



**Innovation Union, the European Research Area and the role of
Universities of Applied Science**

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Thank you for this opportunity to present the policy developments prepared by the European Commission in the fields of research and innovation, which are of course of direct interest to the Universities of Applied Sciences.

I have some familiarity with the subject matter, since until recently I was working in the Directorate General for Research of the European Commission. I said "until recently", because, not only have I moved this month to Marseille, to represent the European Commission there, but my former DG has changed name on the 1st of January and is now called DG Research and Innovation.

This means that DG Research – and Innovation – is moving closer to the main interests of Universities of Applied Sciences.

The Commission is very much focused on bringing research closer to the market. We must ensure a full web of innovation, including basic research, applied research, engineering, design, education, training and social innovation.

Universities of Applied Sciences are very well positioned in this web of innovation. Most of Europe's highly skilled workers are trained in your institutions and demand is likely to increase in the years ahead.

The Universities of Applied Sciences are well positioned, because you are traditionally close to the world of business and industry, in particular small and medium sized companies.

You can provide solutions, which are tailor made to the needs of local industry and not only industry, but also the public sector or NGOs, schools or hospitals, depending on the field of study.

I would like to briefly introduce you to what the Commission has in store with its initiatives for the Innovation Union and the European Research Area. I will also say something on the consultation on our future funding schemes and the upcoming communication on universities.

What?

As you know, the European Commission has launched the Europe 2020 Strategy for Jobs and Growth, which was approved by Member States last year. It is an ambitious agenda to get the European economy back on track. Innovation is at the core of this strategy.

Europe 2020 emphasises that research and innovation have an economic rationale – they are the key to growth and job creation in the long term. In addition, they are also the key to tackle the major challenges faced by our society: fighting climate change, using our scarce resources better and caring for an ageing population, etc.

Europe 2020 is being implemented by seven so-called "Flagship Initiatives". Most relevant for the Universities of Applied Sciences are the Flagships on skills and jobs, mobile youth, the digital agenda – and Innovation Union.

The Innovation Union Flagship was launched on 6 October last year. It proposes a comprehensive set of actions with the overall aim of making the European Union an "Innovation Union".

Research is only the start. The Innovation Union Flagship aims to strengthen every link in the Innovation web, from the "frontier" or "blue sky" research to the successful transfer of such research into commercial products and services. In other words, the objective is to smooth the paths from the lab to the market.

How?

We have to create an attractive environment in Europe, focusing on the key framework conditions: easier access to finance for SMEs, faster standard setting, more affordable Intellectual Property Rights and a genuine European knowledge market. Other key initiatives will reinforce the EU-wide operation of Venture Capital and to facilitate public procurement of innovative products and services.

An important part of the Innovation Union is to ensure the free flow of knowledge across the continent and beyond. For this, the Commission intends to propose a framework to complete the European Research Area. This was endorsed last month by the European Council. It called for completing the European Research Area by 2014.

The Commission proposal for an ERA Framework may include legislative measures as well as support measures. It may cover a range of topics such as: high quality doctoral training, attractive employment conditions, open recruitment, comparable research careers, European supplementary pension funds, open access to publications; and cross-border cooperation.

Some examples

The pan-European Pension Fund for researchers, for example, will be a new initiative, but building on already existing EU legislation. Such a fund would permit research- performing organisations to offer an attractive package to their researchers and facilitate their mobility.

The Commission will also propose a European Framework for Research Careers. This framework will be voluntary, but it will provide coherence across the multitude of job titles in use in the European Research Area. This should make it easier to compare career structures and thereby facilitate and increase mobility between academia, industry and other sectors.

I also would also like to mention the excellent work being done by EURAXESS. This is a service for researchers which includes more than 200 Service Centres in 37 countries, providing practical assistance to mobile researchers. There is also an online portal, the EURAXESS Jobs Portal, which has recently concluded cooperation agreements with "Nature Jobs", Philips and Nokia. It currently offers over 5,000 new jobs to researchers in academia and industry.

Money matters

Before the summer, the Commission will announce its views on what we call the Multiannual Financial Framework, in other words the broad envelope and orientations for the EU budget as from 2014. I cannot tell you what our proposals will be, but it is clear that a credible, modern and forward looking EU Budget needs to have research and innovation as a core component.

After this, the Commission will propose before the end of the year what is called the Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation funding. This will be the successor to FP7, but also to the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme and the funding basis for the European Institute of Innovation and Technology. These three components will thus be brought together in order to ensure full coherence and close interactions between all the elements of EU support to research and innovation. The Commission is currently consulting stakeholders on this future framework, on the basis of a Green Paper. The consultation ends on 20 May. I hope that we can count on your constructive contribution to this consultation.

Simplification

The Commission is absolutely determined to make it easier for researchers and companies to access European funding for research and innovation. The system is currently too complex, even though we have taken important steps to simplify as much as possible within the current legal frame. Simplifying further is therefore one of our top priorities for the new framework. This should be important for all actors, but in particular for SMEs and also, of course, for Universities of Applied Sciences.

Coherence across levels

We also want to better align our research programmes with national and regional R&D and innovation programmes. Both the EU and Member States need to demonstrate to taxpayers that we are getting the best value for money from every Euro spent, no matter where that Euro is coming from. And this requires much better coordination across borders and across levels.

Role of Universities of Applied Sciences

The Commission welcomes very much the engagement of your universities in applied research. We believe that your universities have the potential to be important Innovation Centres for their regions, sharing knowledge with enterprises, engaging in start-ups and spin-offs, etc.

That said, we are not promoting any single model. Not all institutions should seek the same role or the same profile. Some institutions will focus more on teaching, others more on research. What we need is a diversified landscape of high-quality universities. This will be one of the key principles behind the new Communication on Universities that the Commission is preparing for this autumn. I am sure that EURASHE and its members will have a lot to contribute in this respect.

Thank you for your attention.