D7.17 SHORT POLICY BRIEF – YEAR 3

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Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS), Ireland

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ERA **POLICY**BRIEF

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

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 previous policy briefings **D7.15 & D7.16**. We required regional priority areas to define the roadmap for the development of Collaborative Professional Practice-based Research Degrees including a shared Action Plan for validation and accreditation.

Module 2 Sharing research infrastructures. Agreeing on best practices for sharing research infrastructures and other resources including the development of the necessary innovation supports and networking platforms for strengthening academic-business co-operation for implementation of the RUN EU research ecosystem. **Challenge** A coordinated approach to sharing best practice across the European University network as a whole but critically also with our regional innovation actors and stakeholders.

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 practices and Module 6 Embedding Citizens and Society. *Challenges.* To mainstream comprehensive Open Science practices, we needed to overcome differently coordinated management and governance systems for open educational resources and open science research practices.

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

Module 1 *Developing a Common Research and Innovation Agenda* - Within **D6.1** the RUN EU Innovation Ecosystem we are using the national regional and EU priority areas which inform the further development of the roadmap (**D3.2**) for the development of Collaborative Professional Practice-based Research Degrees and the shared Action Plan for validation and accreditation (**D3.3**). This analysis included an overview of the regional research interests and resulted in the identification of those regional priorities which are leveraged in the creation of the RUN-EU Professional Practice-based Research Degree programmes. Sustainability, Digitalisation and Social Innovation were identified as the priority research areas which inform the design of the research programmes of the RUN European University.

Module 2 Sharing research infrastructures- The RUN-EU PLUS project has developed a digital **Cloud of Knowledge portal**, a shared resource across the alliance and externally, supporting talent development in our regions and equipping researchers with a combination of pedagogy and research skills. The portal showcases the research expertise and facilities of RUN-EU research institutes, centres, and groups as well as individual researchers. The portal acts as a collaborative research space, research repository and portfolio of data, results, progress, and publications as well as showcasing the potential for societal added-value and contributions to knowledge and practice.

Module 3 Reinforcing Academia-Business R&I Cooperation- A key impact of the RUN-EU PLUS project is the development of inter-regional R&I models designed to deliver on societal transformation requirements, within the framework of the relevant Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3) and the UN goals for Sustainable Development, and through increased integration of the university activities in the field of R&I within and beyond Europe. **D6.4** linked to **T6.4** included the development of strategies to upscale and strengthen the connection of the RUN European University with other infrastructures and actors of the ecosystem such as investors or business, to facilitate access to innovation to connect to a broad set of stakeholders including a R&I Ambassadors network, including for social or cultural purposes, and to set up local innovation networking platforms to induce academia-business collaboration at regional and interregional levels. **D6.6** showcases the research degree programmes which have been registered during the RUN-EU PLUS project, the report highlights the international supervision teams and the regional impact potential through innovation or policy development. In conjunction with development and implementation of standard practices and training for the development of Intellectual Property and knowledge transfer we have implemented supervisor training programmes for our supervisory teams to provide support during the course of a research degree programme.

A joint PhD in Digitalisation Engineering has been developed by 3 RUN-EU partner institutions. In this PhD programme, each candidate defines an individual plan which includes curriculum units that best suit their research objectives. Whenever possible, the research will be based on an immersion experience in a non-academic environment (e.g., industrial). In this way, solutions to new challenges that require the creation of knowledge will be investigated in a logic of strong interaction with national and international industry. Industry's involvement will provide candidates for the doctoral program, contribute to doctoral themes, and host students, and eventually, their financial support. This

PhD programme has letters of support from more than 20 companies.

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 designed to provide RUN-EU researchers with research and transferrable skills required for successful research careers. This RUN-EU PLUS Researcher Career Development Programme will be supported by the Cloud of Knowledge Portal and the Researcher Career Evaluation System. The Cloud of Knowledge Portal features a web interface for all functionalities related to the research information described above, ensuring accessibility through a standard web browser. A login system compatible with institutions within the RUN-EU network accommodates diverse authentication mechanisms to ensure seamless access for all users has been implemented. The platform's dynamic structure enables back-office configuration for the standardized creation of new elements. This includes three levels of information management and three transversal levels. The platform design supports future scalability, allowing for the addition of new sections, categories, and content types as the network evolves. Attention is paid to user experience (UX) design to ensure intuitive navigation and accessibility across all platform levels. Security protocols, especially concerning login and user data, adhere to the highest standards to protect sensitive information.

