

Position paper on Research and Innovation



Ministerial meeting in Bucharest
26-27 April 2012



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Introduction

EURASHE and UASnet have jointly developed their vision and strategy on Research and Innovation for presentation at the forthcoming meeting of the Ministers of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in Bucharest on 26-27 April 2012.

EURASHE is the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education that offer professionally-oriented programmes and are engaged in applied and profession-related research within the 3 Bologna cycles. Currently, more than 1,200 higher education institutions are affiliated to EURASHE. EURASHE has its membership in 47 countries within and outside the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Membership is mostly through National Associations of Higher Education Institutions and Individual Institutions (HEIs), such as Universities, University Colleges and Universities of Applied Sciences, as well as through other professional associations and stakeholder organisations active in the field of higher education.

UASnet situates the Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) from 10 European countries. Throughout the network, each member is represented by the corresponding national rectors' conference. Partners cooperate in promoting and strengthening the integration and contribution of the UAS sector within the research and innovation strategy of the European Union. The network of this informal group focuses on applied research and the innovation and valorisation of strengths within the UAS throughout Europe. The partners in UASnet are from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Flanders (Belgium), France, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal and Switzerland.

Seven of the national rectors' conferences are members of EURASHE. In 2010, EURASHE and UASnet signed a *Memorandum of Cooperation*, based on the complementarity that exists between UASnet and EURASHE.

1) General context

Pre-eminently, the development of a European knowledge area is crucial in our wish to sustain, and further develop, the welfare and prosperity of European citizens. The development of new economic powers (BRIC-countries and others) in the face of diminishing natural resources, drives Europe towards its most powerful resources, which are knowledge, and the power to innovate. As the systems of production and processing of goods are moving towards other parts of the world, Europe is seeking for a new and intensified role as a technical innovator at various levels of input, performance and outcome.

2) Overarching policies

So that we may succeed towards bringing about a sustainable, knowledge-intensive and innovation-oriented economy, it is strategically vital for there to be an overall economic policy with a clear vision on the future development of Europe as an economic power. European policies on education, innovation and research, regional development and entrepreneurship should be in place and positioned to support the above vision for the future. Education can play a leading role in steering and monitoring high-impact initiatives, such as overseeing the implementation of new instruments for lifelong learning and knowledge transfer in tertiary education. Ministers of Education, dedicated to this task and high-level research, will be crucial to support this re-intensification.

The Education and Research Ministers, in the 2009 Leuven Communiqué stated:

Our societies currently face the consequences of a global financial and economic crisis. In order to bring about sustainable economic recovery and development, a dynamic and flexible European higher education will strive for innovation on the basis of the integration between education and research at all levels. We

recognise that higher education has a key role to play if we are to successfully meet the challenges we face and if we are to promote the cultural and social development of our societies. Therefore, we consider public investment in higher education of utmost priority.

3) Specific context of the Universities of Applied Sciences

As professionally-oriented higher education institutions within the Bologna process, the specific role of Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) is that they should all be involved in applied research, innovation, impact-driven (and market-oriented) knowledge creation and knowledge transfer, in close cooperation with stakeholders. It is therefore imperative that all tertiary education has a link with research and innovation. The 2009 Leuven Communiqué clearly stated that:

Higher education should be based at all levels on state of the art research and development thus fostering innovation and creativity in society. We recognise the potential of higher education programmes, including those based on applied science, to foster innovation. Consequently, the number of people with research competences should increase.

The Bucharest Communiqué should therefore re-iterate that research and development are necessary at all tertiary levels and phases of lifelong learning, whilst also emphasising that education programmes based on applied sciences have particularly important potential in nurturing innovation. Because of the large number of students in the UAS in Europe and the important social role and function they have in many countries, the Universities of Applied Sciences are evidently well-placed to increase the number of individuals with research competences.

4) Joint Position of EURASHE and UASnet

We recommend that within regional, national and European funding mechanisms, the specific characteristics and deliverables of applied research are specifically targeted for development. So that the UAS, aided by the world of work – public and private sectors – is able to play its legitimate role, that of delivering effective innovation, selection and evaluation criteria should be finely tuned in the identification of, and awarding to, the highest quality *applied research* proposals. In this way a fully-confident reinforcing approach to research and innovation could be established for the benefit of a progressive and increasing European membership and its society at large.

It is also essential that the specific character of the UAS sector, its specific kind of associated research and innovation, and the network of institutions are recognised in the new policies. The European partners working together in the UASnet have completed a first exploratory investigation into developing indicators for applied research in the Eduprof project. This investigation has been supported by the European Commission.

