

POLICY INPUT

Enhancing research security in Europe

European University Association input to the European Commission's call for evidence on 'Boosting research security in the EU'

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Universities are by nature internationally-oriented institutions. Europe's universities recognise the challenges to security, ethics and integrity that are inherent in their global activities. Indeed, many have established good practices at national and institutional level to manage these risks in order to continue broad international cooperation in a responsible manner.

It is vital for Europe's standing in the international research community that central values regarding academic freedom, universities' institutional autonomy, ethics and integrity are upheld within the European research and education system.

In this spirit, the European University Association (EUA) welcomes the European Commission's initiative on research security in Europe. The main elements of the initiative are sound and conducive to responsible internationalisation. Many of the topics have already been dealt with in the Commission's 'Global Approach to Cooperation in Research and Innovation' from 2021. Further details on EUA's perspective on these policies can be found in the the Association's previous [Policy Input](#) and [Response](#) to the Global Approach.

Open cooperation must be the default option as already defined in the European Commission's Global Approach. Openness should be responsible, with proportional measures to counter risks, in the relatively small number of cases where these are present. The principle of proportionality mentioned in the call for evidence should be operationalised through fine-grained assessment of concrete and identifiable risks, as well as actions to avoid these risks. Avoiding risks does not necessarily exclude cooperation. Rather, it can be done through various, concrete arrangements, for example, by implementing stricter cybersecurity measures in specific contexts.

Moreover, the risk of non-cooperation should be taken into account. Expanding the boundaries of scientific knowledge is becoming increasingly resource intensive, and therefore requires cooperation. Excluding or drastically limiting the scope for global partnerships will in many cases mean that discoveries will not be made and science-based solutions will not be found.

Identifying risks in the areas of security, ethics and integrity can only be done in close dialogue between authorities, universities and the academic community that is developing collaborations in practice. The central instrument must be universities' self-governance, as this is the place where policies can be efficiently developed and implemented. Clear principles and responsibilities must be agreed within the wider community of stakeholders, including researchers, universities and security agencies.

EUA welcomes the emphasis on support for developing and strengthening risk management within universities and other higher education and research-performing institutions. Resources are needed for institutional development and sharing of good practices. Different actors in the security field have diverse knowledge and specialisations, and synergies between these will only happen in a constructive dialogue.

How exactly this is facilitated, must be considered at the level of individual institutions, within networks and organisations and between systems, given also the differences in governance, organisational structure, and approaches towards internationalisation. Reflections and actions at European and national level, but also by organisations and networks, are definitely of added value. Raising awareness, exchange of information and good practice are enablers of open and responsible collaboration.

The initiative should also recognise the role that cooperation in research and education plays for building bridges and creating inter-cultural understanding. Here, universities have an important mission. For these bridges to work, they must not be instrumentalised for non-academic purposes, nor made too narrow, as this would impede this vital role of universities in the world.

Moreover, the concept of research security must entail intercultural competences in the application ethics policies, in particular, as well as awareness of risks to academic partners outside Europe.

Regarding policies at the European level, the aim of consistency should also apply to the place of the research security initiative in the larger picture of the economic security strategy and the aim of open strategic autonomy. The initiative, with a strong emphasis on open and responsible cooperation, should set the tone for these policies regarding EU's global role in research and education.

EUA DOCUMENTS FOR FURTHER READING:

[Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik, Thomas E. Jørgensen, Henriette Stöber et al. \(2020\), *International strategic institutional partnerships and the European Universities Initiative*, EUA](#)

[EUA \(2021\), *A global approach to research, innovation, education and youth. EUA input to the European Commission Communication Response to Global Approach*](#)

[EUA \(2021\), *Research and innovation as drivers of open international cooperation. EUA response to the European Commission Communication on a Global Approach to Research and Innovation*](#)