



Innovative Leadership and Change Management in Higher Education

NEWLEAD project

Call for participation in the focus groups on leadership development and institutional transformation

Deadline: 31 January 2022

This call offers an opportunity for senior leaders at European higher education institutions to further enhance their leadership skills by discussing and reflecting on disruptive transformation at their institutions. The two NEWLEAD focus groups will enable mutual learning and support senior leaders in higher education who are seeking to become more agile, creative and innovative. The groups will also provide opportunities to exchange on institutional leadership development set-ups and tools used to advance institutional transformation.

The intention is to organise the focus groups in a physical format, as follows:

- **31 March-1 April 2022 at University Ramon Llull in Barcelona**
- **2-3 June 2022 at the University of Iceland in Reykjavik**

Should the pandemic prevent the organisation of the physical events, they would take place in a hybrid or online format.

1. The background and objectives of the focus groups

Across Europe, higher education has experienced significant change in recent decades. New technologies, demographic changes, the transition from elitist to mass higher education, the impact of the Bologna Process reforms, evolving labour market requirements and financial constraints all have been challenging universities, pushing them to constantly adapt and rethink their strategies and operations.

Since early 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a further impact on higher education institutions, forcing them to expand their online learning and teaching offer in a very short time. Alongside other structural changes and reforms, the pandemic has certainly been a testing board for the leadership skills of senior executives. More than ever, this crisis has shed light on the need to invest in the capacity of university leaders to address institutional transformation in a fast-changing and radically disrupted context.

It is against this background that the project "[Innovative Leadership and Change Management in Higher Education](#)" - NEWLEAD was launched in the autumn of 2020. The project, which will run until 2023, is supported by the European Commission's Erasmus+ Programme. It aims to enable leaders and senior managers at universities to successfully steer complex institutional transformation agendas. Led by University Ramon Llull (URL), in partnership with the European University Association (EUA), the consortium includes the Conference of



Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland (CRASP), ESCP Business School, the University of Iceland, the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) and the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities (CRUE). The project also benefits from the support of several associate partners, namely the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI) and the Polish Rectors Foundation.

Surveys recently conducted under the NEWLEAD project reveal that the essential skills for a higher education executive head include being a good communicator, being open-minded, knowing how to address conflict and being resilient. Alongside such personal competences, technical skills (such as project management) and strategic skills (e.g., decision-making, the ability to steer change and cope with crisis management) were also considered to be very important.

However, leadership development opportunities for higher education executives remain in short supply across Europe. Leaders are often expected to develop on the way to the position or through interactions in research groups and participation in organisational units.

The NEWLEAD focus groups are aimed at higher education executives who are interested in further enhancing their leadership skills. By addressing disruptive transformation seen through the lenses of themes central to higher education today, the focus groups will analyse concrete and pertinent issues that higher education leaders must address in order to ensure the success of their institutions. The focus groups will enable mutual learning and support senior leaders in higher education seeking to become more agile, creative and innovative.

2. Concept and methodology

The focus groups will tackle disruptive transformation at universities, seen through the prism of several themes of vital interest for universities today.

Suggested themes include:

- Female leadership in higher education
- Equity, diversity and social inclusion
- Sustainability and greening agendas at universities
- International collaboration (e.g., the European Universities Initiative)
- Evolving labour market needs
- Service to society

The participants will reflect on the topics with an eye on disruptive transformation. They will analyse and discuss the themes by looking at the challenges that they bring about in terms of:

- Efficiency, effectiveness and value for money
- Effective governance (i.e., how institutional governing bodies and strategic and operational leadership work together to tackle change)
- Leadership (focusing on senior university representatives, including both academic and non-academic roles and the related possible synergies and tensions)

Work in the focus groups will be based on guidance and reports derived from the NEWLEAD project (such as the recently published [report on institutional transformation and leadership development](#)), and from previous EUA work on the topic.

Different formats will be used within the focus groups, including moderated discussions, alongside group work on some of the issues pertaining to disruptive transformation. Reflective conversations will help assess how higher education leaders and institutions can be better prepared to address specific challenges in higher education.



The groups will work towards identifying key points for successful implementation of some of the disruptive transformation themes at universities and the sort of leadership training that is needed to underpin such transformation. This will result in a collection of examples, practices, workbooks, strategies and resources in creative and innovative leadership in higher education.

3. Profile of applicants

To ensure the quality of interactions and the depth of analysis, each focus group aims to gather between 15-25 participants.

The focus groups are based on an inclusive approach to leadership and are designed for various senior profiles at higher education institutions in Europe.

The focus groups primarily target members of the executive leadership team at universities, with both academic (such as rector, vice-rector/pro-rector, dean, head of faculty department, etc.) and non-academic profiles (such as head of administration, director general, chief operating officer and directors of finance, human resources, communications and research).

4. Eligibility and selection

The selection will be made according to the following criteria:

- Motivation to participate in the focus groups
- Diversity of profiles in terms of experience, gender, age, type of institution, etc.
- Overall geographical balance

Applicants interested in participating in this call are invited to fill in [the online application](#) by **31 January 2022**.

Please note that applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis, hence we encourage you to apply as early as possible.

For further information and questions, please write to newlead@eua.eu

The results of the selection will be communicated to all applicants via email by 15 February 2022 at the latest.

5. Terms and conditions for participation

Selected participants commit to actively taking part in the focus group.

The focus group organisers will ensure and implement all Covid-19 safety standards in line with the rules of the country hosting the focus group.

No fee will be charged for attending the focus groups. Selected participants will take part in the focus group on a self-funded basis and will be responsible for organising and covering their own travel and accommodation.

During the focus groups, lunches and coffee breaks will be covered by the host.