European Institute of Innovation & Technology

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STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION: NEW EIT ACTION TO SUPPORT THE INNOVATION CAPACITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIs)

Budapest, February 2021

Stakeholder Consultation

New EIT Action to support the innovation capacity of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Contents

Executive Summary

As part of the EIT's [Strategic Innovation Agenda for 2021-2027,](#) the EIT plans to:

- **integrate a wider number of HEIs** into innovation value chains and ecosystems;
- **build on previous policy initiatives** as using the HEInnovate self-assessment tool and establish new activities.
- **support inclusive education** by extending the EIT Label, currently given to KICs' education programmes, to the wide range of HEIs that will participate in the new action.

In order to ensure that the EIT achieves these objectives optimally, the EIT carried out a public online consultation from 1 October-15 November 2020 as part of the EIT Stakeholder Forum 2020. The respondents were asked a series of specific questions about themselves and their organisation and were also asked to comment in free-form text on:

- why Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Europe are underperforming in terms of their capacity to be more innovative and entrepreneurial;
- how the EIT can mobilise resources through [Knowledge Triangle Integration](#) (bringing together business, research, and education) in the most effective way possible to address the issues;
- what concrete measures the EIT and the EIT KICs should consider to help universities become more innovative and entrepreneurial;
- how the EIT and the EIT KICs can ensure that the new action to support HEIs involves participants from all over the EU, regardless of their level of innovation capacity;
- what factors are currently preventing HEIs in Europe from becoming members of the EIT KICs' networks or from participating in the EIT KICs' activities.

There were 46 respondents to this consultation. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were the predominant group (28, or 61%), followed by EIT KICs (6, or 13%). The remaining 12 respondents accounted for 4 who self-identified as "Other", 3 research institutions, and one each from a European institution, a national authority, a corporate/industry, a start-up/scale-up, and an NGO.

Responses came from 20 countries, of which 18 were EU Member States. The two exceptions were Bosnia and Herzegovina and Switzerland. There were 7 respondents each from Germany and Belgium (of which 1 was an EIT KIC), 6 from Hungary (incl. 4 EIT KICs), 4 each from Finland and Sweden. The sixth EIT KIC was from France.

Two-thirds of all respondents (67%, 31 of 46) were already a member of the EIT Community, including either staff of an EIT KIC, or an EIT KIC partner or an EIT alumnus. The proportion of EIT Community membership when the EIT KICs are not taken into account is slightly lower (63%) and

it is 60% for the HEIs. Two-thirds had attended an EIT Community event. Nearly half had taken part in an innovation project. Their main areas of interest were education and training, and innovation-driven research activities. Interest in ecosystem-building/connectivity was also high. Respondents were less interested in business support.

Underperformance of HEIs in innovation and entrepreneurship

Respondents attributed HEIs' underperformance in terms of their capacity to be more innovative and entrepreneurial to the lack of financial resources to drive change; external regulation limiting the HEIs' freedom of manoeuvre and teaching staff not being assessed for these capacities, but on measures such as number of publications and meeting teaching requirements. Some respondents felt it would be wrong to generalise that HEIs are underperforming in innovation and entrepreneurship because there are some HEIs which do well in this area, different countries have different systems, and capacities can vary within a given country.

Mobilising resources effectively

Respondents supported the need for a more integrated approach to mobilisation of the Knowledge Triangle. The solutions they put forward centred on strengthening the brokerage role of the EIT / EIT KICs, disseminating good practice more extensively, and achieving stronger synergies with other EU initiatives. A range of ideas were put forward for improvements to existing initiatives or new areas to fund, and for different forms of exchange of best practice or matchmaking. Suggestions included better integration of the EIT's education offering in universities' programmes and increasing engagement with universities' technology transfer, incubator and accelerator activities.

