **4. Policy topic 4: access to excellence**

- *What is your advice on how to accelerate access to excellence in science and in value creation for participants for higher education institutions across the ERA, through the European Universities Initiative?*

As regionally embedded university organisations spanning Europe, we are acutely aware of our critical role in the broader economic, cultural, and social development of our region and beyond. RUN-EU will be a European and global hub of research and innovation education creating a centralised RUN-EU research and innovation education area (RUN ERA) enabling students to obtain research PhD qualifications by combining studies in multiple EU countries. It is envisaged the RUN ERA work package will increase the national and international competitiveness of the associated regions and their academic community allowing them to: (i) complement existing capital and large city regions; (ii) retain and attract young talent and (iii) correct existing unfavourable bias in development trends in peripheral European regions. RUN-ERA will deliver enhanced access to research and innovation excellence and enhanced interconnections between innovation ecosystems across RUN-EU and through the RUN-EU European Innovation Hubs (RUN-EIH) with particular emphasis on green and digital transitions. RUN-EIH will convert research ideas into exploitable innovations working closely together with its backbone of companies, institutes, stakeholder, investors, and academia within the regions of the alliance. Access to excellence can also be enhanced by digital offers like MOOCs and high-quality video content facilitated by funding mechanisms to produce high quality digital content. Specific calls for producing and offering such open access content would welcome to achieve this.

#### **5. Policy topic 5: increasing global competitiveness**

- *Europe's relative weight at a global level when it comes to research-intensive universities is shrinking. In light of this, a European Excellence Initiative will be established to improve global competitiveness of Europe's universities, in synergy with the European Universities Initiative of Erasmus+. In your view, what would be key elements of such an Initiative? Secondly, could you envisage that such an initiative specifically targets EU objectives such as the Green Deal or European Missions?*

With a view to enhancing the collective research and innovation capabilities of the partners, we have performed a detailed audit, characterisation and understanding of each partner's existing regional innovation ecosystem cluster activities and capacity. This activity will support identification of potential areas for cooperation, collaboration, and creation of a European wide 'immersive super-innovation research institute'. Drawn from industry and enterprise, regional government and society, this co-design and immersive practice will ensure maximum relevance and impact. By taking this approach we envisage that it will ultimately lead to the development of the multinational European Zone of Inter-Regional Development (EZ-ID), made up of the constituent regions of RUN-EU. This EZ-ID will be a driver for the implementation of Smart Specialisation Strategies and the promotion of common European Green Deal values and identity. The RUN-EU PLUS research ecosystem promotes a knowledge sharing approach and knowledge transfer capacity, the aim of which is to remove existing obstacles to innovation development and revolutionize the way the public and private sector work together to bring research developments and advancements to the marketplace for societal benefit. The value of an effective innovation system is that it provides access to innovation processes for companies and supports the effective flow of information for its stakeholders. The European Universities are a step into the right direction, the 4+2 years approach, but real competitiveness would come with 10 years+ of structural funding.

#### **6. Other recommendations**

We believe our current recommendations (after year 1) of the RUN-EU PLUS project are identified above. We may of course expand on these recommendations in the year 2 and year 3 policy brief reports.



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