

# EUROPEAN INITIATIVES - CHANCES FOR UNIVERSITIES

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## Abstract

*Universities play a central role in the development of their country. They produce and process knowledge and transmit this knowledge to the next generation, to the economy and to society at large. Universities need to take action in order to become even more successful players at local, regional, national, European and international level. Actions include modernisation in education, research and innovation. Special attention should be given to human resources management and doctoral training. European initiatives can act as a catalyst.*

*Key words: European Higher Education Area, European Research Area, modernising universities, EU programmes.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Universities are teaching, doing research and fostering innovation at local, national, European and international level. They are contributing substantially to the well-being of their region and country. Ideas born at universities can resonate throughout the European Research Area (ERA) and beyond. Students may find many places to study in the European Higher Education Area (Bologna) and further afield. From an EU perspective, universities are helping to build the 'Innovation Union' and reach the aims of the 'Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth'. The EU is an important source of funding for universities through programmes like Erasmus+, Horizon 2020 and the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). This paper points at chances for universities and actions they could undertake.

## 2 MODERNISING EDUCATION - BOLOGNA ACTION LINES - ERASMUS+

Universities have been challenged to rethink the way they operate by a number of European initiatives. The most well known and influential is the Bologna process, the most comprehensive is the EU Modernisation agenda.

Bologna requires the introduction of three cycles (bachelor, master, doctorate) with distinct durations and characteristics. Bologna is also about quality assurance, ECTS, Diploma Supplement, student-centred learning, employability, competitiveness, mobility, European dimension (double and joint degrees), connecting education and research (doctoral training), social dimension (widening access) and international dimension (attractiveness).

The EU Modernisation agenda has embraced the Bologna action lines and has put its own emphasis on good governance (balancing autonomy and accountability), appropriate funding (balancing public and private money), widening access (balancing excellence and equity), lifelong learning and educational innovation (OER and MOOCs).

Countries have defined National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), which describe the various levels of education and training, including the three levels of higher education, in terms of 'learning outcomes' or 'competences': what graduates know and can do. These definitions fit the Bologna- and EU Qualifications' Frameworks (EQF). Academics gathered in the 'Tuning' project have translated these general statements in subject-specific profiles, which can be used for re-writing curricula together with stakeholders.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu>

The Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020) offers many opportunities to engage in activities, which could help to modernise your university and bring your own ambitions in tune with Bologna.

#### Actions to consider

- *Do you encourage your students to stay or to look around after their bachelor?*
- *What mix of bachelor, master and doctorate programmes you want to offer at your institution?*
- *What numbers of students you hope to enrol, at the three levels, five years from now?*
- *How many part-time students would this entail? How to attract and retain them?*
- *How will you publicise your programmes nationally en internationally?*
- *Do you have recruitment strategy? And an overall communications strategy?*
- *What mix of selection mechanisms you want to apply (none, high school examination grades, internal or external tests, portfolios, interviews?)*
- *Will you offer one or more on-line courses? For on-campus students? For others?*
- *Do you involve external stakeholders (alumni, employers) in the development, enhancement and updating of courses?*
- *Have you developed courses in correspondence with your National Qualifications Framework?*
- *Do you apply the Tuning methodology?*
- *Do your students learn how to become entrepreneurs? As part of the curriculum?*
- *Do you keep track of your alumni?*
- *Would you or your institution consider joining garagErasmus?<sup>3</sup>*
- *Have you made a calendar of the upcoming Erasmus+ calls and steps to take?*
- *Do you have a list of potential partners for mobility and projects? What are your criteria?*
- *Do you allow your staff to visit Brussels (Commission and ACA seminars)?*
- *Do you attend the EAIE Annual Conference (this year in Prague 16-19 September 2014)?*
- *Has your institution volunteered to take part in U-Multirank?<sup>4</sup>*

### **3. MODERNISING RESEARCH AND INNOVATION - ERA PRIORITIES - HORIZON 2020 - EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL AND INVESTMENT FUNDS**

Universities are key players in research and innovation. They train the next generation of researchers and innovators and they help to find solutions for societal challenges such as climate change, healthy ageing and building innovative and inclusive societies. EU policies and programmes provide guidance and incentives. The main EU policy goal for research is to establish the European Research Area (ERA) *'in which researchers, scientific knowledge and technology circulate freely'* (art 179 of the EU Treaty). The ERA reform agenda consists of five big priorities:

- More effective national research systems;
- Optimal transnational co-operation and competition (on common research agendas, grand challenges and infrastructures);
- An open labour market for researchers (open recruitment, access and portability of grants, mobility information, innovative doctoral training, careers and HR strategies in line with Charter & Code, mobility between industry and academia, recognition, social security, pensions, visas);
- Gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research (encouraging gender diversity to foster science excellence and relevance);
- Optimal circulation and transfer of scientific knowledge (to guarantee access to and uptake of knowledge by all).

Horizon 2020 (2014-2020) is the world's largest framework programme for research and innovation. Horizon 2020 contains a wealth of opportunities for individuals with bright ideas (Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, European Research Council/ERC), companies (new SME instrument, access to risk finance etc.) and transnational teams of researchers (addressing societal challenges together).

<sup>3</sup> [www.garagerasmus.org](http://www.garagerasmus.org)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.u-portal.org/u-multirank>

The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) were designed to help less developed and transition regions catch up. In the new funding period, 2014-2020, the focus will be on education (skills) innovation, research and development. In 2014, each country will adopt a Smart Specialisation Strategy, sign an Agreement with the European Commission and adopt a Work Programme. ESIF funding can be combined with funding from other EU programmes like Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020.