Helping universities become more innovative and entrepreneurial

Notwithstanding the view that not all HEIs are underperforming, there was consensus across the responses that there is a widespread need to foster a more entrepreneurial mindset in many HEIs. There was a desire to see the EIT fund a range of new activities, including not only educational programmes but also infrastructure, and projects and programmes across the full innovation development cycle. It was also suggested that the EIT and the EIT KICs could help HEIs develop project-based / real-life learning. In addition, respondents were looking for more flexibility from the EIT and the EIT KICs in their requirements in order to make it easier for HEIs to take part in their projects and activities, as well as for more dissemination of best practice.

Ensuring participation from across the EU

The solutions suggested for ensuring that the new action attracts HEIs from across the EU regardless of their current entrepreneurial or innovation capacity included making diversity a

precondition of a future action or future calls. Some saw this solely as a question of a geographic spread, while others suggested different criteria to modify the make-up of participant types and different approaches to measuring success or different criteria, e.g. entrepreneurial initiatives and entrepreneurial attitudes, different levels of maturity/experience in consortia; the number of highly skilled or high potential people in a lesser known region. Some respondents felt that making requirements easier to fulfil would of itself lead to greater participant diversity. The need to widen the pool of applicants through awareness-raising and particularly networking/knowledge-sharing was also stressed.

Obstacles to HEI participation in EIT KIC networks and activities

Respondents to this question identified some structural issues, such as the need for EIT KICs to put more emphasis on education and building relationships with HEIs, and addressing barriers to participation for smaller HEIs. They key messages, however, were about unhappiness with complexity, the administrative burden and transparency. In addition, there was a widespread feeling that it is not clear, particularly to those not already inside the EIT Community, that the benefits of being part of the EIT Community outweigh these disadvantages. These comments came with a number of suggestions on improving the visibility of the EIT.

Conclusion

There was consensus in this consultation that HEIs generally need support from the EIT and the EIT KICs to become more entrepreneurial and innovative. There are exceptions since Europe has some top-tier universities, but the hypothesis that the EIT and the EIT KICs have a role in improving the situation was well accepted.

A critical step in that is for the EIT and the EIT KICs to be better known and for there to be a better understanding of what they do and the benefits of working with them. Improving the visibility of the EIT and the EIT KICs, and sharing knowledge and building capacity more, is not just a question of working with teaching staff and students, but also of engaging with administrative staff, technology transfer offices, incubators and accelerators.

There was a very wide range of suggestions of what the EIT should fund, but the overarching theme was that it would be desirable for the EIT to develop more educational programmes and funding schemes targeting HEIs. The EIT is seen as being particularly well placed to foster project-based education based on real-life situations.

A better understanding that the EIT is not just a research funder and that it is not the "closed shop" it is sometimes perceived to be outside the EIT Community would help offset the disadvantage of the administrative burden associated with involvement with the EIT. That administrative burden is perceived as heavy.

Respondents wanted greater flexibility in applying existing requirements in order to reduce the administrative burden, but also suggested the use of a more diverse set of criteria in assessing eligibility to participate in EIT and EIT KIC criteria to make it easier for small, or second and third tier HEIs to become more innovative and entrepreneurial. In conclusion, therefore, respondents to this consultation were aligned with the direction of the EIT's future plans to integrate a wider number of HEIs into innovation value chains and ecosystems; establish deeper and broader new activities that build on previous policy initiatives and take an inclusive approach to participation in its new action.

1 Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Europe need to be more innovative in their approach to education, research, and to engagement with local innovation ecosystems, including business and civil society. This requires a clear strategy, methodology and resources. The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) is uniquely positioned to support the development of entrepreneurial, innovative HEIs, under Horizon Europe, the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation for 2021-2027.

The European Commission has proposed that the EIT and its Knowledge and Innovation Communities (EIT KICs) launch a new action to boost the innovation capacity of higher education institutions as part of the EIT's Strategic Innovation Agenda for 2021-2027. In line with the European Commission's proposal,[1] the EIT plans to:

- **integrate a wider number of HEIs** into innovation value chains and ecosystems;
- **build on previous policy initiatives** and establish new activities.
- **support inclusive education** by extending the EIT Label, currently given to KICs' education programmes, to the wide range of HEIs that will participate in the new action.