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 aim of RUN-EU PLUS was to develop an integrated long-term strategy for research and innovation within our European University. We believe we have met and indeed surpassed these objectives. The RUN European University **Innovation Ecosystem** underpins a knowledge sharing approach and knowledge transfer capacity, valourising the entrepreneurial mind-set amongst our researchers and innovators. An analysis of RUN-EU regional priority domains carried out in the project identified the focus of future research and innovation (R&I) collaboration activities with business and society partners. **Ambassador networks** have been established to mainstream best practices in open science, research & innovation, and gender & diversity across the alliance. The **Researcher Career Development Training Programme** supports 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. One of our key successes has been the **Cloud of Knowledge Portal,** a digital platform which now serves as a central hub for resources, collaboration, and information dissemination among the network's members. The development of this Knowledge Platform represents a landmark achievement within the scope of our European project, embodying the spirit of collaborative effort and innovation that characterizes the RUN-EU alliance. This initiative has successfully forged connections between institutions at various levels, with a particular emphasis on research and innovation. What began as a requirement gathering exercise for a scientific training repository quickly evolved into a comprehensive portal, far exceeding our initial ambitions. This transformation has resulted in a platform that not only showcases the research and innovation endeavors of each RUN-EU member but also fosters potential synergies with alliance partners and industrial stakeholders across different regions. The Cloud of Knowledge Portal showcases the excellent research done by the RUN European University. The journey to populate the platform and gather information from various partners for the different sections of the portal posed a considerable challenge. However, through collective effort and determination, a foundational model was established namely a scalable and adaptable platform equipped with a back-office that allows for the configuration of the platform's entire scope. This ensures that the portal can evolve in response to future demands and opportunities.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, the European Universities pilot Alliances make recommendations in relation to the policy topics identified below. Given the unique strengths and focus of each European University Alliances, please focus only on

those aspects of most relevance to your case. Please feel free as well to expand to other policy topics you may wish to share your learnings and recommendations (other recommendations).

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?*

Implementation of a seamless best practice European Research Area relies on a number of factors not least of which is a commitment to the implementation of our research and innovation training vision developed through RUN-EU PLUS along with concrete regional actions, in the RUN EU European University in the next cycle working towards the development of solutions to the challenges of today. This includes '*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 believe the '*research co-supervision model'* developed in our project consolidated through the sharing of research knowledge and infrastructure is a key element to driving forward with our research and innovation agenda. These initiatives require strengthening of the funding support systems for staff and research students, through the incorporation of a European University researcher mobility grant programme to allow the exchange of best practices and new knowledge creation not just within individual European Universities but across the alliances as a whole. Further research and innovation development would be advantaged by a dedicated European University R&I funding support mechanism within Framework 10. We would reiterate from our previous policy briefs that an EU joint degree mechanism for research programme degrees would facilitate alliances to deliver further on regional industry/academia partnerships in providing solutions to those issues facing European society. These degree programmes would be informed by Economic Resource/impact assessment models to set out research performance indicators (beyond publications) that define the measures of success and a broad range of impacts arising from successful professional practice-based research degrees including a cost-benefit analysis. The collaborative research degree programmes would be accredited, scalable, interdisciplinary, and focused on business and society development needs. To address challenges in the design of our European University research degree framework in those legal regulations and accreditation of master's and doctoral training, a basic structure has been agreed with admission and assessment guidelines for a general framework for joint research Doctoral and master's programmes across the alliance. We have incorporated the necessary elements to provide a clear transfer pathway from master's to doctoral degree for those master's level research projects that generate sufficient innovation to allow transfer to the Doctoral programme.

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?*

As we have articulated previously, reaping economic and societal rewards from investment in research is coincident with support systems for researchers allowing them to view research as a career within itself rather than solely a pathway to academia. This is compounded by the precarity of research funding required to support researcher career longevity. We believe that a model tenure-track system at European level specifically designed to support researcher career development is essential. The Research Career Development Training Programme developed by the RUN-EU PLUS project supports our research degree framework for researchers and adheres 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. Again as articulated previously career path structure models exemplified in innovation leaders as such as Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Netherlands and Luxemburg would be an excellent starting point in the design of the tenure track model for researchers with different model tracks for professional researchers, particularly advocating for those researcher supporting their regional and European industry collaborators with enterprise driven tracks TRL6-10 and the more traditional TRL1-5 research areas and disciplines.