Actions to consider

- *Have you matched your own research priorities against the societal challenges of Horizon 2020?*
- *Have you made a calendar of the upcoming Horizon 2020 calls and steps to take?*
- *Do you have a list of potential partners for projects? What are your criteria?*
- *Have you seen the Smart Specialisation Strategy of your region/country? Are there connections with what you do?*
- *Have you considered applying for an ERA Chair?*
- *Do you have a policy regarding Open innovation and knowledge transfer, including IP?<sup>5</sup>*
- *Have you compared the EU 'Code of Practice' of 2008 with the practices at your own institution?<sup>6</sup>*
- *Is your campus infrastructure the way you would like it to be?<sup>7</sup>*

#### 4 MODERN HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

The European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers are sets of principles and requirements, which specify the roles, responsibilities and entitlements of researchers as well as of employers and/or funders of researchers (Charter & Code).<sup>8</sup> 1200 organisations from 37 countries have endorsed the Charter & Code. More than 300 universities, research institutes and funders are currently participating in the 'Institutional Human Resources Strategy Group' peer review exercise based on the Charter & Code. So far 180 'HR Excellence in Research' logos have been awarded to acknowledge their efforts.<sup>9</sup> The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers consists of five steps:

1. An internal analysis by the participating research institution or funding organisation, involving all key players, to compare policies and practices against the Charter & Code principles;
2. On the basis of the results of this analysis, the participating institution or organisation develops its own HR strategy for researchers, which should include a concrete action plan. This document is made public;
3. The analysis and action plan are then reviewed and acknowledged by the European Commission. The acknowledgement implies the right to use the 'HR Excellence in Research' logo;
4. Progress in the implementation of the strategy and action plan is subjected to a self-assessment after 2 years;
5. An external evaluation is carried out at least every 4 years.

Researchers moving from one country to another risk losing part of their pension rights. The Commission supports employers of researchers (universities, institutes, companies) interested in setting up a Pan-European Pension Funds for Researchers in order to address this problem and position themselves as attractive employers. These volunteering institutions have created a Task Force.<sup>10</sup>

Actions to consider

- *Has your university (or rector's conference) formally endorsed the Charter and Code?*
- *Has your university adopted an Institutional Human Resources Strategy?*
- *Do you have a gender action plan?*

<sup>5</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/b1\\_studies-b5\\_web-publication\\_mainreport-kt\\_oi.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none](http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/b1_studies-b5_web-publication_mainreport-kt_oi.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none)  
[http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/b1\\_studies-a4\\_web-publication\\_appendix-kt\\_oi.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none](http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/b1_studies-a4_web-publication_appendix-kt_oi.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none)

<sup>6</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/ip\\_recommendation\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/ip_recommendation_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://managingtheuniversitycampus.nl>

<sup>8</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4Researcher>

<sup>9</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4Researcher>

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- *Do you publish all your vacancies on Euraxess Jobs?<sup>11</sup>*
- *Would you consider recruitment at your university as open, transparent and merit based?*
- *Do you provide career guidance and outplacement services?*
- *Do you offer tenure tracks?*
- *Could your university consider joining the Pan-European Pension Funds for Researchers?*

## 5 A PIVOTAL ROLE FOR DOCTORAL TRAINING

Doctoral degree holders are crucial to the knowledge society. Their critical minds and innovative competences are highly valued by employers. Most fulfil important positions outside academia. The EU will need at least an estimated one million new research jobs in order to increase the research intensity of our economies and reach the R&D target of 3% of GDP spending. Universities are changing the way they train doctoral candidates. Inspiration is drawn from the Salzburg Recommendations of EUA<sup>12</sup> and the related EU Principles for Innovative Doctoral training.<sup>13</sup> The EU Principles refer to:

*1) Research Excellence; 2) Attractive Institutional Environment (in line with the Charter & Code); 3) Interdisciplinary Research Options; 4) Exposure to industry and other relevant employment sectors; 5) International networking; 6) Transferable skills training; 7) Quality Assurance.*

Erasmus+ supports the mobility of doctoral candidates as third cycle students. Horizon 2020 provides grants for doctoral candidates under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions. Doctoral candidates also benefit, as team members, from other Horizon 2020 grants (ERC, Societal Challenges). Programmes for doctoral candidates are also set up and funded locally and nationally, often with the support of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF).

### Actions to consider

- *Has your university a policy for doctoral education, covering issues like publicising posts, selection of candidates, joint training activities, international mobility, dialogue with industry and other relevant employment sectors.*
- *What percentage of doctoral candidates come from other institutions/countries? Is recruitment open, transparent and merit based? Have you considered limiting local intake to, for instance, one third of places available?*
- *What mix of selection mechanisms do you apply?*
- *Do you have one doctoral programme/school/institute or several? What does the school do?*
- *Do you organise doctoral training together with other universities in your country or abroad?*
- *Is your institution partner in a joint or double degree programme? Funded by Erasmus Mundus (in future Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions) or from other sources?*
- *Have you considered joining the Council for Doctoral Education (CDE) of EUA?*
- *Are you active in other transnational university networks of universities like Coimbra, Compostela Group, Santander Group, ECIU, LERU, Utrecht Group.*

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<sup>11</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/jobs/index>

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.eua.be/Libraries/Publications\\_homepage\\_list/Salzburg\\_II\\_Recommendations.sflb.ashx](http://www.eua.be/Libraries/Publications_homepage_list/Salzburg_II_Recommendations.sflb.ashx)

<sup>13</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research\\_policies/Principles\\_for\\_Innovative\\_Doctoral\\_Training.pf](http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/Principles_for_Innovative_Doctoral_Training.pf), endorsed by the EU Council of Ministers in November 2011  
[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/126375.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/126375.pdf)