In preparation for this new initiative, the EIT carried out a Stakeholder Consultation from 1 October to 15 November 2020 as part of the EIT Stakeholder Forum, the annual forum for engaging with its varied stakeholders & partners. In 2020, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Forum combined online consultations with a series of digital sessions and meetings. The Stakeholder Consultation provided a platform for EIT stakeholders to express their views and contribute to the impactful implementation of the EIT's Strategic Innovation Agenda (SIA) 2021-2027.

The feedback received will contribute to the implementation of the new EIT action to support the innovation capacities of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Europe.

Any stakeholder interested in the topic was invited to respond, whether they had previously been involved with EIT's activities or not. Those more familiar with the topic were encouraged to provide their views and ideas on the future implementation of the new action based on their own experience and expertise.

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[1] On 28 January 2021 a political agreement was reached between the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union on the EIT Regulation and Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027. The publication of the entire legislative package in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJ) is expected in spring 2021.

2 Respondent profiles

There were **46 respondents to this consultation**. Higher education institutions (HEIs) were the predominant group (28, i.e. 61%), followed by EIT KICs (6 i.e. 13%). The remaining 12 respondents accounted for 4 who self-identified as "Other", 3 research institutions, and one each from a European institution, a national authority, a corporate/industry, a start-up/scale-up, and an NGO (Figure 1).

Throughout this report, a **distinction has been made between the higher education institutions and the rest**, and **between EIT KICs as internal stakeholders and the other respondents**, where relevant.

Figure 1: Type of organisation
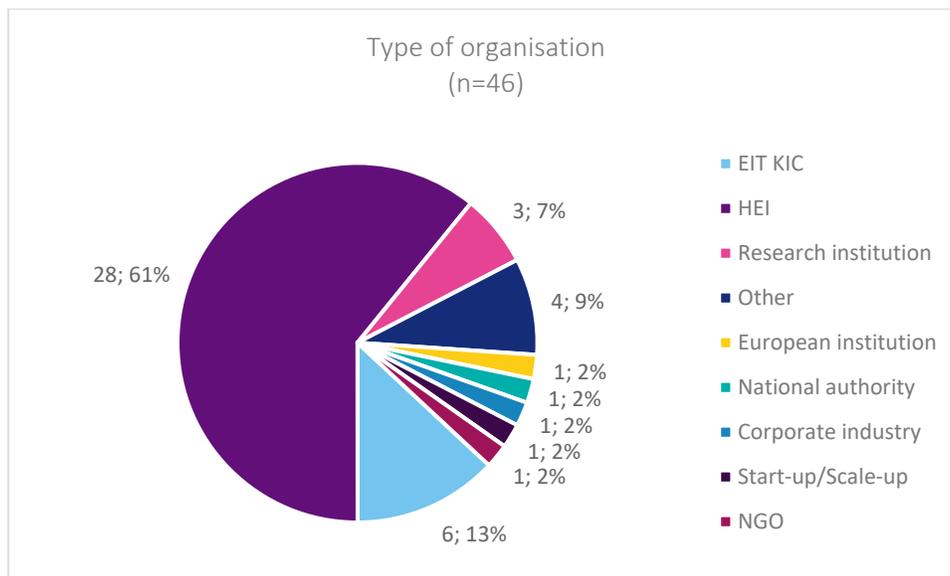
Responses came from **20 countries**, of which 18 were EU Member States. The two exceptions were Bosnia and Herzegovina and Switzerland (Figure 2). There were 7 respondents each from Germany and Belgium (of which 1 was an EIT KIC), 6 from Hungary (incl. 4 EIT KICs), and 4 each from Finland and Sweden. There were only 1 or 2 from other countries. The French singleton was an EIT KIC.

The Figure below shows both the overall geographic breakdown and the breakdown without the 6 responding EIC KICs, i.e. with 4 fewer in Hungary and 1 fewer in Belgium and France.