We believe that professional higher education, and universities of applied sciences in particular, are ideally placed to partner with DG Research and Innovation (EC) in the delivery of the *Innovation Union* agenda:

- first, with a focus on full-time and continuing professional higher education to meet the high-level skills' needs of the regions (in such diversely important fields as Economics, Business and Management, Teacher Training, Engineering, Social work, Health Care, Fine and Performing Arts and Agriculture);
- second, with a growing emphasis on engaging in applied research and innovation with SMEs, public institutions, the not-for-profit and social-profit sectors.

Based on our experience **we propose** the following three key targets in the new research and innovation programmes of the European Union:

- ensuring a high impact-driven orientation;
- offering EU leverage for regional innovation alliances and
- changing the rules of participation, which makes it possible to participate in small-scale programmes and enter at any stage of a project's lifetime.

EURASHE and UASnet urge the European policymakers to incorporate the following 4 priorities into their new strategies in order to ensure a high impact-driven orientation and to facilitate the formation of innovation networks in the new national and European programmes.

For economic prosperity: unleashing the innovation potential of high technology and non-high-tech SMEs from the region onto the European level, through connecting regions of knowledge by smart specialisation.

For societal welfare: supporting public institutions, the not-for-profit sector and the social-profit sector, such as hospitals, child-care institutes and municipalities in cross-border collaboration and social innovation, so as to address the great European challenges, for example, healthy ageing, climate control and urbanisation.

For a sustainable innovation basis: translating innovation and research results into the higher education of professionals, involving both initial and lifelong learners.

For sustainable innovation creativity and dissemination: investing in building European alliances of SMEs, public institutions, the not-for-profit sector and the social-profit sector, regional authorities, RTOs, UAS and complementary knowledge institutes.

The Universities of Applied Sciences see it as their mission to realise these goals for Europe by offering the combined efforts of Higher Education and Applied Research in delivering highly-skilled professionals and innovative projects for the benefit of European society.

5) Our Recommendations

On the level of the Institutions

- Develop research capacity and link to educational practice
- Build networks in the region, with industry, with not-for-profit, with the SME sector
- Develop the key role in evidence-based and high impact-driven research
- Involve teaching staff and students in the projects
- Spearhead action without the prevention of all educational programmes being linked to research.

For Collective action

- Compile an inventory of the strong points of the members and the regions they represent
- Develop clear and simple indicators for specific kinds of research and innovation
- Collect best practices, and testimonials of partners
- Discuss the spearheaded action and the influence on the overall educational practice.

On the level of Policy makers

Connect member states and regions:

- Find ways for European funds to act as a leverage for better collaboration between member states and complementary sources of public and private funding, with a specific focus on high impact-driven innovation and research projects. The prerequisite to develop and deliver a successful implementation is to stimulate the forming of European alliances in Applied Research which enables the dissemination of good practices both in education and applied research throughout Europe.

Introduce new performance indicators:

- EURASHE and UASnet favour the development of a framework in which proposals are judged in terms of expected output in 4 research domains: science, education, society and the professions. The Report of the UASnet partners on 'developing indicators for Applied Research' can be used at the outset.

Involve the whole innovation cycle:

- Concomitant to a stronger focus on the above 4 domains, is the investing in pre- and post-project time, which is essential to cater for the fast-changing demands within the world of work. This will stimulate the building of stronger knowledge alliances between SMEs, public organisations, regions, RTOs and UAS throughout Europe. With a better impact-driven approach, translation into education, and broader dissemination will result.

Involve SMEs:

- EURASHE and UASnet see the need to better involve those enterprises and organisations that experience a need to innovate, but do not have an extensive R&D infrastructure in place.

Align Education, Structural and Framework Funds and Cohesion Funds:

- EURASHE and UASnet expect that a smart combination of these European funds will help to cater for a fast response to the innovation and research needs of the world of work.

Strengthening the Marie Curie programme:

- EURASHE and UASnet favour investing in professional and industrial PhDs, in order to deliver into Europe a new generation of high impact-driven researchers.

Conclusions

EURASHE and UASnet believe that part of the mission of HEIs is to focus on innovation, applied research and the specific role of professionally-oriented higher education in the knowledge-based society. They feel they are well placed to do so, given their track record of educating employable students in a variety of disciplines, and their continued focus on developing entrepreneurial skills.

The economic crisis that is also affecting European society, should be seen as a challenge to be overcome by means of continued and focused investment in what are our most precious assets, those of knowledge and expertise, gained through high-level education and training.

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