

Designing the European Innovation Council for the benefit of society: Recommendations from European universities

The European University Association (EUA) appreciates the European Commission's efforts in fostering innovation in Europe. It welcomes the ongoing discussion on designing the European Innovation Council (EIC) for the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (Horizon Europe), as expressed through the [EIC pilot](#) in Horizon 2020 and the [report of the High-Level Group of Innovators](#). Building on a review of [EUA's initial 2016 response](#) to the Commission's call for ideas on designing an EIC, EUA believes that a comprehensive strategy for facilitating well-functioning regional, national and European innovation ecosystems, and for strategically addressing the barriers to investment in innovative business opportunities is, indeed, needed. In this regard it is of utmost importance to ensure the complementarity of and fit between European, intergovernmental and national initiatives that are currently being developed in a number of countries such as [France](#) and [Germany](#).

From EUA's perspective, the EIC's main mission in Horizon Europe should be the enhancement of Europe's societal welfare and competitiveness through research-based knowledge and help in creating jobs with high added-value through driving innovation in its broadest sense. It should be open to beneficiaries from all sectors and should take into account the strong relation between investment in innovation deriving from research, investment in the development of highly-skilled human talent and the resulting economic and social innovation. Education and training should be an integral part of European innovation policies.

The future outlook for the EIC below is based on the points outlined in more detail in the second part of the document, which were developed by EUA's members and its Research Policy Working Group (RPWG).

Looking ahead: future perspectives and potential achievements of the EIC

To assess its potential success, EUA suggests the following integral elements for a long-term, comprehensive performance review of the EIC:

- **Reaching the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals:** Through a broad approach to supporting the complete bandwidth of innovation, the EIC should become an instrument for reaching the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It should contribute to both tech- and science-related goals, such as ending hunger or affordable and clean energy, as well as economic and societal goals, such as ending poverty, gender equality or peace, justice and strong institutions. The unique cultural diversity across Europe and its cultural heritage should also be addressed within comprehensive policies for research and innovation.

- **Educating and training the next generation of entrepreneurs and highly-skilled citizens:** The EIC should strengthen and broadly communicate about its investments in university efforts towards building Europe's talent base in all fields of breakthrough innovation, ranging from technological to non-technological, social and cultural innovation. This should be done through instruments such as innovation awards, inducement and recognition prizes and fellowship schemes. These measures will further enable universities to play a fundamental role in equipping their graduates with the necessary knowledge, skills and a broad mindset to innovate across all areas, thus strengthening Europe's societal cohesion, shared values and economic competitiveness.
- **Increasing the number of start-ups and spin-offs:** The EIC should increase the overall number of start-ups and spin-offs based at universities and provide financial support to scale them up. Shared facilities among universities, their start-ups and spin-offs that are also open to industry need to be supported as well. A major proportion of funding should be based on grants, while loans and equity instruments should be reserved for suitable, large scale-up activities. The EIC would hence be able to create numerous jobs and novel companies across Europe.
- **Exploring innovative and responsible monitoring mechanisms:** Progress should be monitored corresponding to the broad nature of the objectives for the EIC. Monitoring should be based on quantitative and qualitative metrics and views of experts from all sectors. This would lead to transparent and strong narratives with numbers.

EUA's views and recommendations are based on the following rationale:

A Innovation from a university perspective

- From a university perspective, innovation is a broad concept in which research and innovation are an integral part of the innovation value chain that generates societal well-being, i.e. research generates knowledge, and innovation creates value from this knowledge, which can be economic, social, educational or cultural in nature.
- Universities have played and continue to play a critical role in innovation, at regional, national and international levels. Universities educate the future workforce, are engines for the development of new ideas through both basic and applied research and connect to and collaborate with a variety of external actors in the innovation ecosystem (e.g. businesses, public and private organisations) to solve societal challenges.

B Goals and objectives of the EIC

- The EIC would be most useful as a coordinating body, integrating all European Commission policies on innovation, and streamlining existing instruments to address the whole bandwidth of innovation, while taking into account that innovation often emerges from non-linear processes. The obstacles to fully realising Europe's innovation potential should be addressed with comprehensive policies.