Figure 2: Organisations' location

Organisations' location
n=46)
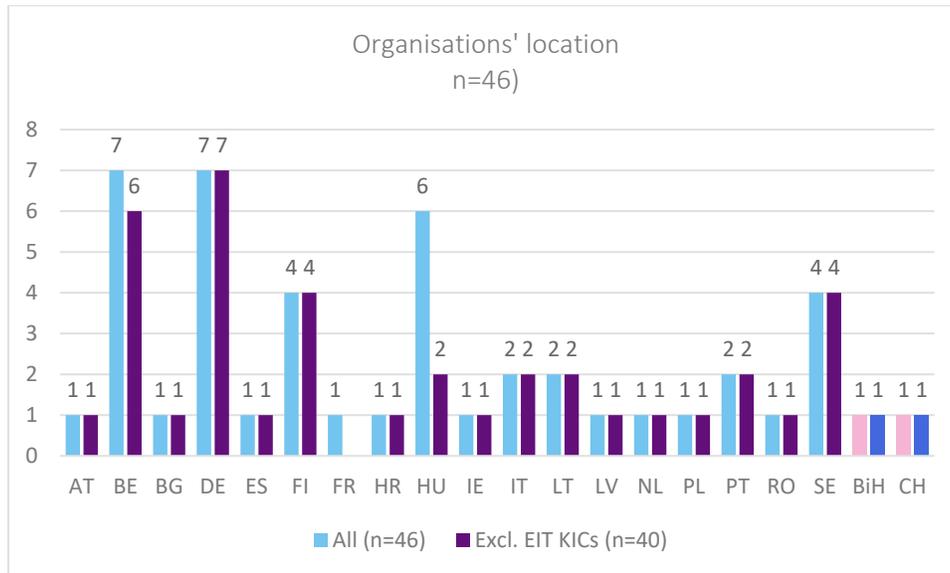
Taking the HEIs alone (Figure 3), the **top 3 respondent countries were Germany (6), Belgium and Finland (4 each)**.

Figure 3: Location of Higher Education institutions

Location of Higher Education institutions
(n=28)
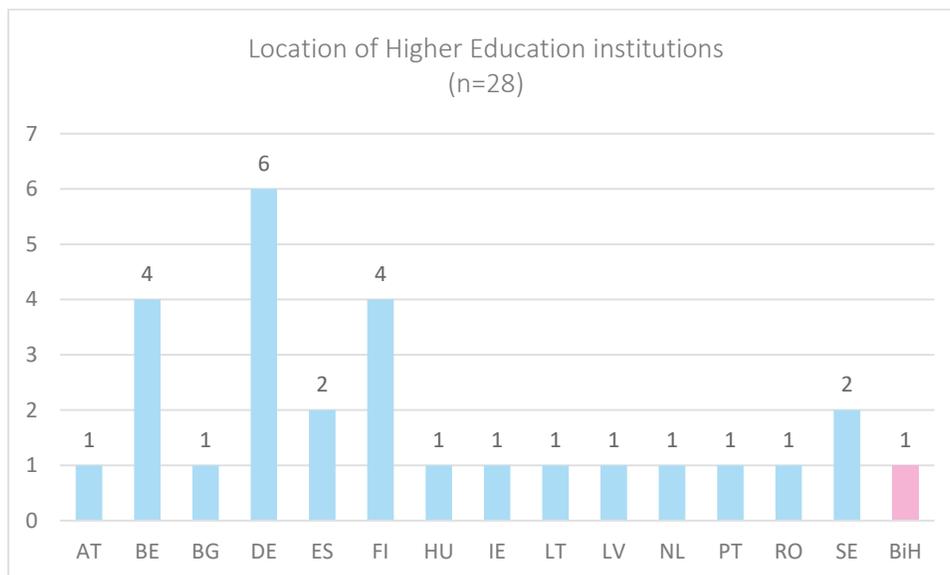
Two-thirds of all respondents (67%, 31 of 46) **were already a member of the EIT Community**, i.e. they were either staff of an EIT KIC, or an EIT KIC partner or an EIT alumnus. The proportion of EIT Community membership when the EIT KICs are not taken into account is slightly lower (63%) and it is 60% for the HEIs (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Are you currently a member of the EIT Community (EIT KICs and their partners, EIT Alumni)?

