

EUA STATEMENT

The future of innovation ecosystems: recommendations from the European Smart Specialisation Workshop

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The next six months will be an important period for policy makers, the university sector and many other stakeholders engaged in Research and Innovation Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3). With the ongoing preparations for the EU's 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework, the [European Workshop on Smart Specialisation](#), entitled "Universities as Regional Lead Institutions", held under the auspices of the Austrian Presidency of the EU Council, provided an opportunity to take stock of past achievements and identify emerging priorities for building successful European innovation ecosystems in the post-2020 period.

In this document, EUA presents the main messages and recommendations on the role of universities in this context and the need for them to contribute to innovation, building on the [key factors](#) identified by EUA for successful Smart Specialisation Strategies. The present messages and recommendations are complementary to the [conclusions](#) of the 9th Week of Innovative Regions in Europe (WIRE), which were endorsed by the audience of the workshop.

HUMAN TALENT AS CATALYST OF INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS

As human talent is the cornerstone of innovation, an enhanced focus on education and training to develop talented people is needed. Skills such as entrepreneurship, technology and social awareness, identification of business opportunities, idea generation, risk taking and networking are indispensable to ensure the capacity for cities, regions and countries to innovate in the long term.

Universities have an essential role in developing, attracting and retaining human talent in their innovation ecosystems. They not only provide curricula in multiple areas, but also develop soft skills and stimulate the entrepreneurial mindset of their students and staff. The provision of skills for innovation, in addition to technological undertakings, should be one of the main areas of support of the European Structural and Investment Funds.

STRONG LINKS BETWEEN EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION AS A KEY FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Investing in reinforcing the links between education, research and innovation is essential for societal and economic development. The connection should be reflected in all funding programmes and policies aimed at boosting competitiveness and inclusive growth. Importantly, the definition of innovation must be expanded beyond a simplistic linear model. It should also be broadly understood by stakeholders as beneficial for society and include all fields of knowledge, for example not only natural sciences but also social sciences and humanities.

UNIVERSITIES AS INNOVATION LEAD INSTITUTIONS

Many initiatives showcased at the [EUA annual workshops on Smart Specialisation](#) provide evidence that universities can be effective network builders and strategic partners that play a crucial role in innovation ecosystems. They can contribute to regional development in many ways, such as through educating the next generation of citizens, performing research and innovation activities, as well as through fulfilling their "third mission". As a result, they significantly contribute to raising public awareness on the added-value of research and innovation investments. Therefore, regions, in the broadest

sense of the word (from local communities to national territories), should fully capitalise on assets that universities offer for the benefit of their innovation ecosystems.

SMART SPECIALISATION AS A LONG-TERM PROCESS

Trust between all partners of the innovation process is key to maximising the impact and efficiency of innovation ecosystems. However, it is important to highlight that it takes time to develop trust among stakeholders for well-functioning innovation ecosystems. Smart Specialisation requires strong partnerships, a long-term vision and sustained coherent objectives and policies. Therefore, open and inclusive systems with the participation of all regional stakeholders, including universities, are necessary to guarantee its success. The sustainability of innovation ecosystems can only be ensured if the process is sufficiently independent of public funding cycles and has continued support of the local communities.

Based on the messages that emerged from the 2018 European Workshop on Smart Specialisation, EUA offers several recommendations for policy makers and universities to support them in building successful European innovation ecosystems in the post-2020 period.

Recommendations for European, national and regional policy makers

- Support the development of human talent and invest in stronger links between education, research and innovation.
- Introduce measures to increase long-term partnerships among regional stakeholders, in particular between universities, businesses, public authorities and civil society.
- Provide platforms for continued dialogue among regional stakeholders, including universities and citizens, to ensure well-functioning innovation ecosystems, beyond funding cycles.
- Effectively combine top-down and bottom-up approaches to ensure enduring innovation at the regional level.
- Provide sustainable funding for Smart Specialisation strategies and other research and innovation initiatives at regional, national and European levels.

Recommendations for universities

- Continue developing entrepreneurship as a key transversal competence in students and staff.
- Engage with regional stakeholders, including public authorities, businesses and civil society to seize new opportunities.
- Provide incentives to diversify university research and education career models beyond scientific publication merits so that universities can better fulfil their "third-mission".
- Continue activities aimed at increasing public engagement and promote open innovation to enhance universities' impact on innovation ecosystems.
- Recognise the importance of communicating the role of universities as regional lead institutions in developing internationally competitive knowledge regions.

This position has been developed by the European University Association (EUA), in close collaboration with its [Expert Group](#) on Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation. The [European Workshop on Smart Specialisation](#) took place on 13 November 2018 and it was jointly organised by Universities Austria (UNIKO), the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI) and EUA. It took place at the University of Graz in Austria, under the auspices of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU. The event was the fourth in a series of annual workshops on Smart Specialisation jointly organised by national rectors' conferences and EUA.