- All forms of innovation are important to address current and future societal challenges. The EIC should, therefore, take a strategic role in providing advice on the creation, sustainability and coordination of European innovation ecosystems. It should consider commercially viable innovation, as well as social and cultural innovation. The EIC should promote excellent, research-based innovation to create or further develop markets, for the benefit of society at large.
- At a time of low public research investment in Europe, it is essential that the funding allocated to research is preserved, specifically the budget of Pillars 1 and 3 from Horizon 2020 and its successor programme. EUA hence considers that the EIC should receive fresh funds without repercussions for other programme sections.
- The EIC should cover all areas of innovation, including all disciplinary fields and sectors, encompass education and training and promote an entrepreneurial culture across Europe. A long-term vision on training and education and correspondingly ambitious funding perspectives are crucial aspects in fostering entrepreneurial mindsets across Europe. The EIC must be based on a bottom-up approach without predetermining specific fields for support. It should identify and address bottlenecks for innovation that are related to legal frameworks and economic and social environments.
- The governance of the EIC should include representatives of all relevant public and private sectors. Its decisions should be based on transparent, holistic evaluation and selection procedures by qualified peers combining quantitative and qualitative elements. A portfolio approach assessing the overall coherence of collaborative projects should be explored.
- The goal of the EIC should be to complement, and not overlap with or duplicate other existing national and EU bodies. The EIC should further align existing support instruments for innovation in different EU funds (e.g. European Fund for Strategic Investments, European Structural and Investment Funds) beyond the current EIC pilot in Horizon 2020 (i.e. the SME instrument, Fast Track to Innovation, FET Open and Horizon prizes).
- Across the European funding landscape, it is crucial to establish a clear relationship between the EIC and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) by linking its Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) to the EIC. This will facilitate market uptake of research-based innovation in a coordinated and sustainable way.
- With a view to accelerating the translation of research results into products and services, the EIC should foster closer cooperation between academia, industry and research and technology organisations. It should provide strategic advice to regional and national authorities in developing and sustaining innovation ecosystems. It should also encourage collaborative projects across Europe, to help close the gap between different European regions.
- The EIC should include dedicated funding streams for supporting intersectoral mobility of entrepreneurial students and early-career researchers to establish partnerships with industry, digital companies, small and medium-sized enterprises and to access networks across sectors. These funding streams should also foster linkages with public bodies and the social sector as public and social innovation are important elements for increasing the well-being of citizens and the resilience of society at large.

C The EIC's role in strengthening links between education, research and innovation

- Universities' crucial role in innovation ecosystems lies in their performance in basic and applied research and in educating and training students with high-level skills, who enter the job market and enrich the human resources of public and private organisations of all shapes and sizes.
- To fully exploit the potential of the innovative capacities of universities, the EIC should further foster mutual exchange of personnel between industry and academia and advocate for minimising existing legal and bureaucratic barriers.
- The EIC should build on and learn from existing good practices within universities and in their collaborative research with large companies, small and medium-sized enterprises and research and technology organisations. It should also consider successful instruments at the national level, such as the [Connecting Capability Initiative](#) in the UK which supports cooperating groups of universities with innovative commercialisation schemes.
- The EIC should support existing initiatives on university campuses, such as Junior Enterprises, that offer students opportunities to develop their innovative ideas with guidance from professors and entrepreneurs. These efforts could be leveraged by introducing EIC fellowship schemes and innovation awards. More generally, the EIC should encourage universities in augmenting entrepreneurial training in teaching curricula and research projects.

EUA has engaged in a consultation with its members and with its Research Policy Working Group (RPWG) to develop this position. The RPWG advises the EUA Board and Council on European research and innovation policy matters. The EUA Council is comprised of the President, the members of the Board, and of the presidents of Europe's national rectors' conferences (NRCs). EUA is the representative organisation of more than 800 universities in 47 European countries and 33 NRCs.

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