Member of the EIT Community
(n=46)
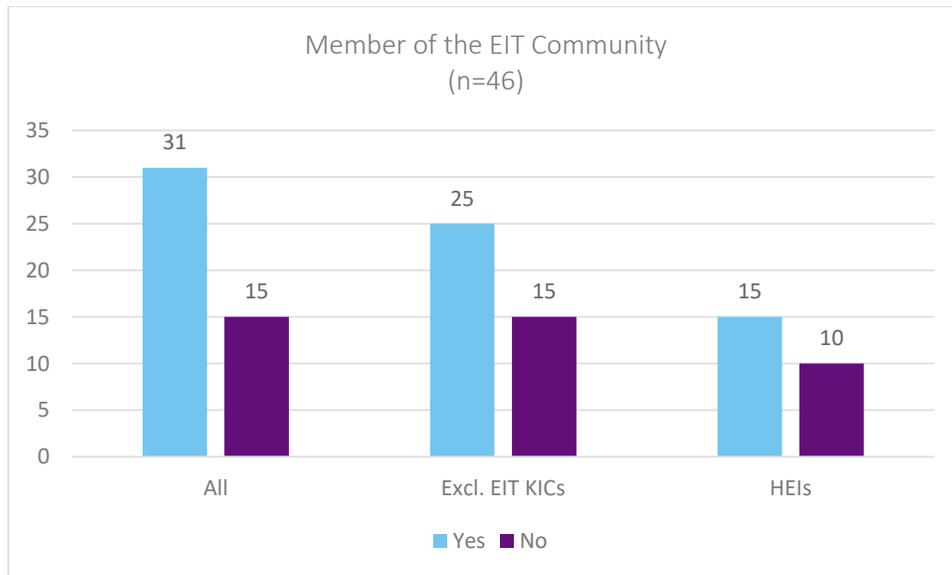
In answer to the multiple-choice question on **previous participation in EIT activities**, **most respondents indicated EIT Community events** (30 respondents out of a total of 46 respondents) (Figure 5). Taking the HEIs alone, innovation projects are marginally ahead of EIT Community events (19 as opposed to18). Not all EIT KICs had taken part in an EIT Community event (4 of 6), which might seem surprising.

Taking the EIT KICs out of the totals does not change the other relativities: education programmes and venture support come in third and fourth place (18 and 11 respondents in all). There is, however, a very large "Other" category, with 20 mentions. One EIT KIC and 3 HEIs said they had participated in all types of activity.

Figure 5: Have you participated in an EIT activity before?

Previous participation in an EIT Community activity
(multiple choice) (n=46)
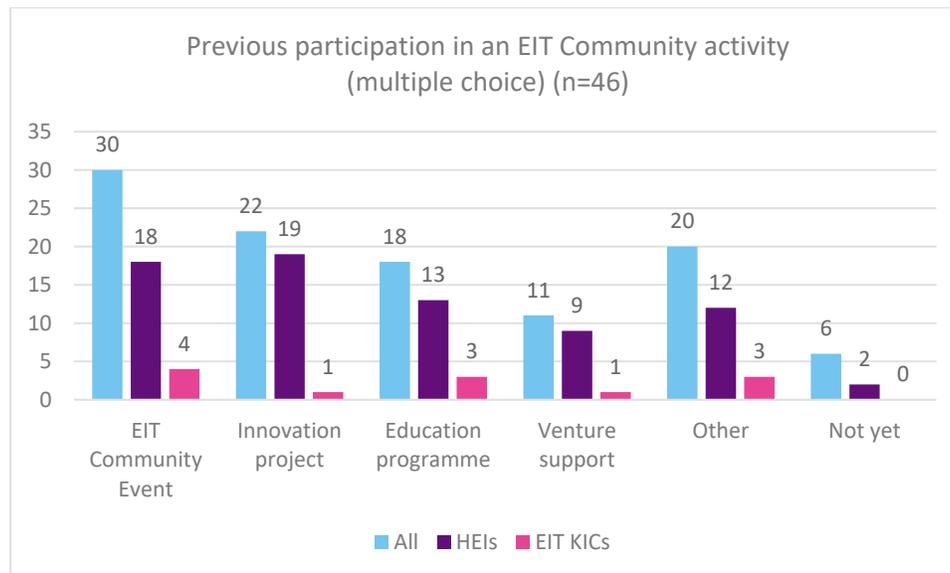
Looking at the **areas in which respondents were most interested,** education and training was the area cited most, both when taking all respondents into account and when looking at this without the EIT KICs (**Figure 6**) This order is reversed when taking HEIs alone. However, the differences in both cases are of one response only. If EIT KICs, which expressed a much greater interest in education and training than in innovation-driven research activities, are taken out, then it is the innovation-driven research activities which are the main area of interest to respondents as a whole.

