



D7.16 SHORT POLICY BRIEF – YEAR 2

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ERA POLICYBRIEF

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/



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:** Our challenges have not changed dramatically detailed in the initial policy briefing **D7.15**. We have now defined regional priority areas in development of the RUN EU Innovation ecosystem (**D6.1**). We have succeeded in development of the roadmap (**D3.2**) for the development of Collaborative Professional Practice-based Research Degrees which also details a shared Action Plan for validation and accreditation (**D3.3**).

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 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.

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.

Module 5 Mainstreaming of Open Science practises / 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.

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.

Module 1 Developing a Common Research and Innovation Agenda - This analysis included an overview of the regional research interests and resulted in the identification of those regional priorities which will be leveraged in the creation of the RUNEU Professional Practice-based Research Degree programmes. Sustainability, Digitalisation and Social Innovation were identified as the priority research areas which will inform the design of the research master's and Doctoral programmes. The programmes will be accredited, scalable, interdisciplinary, and focused on business and society development needs. The roadmap and accreditation action plan will ensure that the programmes created are producing research that has a significant impact and will address pressing societal challenges. The development of the programmes is currently underway. Within our alliance we identified challenges in the design of our European University research degree framework in that legal regulations and accreditation of master's and doctoral training are different from one country to the other and can also vary within each country and across universities. This issue also applies to fees. To address this, a basic structure has been proposed with admission and assessment guidelines for a general framework for joint research Doctoral and master's programmes across the alliance. Our co-designed research degree programmes incorporate the necessary elements to provide a clear transfer pathway from master's to Doctoral degree as in certain instances, we envisage that some master's level research projects will generate sufficient innovation to allow transfer to the Doctoral programme.

Module 2 Sharing research infrastructures-Within RUN-EU through the Cloud of Knowledge Portal currently being developed by the project we are creating a shared resource across the alliance and externally, attracting talent to our regions and equipping researchers with a combination of pedagogy and research skills. The portal will identify the research strengths across our network and the various research infrastructures available to our research community to develop existing and new research study programmes.

Module 3 Reinforcing Academia-Business R&I Cooperation-We have developed and implemented standard 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. We have also developed and implemented our supervisor training programmes for our masters and PhD supervisors to provide support to supervisory teams during the course of a research degree programme.

Module 4 Strengthening human capital/Module 5 Mainstreaming of Open Science practices/Module 6 Embedding Citizens and Society. Challenges - RUN-EU PLUS has developed a Researcher Career Development Training Programme which has been implemented across the RUN-EU alliance and continues to be delivered by the RUN-EU PLUS team. Topics include Open Science Practices, Attractive Researcher Careers and Approaches to Early-stage Supervision. This training programme consists of workshops which are designed to provide RUN-EU researchers with research and transferrable skills required for successful research careers. The programme has been informed by EU guidelines on researcher skills training, an Audit and GAP analysis of RUN-EU partners to identify their current researcher career development practices and skills training/educational requirements as identified by RUNEU researchers. This RUN-EU PLUS Researcher Career Development Programme will be supported by the Cloud of Knowledge Portal and the Researcher Career Evaluation System, both researcher support tools currently under development by the RUN-EU PLUS project. Valuing human research capital is evidential as a critical factor in reaping economic and societal rewards from investment in research. The Research Career Development Training Programme developed by the RUN-EU PLUS project supports our research degree framework for master's and Doctoral researchers and 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. We have also designed and implemented a pilot researcher assessment tool which we will roll out across the alliance in the coming year.

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).

The RUN-EU PLUS consortium has made considerable progress during the first 24 months of the project and is on target to meet its ambitious objectives. The aim of RUN-EU PLUS is to develop an integrated long-term strategy for research and innovation within our European University. The 'PLUS' stands for Professional Research Programmes for Business and Society and the main goal of this project is to reinforce academia-business collaboration in three RUN-EU thematic areas (Sustainability, Digitalisation, and Social Innovation), through the development of a framework and programmes at master's and Doctoral levels across the network. 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. An analysis of RUN-EU regional priority domains was carried out by the project to identify the focus of future research and innovation (R&I) collaboration activities with business and society partners. Ambassador networks have been established to mainstream open science, research & innovation, and gender & diversity best practices across the alliance. The developed 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 to prepare our researchers with skill sets for a variety of careers in the public and private sector in research and non-research roles.

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 Within an R&I environment 'further implementing a European Research Area implies strengthening mobility of researchers and the flow of knowledge, incentivising investment in research and innovation, and enhancing transnational cooperation among higher education institutions, as well as with businesses and other research and innovation actors in their ecosystems.' 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. Critical to this endeavor are the funding mechanisms to allow researcher mobility. Within RUN-EU we employed a researcher mobility programme for this purpose for staff and research students. We would see a strengthening of funding mechanisms for these types of initiatives as crucial to maintaining the existing momentum. Critically a follow-on R&I funding support mechanism within Horizon Europe specific to the University alliance programmes would be an important step forward in this regard. A second key challenge comes in identifying strategic pathways and a framework to address legal and administrative challenges in designing, registering, funding (different fee structures) and approving research degree structural requirements following the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) satisfactory to all members and their state legislative requirements. We would reiterate from our policy brief 1 that 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 European research degree programmes. To that end we have begun implementation of the European Approach to accreditation of programmes across country borders to tackle 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 must be ensured that a degree awarded by 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?* Valuing human research capital is evidential as a critical factor in reaping economic and societal rewards from investment in research. Researcher career possibilities are often dependent on externally funded short-term contracts and this needs to change with the introduction of a form of tenure track explicitly for researchers while remaining cognizant that the majority of researchers undertaking research degree programmes may not necessarily remain within the academic structures but will work outside academia having direct and important impact on how research knowledge is transferred to and understood in society. 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. Between 2012-2018 the OECD identified the innovation leaders as Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Netherlands and Luxemburg. The career path structure in these countries could be investigated for a best practice model system. We would advocate for different model tracks for professional researchers including both research which would involve the traditional TRL1-5 (Technology Readiness Level) and enterprise driven tracks TRL6-10 delivering more applied market ready research outputs and impacts.