- *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?*

We have also designed and implemented a pilot researcher career development evaluation tool. An essential element is that researchers develop strong competencies in research and transferable skills and the ability to plan their future career and learning paths. The competencies in research impact, research ethics and integrity form the essential foundation for further research skills development. Open Science skills and awareness of challenges in Gender and Diversity questions in different contexts are essential overlapping topics in which all RUN-EU researchers will grow their understanding. The RUN-EU PLUS Research and Career Evaluation System emphasizes the support for researchers on all stages of a researcher career path. The assessment tool-

- supports researcher competences, focusing particularly on practice-based research
- helps to identify and raise awareness of one's own expertise as a researcher
- supports researchers to conceptualize one's own skills and expertise
- helps researchers to identify training needs
- helps to assess own well-being and construct well-being of the community
- helps recruiters to assess a researcher's performance/developments at each of the researcher career stages
- is suitable for use at different researcher career stages, from doctoral researchers to senior researchers
- provides the structure for (some of) the professional development and supervision discussions, e.g., with the individual study plan
- improves equality in supervision
- supports identification of researcher career development domains and goals in writing funding proposals such as international EU funding project proposals
- supports discussions on developing and integrating the necessary career support services and training for researchers across our RUN- European University
- can be used flexibly thereby supporting strategic goals for researcher development at RUN-EU partner universities
- is useful both those researchers that are interested in an academic career or a career outside of academia, and for those whose goal is to develop a hybrid of both
- will be relatively easy and not too time consuming to use and can be integrated into work routines of researchers, research group leaders and HR function
- has clear user guidelines for all users
- offers regularly organized support workshops according to user needs
- can be implemented across the RUN-European University
- can be easily modified when needed and
- supports the systematic identification of gaps in existing career development activities.

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?

Accelerating alliance digital transitioning is a multi-faceted task and requires a combinatorial multi-faceted approach to maximise the alliance member skillsets. This includes common policies and procedures for implementation of University strategic goals and the associated supporting e-infrastructures for administrative activities e.g., such as research and knowledge and technology transfer offices, research and innovation hub cluster management and coordination, joint registration and supervision systems etc. In the Cloud of Knowledge Portal, developed within RUN EU PLUS, each researcher in the RUN-EU project has access to training materials which support career development, and their work may be displayed on this portal. The portal serves as a place where researchers can collaborate, share their progress, and highlight the impact of their work on society. This portal offers various resources like publications, training materials, and videos on topics important for researchers'

careers. Besides helping researchers progress their research career, the portal also encourages collaboration between different sectors and promotes networking for innovation. It aims to strengthen partnerships between academia and industry, and it will facilitate international cooperation on research practices and ethics. Valuing human research capital is evidential as a critical factor in reaping economic and societal rewards from investment in research.

The 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 the 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).

At a European level, the need to broaden research career development and concurrent evaluation criteria and to bring new elements to the research evaluation discussions are now advancing. International references, such as the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA), recognise the need to improve the ways in which researchers and the outputs of scholarly research are evaluated. '*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 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 Researcher Career Evaluation tool was developed to support researchers in identifying their own skills and expertise as a researcher. The tool will be implemented across the RUN-European University and is designed to help researchers identify training needs and develop their personal skills training plan for their chosen career path. The tool is suitable for use at different researcher career stages, from doctoral researchers to senior researchers and academic research staff. The tool provides the structure for professional development discussions between academic supervisors/research managers and early-stage researchers. It is designed to be relatively easy and not too time-consuming to use and may be used flexibly and modified to fit requirements.

Policy topic 4: access to excellence

- What is your advice on how to accelerate access to excellence in science and in value creation for all participants for higher education institutions across the entire 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'*. Together with the previously reported Collaborative Professional Practice-based Research Degree Programmes and Cloud of Knowledge Portal, we have also proposed an innovation detection scheme for potential innovations or innovators among local or alliance-wide partners, exploitation of associated interface services such as technology transfer services, innovation support staff and start-up incubators, the establishment of a mechanism to access new or existing research or industrial infrastructures and associated databases and new approaches to the establishment of co-operation arrangements. The development and implementation of the innovation detection system will be carried out in conjunction with the R&I Ambassadors network, and this will accelerate research and innovation development with the other ecosystem actors.

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

- Europe's relative weight at a global level when it comes to research-intensive universities is shrinking. Considering 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?

We have previously articulated the RUN EU envisaged European Zone of Inter-Regional Development (EZ-ID) as a central driver of an overall research and innovation regional ecosystem across the RUN-EU alliance. 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. This ecosystem will facilitate industry and enterprise access directly to the research and innovation skillsets of RUN-EU European innovation hubs allowing knowledge exchange between our best researchers and our regional employers specifically in the design and implementation to solution-based research projects and programmes designed by and with our regional industry and enterprise stakeholder with a view in societal and economic regional impact.

5. **Other recommendations**

We believe our current recommendations of the RUN-EU PLUS project are identified above.