The other relativities remain the same with or without the EIT KICs, i.e. ecosystem-building/connectivity comes ahead of business support. However, EIT KICs are much more interested in ecosystem-building/connectivity and Education & training (6 and 5 respondents respectively) than in the other two areas (1 mention each).

Figure 6: Which of the following areas of activity are you most interested in?

Areas of interest
(multiple choice, n=46)

	All	HEIs	EIT KICs
Education & training	38	23	5
Innovation-driven research activities	37	24	1
Ecosystem-building/connectivitiy	29	19	6
Business support	13	9	1
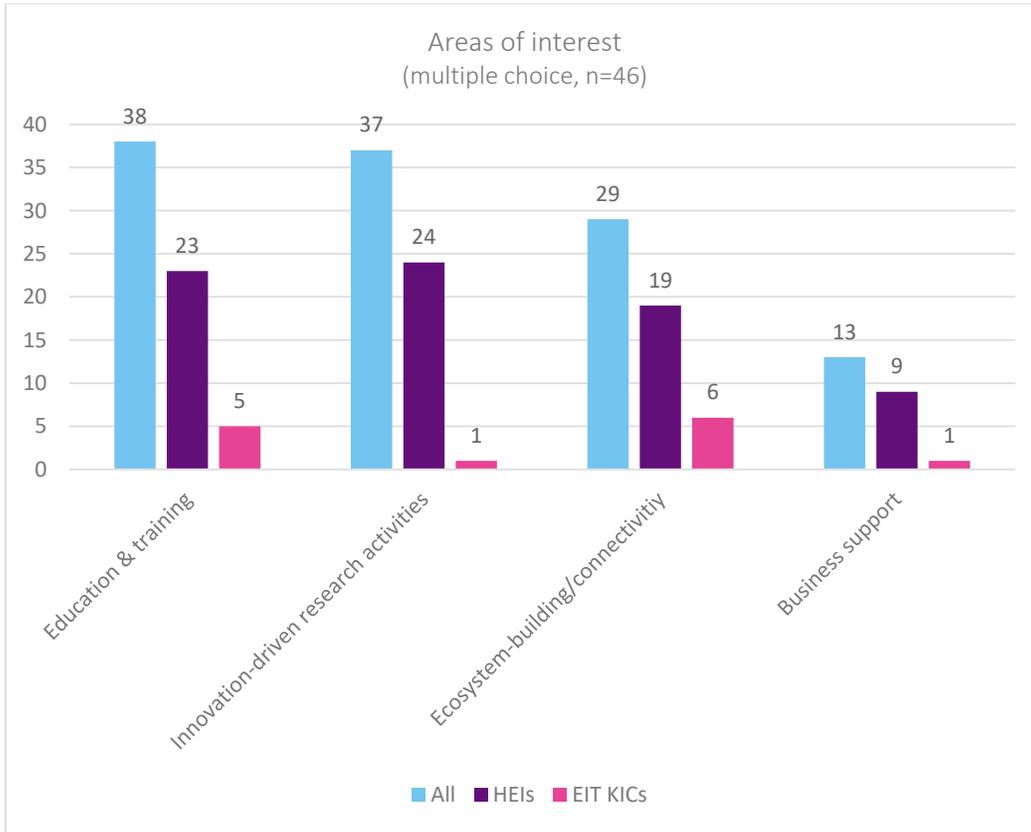
3 Thematic Questions