- *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?*

The Research and Career Evaluation System was designed by the RUN-EU PLUS project as a tool for flexible use which a researcher can use alone or with a supervisor, HR, etc. and is in testing. The 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. The system is aiming explicitly to support RUN-EU researchers to identify skills gaps for their chosen career path and identify training needs to develop their competencies and transferable skills in addition to the ability to effectively plan their future career and learning paths. The system is being piloted in Spring 2023. A group of 107 RUN-EU researchers or other staff are registered in the pilot. Future and Advanced Skills Academies will also be involved in system evaluation, as will partner university Career Offices (where available). The researcher evaluation system, follows the recommendations described in the EU report 'Towards a Reform of the Research Assessment (2021)'

Goals for the Researcher Career Development Evaluation Tool are 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 researchers to plan and implement their training 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. Shared digital infrastructure is a critical element of successful European University alliance Research & Innovation ecosystems. Within RUN-EU PLUS we have designed and are currently implementing a digital Cloud of Knowledge Portal. The Cloud of Knowledge shared platform has been developed to share RUN-EU researcher expertise, research data, and resources, to support their pedagogical and research skills training. A specification of the entire platform was already created and validated by the consortium. A beta version of this digital knowledge hub is ready to be populated and will be used by RUN-EU researchers soon. The portal is hosted on the local server of IPL and access to the beta version is currently only allowed to RUN-EU researchers. The beta version of the portal includes the following sections: resilience and independence working, networking, and influencing skills, education, expertise project management, strategic career development, writing and publishing skills, communication skills, areas of interest, personal development and time management. The portal was implemented using a dynamic strategy, allowing to further create other contents or sections. The portal will include various resources including texts, policy documents and informative training materials which focus on a variety of topics (generic and domain specific research material) and will provide an intersectoral collaborative space and allow networking in research and innovation across the RUN European University. Moreover, an improved interface and dedicated front-end pages will be released in the final version. A group has been formed within the RUN-EU PLUS project who have the responsibility of gathering partner data and uploading it to the portal. This cloud key digital instrument will:

- include different resources (policy documents, informative and training materials, infographics, videos, etc),
- address various topics, e.g.: resilience and independent working, communication skills, networking etc.
- provide a research career evaluation system to reward 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 common approaches to research skills, intellectual property, ethics, 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. RUN-EU PLUS has developed a researcher training programme that is being implemented across the RUN-EU alliance. This training programme consists of workshops which are designed to provide RUN-EU researchers with the research and transferrable skills required for successful research careers. The programme has been informed by EU guidelines on researcher skills training, an audit and GAP analysis of RUN-EU partners to identify their current researcher career development framework practices, and skills training and educational requirements as identified by RUN-EU researchers. To date, 6 open science workshops have been delivered: 4 workshops were delivered in 2022: • Open Access - introduction (85 participants) • Fair Data and Data Management - introduction (89 participants). 5 workshops were delivered in 2023: • Open Access - beginner level (39 participants) • Open Science - beginner level (39 participants) • ORCID – introduction (49 participants). • Fair data- intermediate level (15 participants) • Teaching Open Science - expert level (15 participants). From 2023 on, these workshops have been tailored to different levels of expertise in open science namely beginner, intermediate and expert. The OSA network is active in suggesting additional topics for workshops to be held in 2024. Digital Badge Certification has been awarded to this Open Science programme by TUS and will be awarded to participants who achieve the learning outcomes of the programme.

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?*

Agreeing on best practices for sharing research infrastructures and other resources for implementation of the common R&I agenda is key to delivering a coherent research ecosystem. In the RUN-EU PLUS project, our student-centred Collaborative Professional Practice-based Research Degree Programmes are being created 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 RUN-EU researchers and increase the flow of

knowledge using a research co-supervision model and a sharing of 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. The members have committed to the creation of joint policies and procedures, as well as the joint provision of services, databases, and access to teaching and scientific infrastructures. 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 portal is a shared platform which is designed to 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 of Knowledge Portal will aid the sharing of research infrastructures by providing a centralised platform for all stakeholders to communicate, access and share resources and infrastructures.

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?*

The European Excellence Initiative, particularly in its widening dimension, aims to raise excellence in science and in knowledge valorisation of Europe's universities through cooperation empowering them further to be actors of change in R&I. Perhaps the first key element would be engagement with the critical stakeholders, society and SME's and to a less extent larger MNC's. Ultimately these will be the drivers of R & I pathways to impact within the global green deal and European mission initiatives. This might involve regional ecosystem development to support identification of potential areas for cooperation, collaboration, and creation. Specifically in our project this is envisaged as the European Zone of Inter-Regional Development (EZ-ID). 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 made up of the constituent regions of RUN-EU. As mentioned previously this EZ- ID will be the driver for the implementation of Smart Specialisation Strategies and the promotion of common European Green Deal values and identity. The overall European Excellence Initiative can certainly be tailored to specific EU targets such as the Green Deal. Promoting a knowledge sharing approach and knowledge transfer capacity 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 is achievable within the initiative. 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 and specific project area calls could target those specific EU missions e.g. Green Deal, digitization etc.

6. Other recommendations

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



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