In most cases, the responses to these questions are based on clustering by:

- (i) overarching issues
- (ii) suggested changes to **the way the EIT has hitherto approached supporting HEI innovation capacity**
  - at a policy/**conceptual** level
  - in relation to scope or focus
- (iii) proposals for changes to **operational requirements** within the existing programmes
- (iv) suggestions on ways to **strengthen the ecosystem**
  - through visibility and engagement (i.e. with external stakeholders)
  - through capacity-building, knowledge-sharing with knowledge triangle stakeholders

Not every cluster is relevant in each case. Where relevant, the respondent group has been indicated.

A number of **cross-cutting** issues emerge from the responses, throughout the survey:

- The need to cooperate with other EU programmes and smart specialisation activities to identify synergies and avoid duplication;
- The importance of promoting more open innovation;[2]
- The need to engage with society at large, including citizens;
- Proposal to widen HEI participation in EIT KIC activities with new forms of partnership that stop short of full membership but enable HEIs currently outside of the Community to access learning, that will help close the entrepreneurial and innovation capacity gap;
- A view that the project-cycle is too short;
- Unhappiness with frequent changes to requirements related to the financial sustainability, co-funding and KCA;
- Perceptions of the EIT as bureaucratic and hierarchical;
- Proposal for EIT-supported "ambassadors" from inside the EIT Community to make the EIT better-known, as a measure against the weak EIT branding;
- The need for an inclusive approach to capacity-building, going beyond students, researchers and teaching staff and reaching staff of Technology Transfer Offices and other relevant university departments.

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[2] Promotion of open innovation was not included as a separate item in any of the several responses where it was mentioned because it is a generic response to a request for proposals on measures.

3.1 Underperformance of HEIs in innovation and entrepreneurship

Question: Why do you think Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Europe are underperforming in terms of their capacity to be more innovative and entrepreneurial?

The reasons cited by respondents for the HEIs' underperformance in terms of their capacity to be more innovative and entrepreneurial included the lack of financial resources to drive change; external regulations limiting the HEIs' freedom of manoeuvre and teaching staff not being assessed for these capacities, but on measures such as number of publications and meeting teaching requirements. Some respondents felt that it is not possible to generalise that HEIs are underperforming in these areas, particularly because systems vary across countries, and within a given country. Thus, there can be variegated levels of performance at country level as well. Participating in an EIT KIC or EIT activities was judged as contributing to improved performance.

3.1.1 No single picture

Some HEI respondents **queried the premise** that HEIs are underperforming **or wished for a clearer definition** of what the EIT understands by "underperforming". One respondent suggested that there are two tiers, "global" HEIs and "national" HEIs. Many of the respondents, including from HEIs, who agreed with the hypothesis that HEIs are underperforming suggested that the bar of expectations is set too high, as changing the mindset takes time. Several were optimistic that change is under way.

One HEI association was among those disputing that there is a deficit: "*There are clear examples of how universities play a major role in innovation (…) Universities are moving away from linear concepts of innovation to closer co-creative approaches with external partners [and] of how universities mobilise and cultivate the entrepreneurial spirit of their students.*" This respondent said that there are already good examples of project-based entrepreneurial education dealing with real-life challenges, while there were other respondents who felt that innovation and entrepreneurship are areas that still need strengthening.

Respondents also underlined the fact that **universities in Europe operate in very different ecosystems** so that it is not possible to take a one-sized-fits-all view. In Sweden, intellectual property (IP) and commercialisation activities are handled outside the boundaries of the public authority. Innovation may originate in HEIs, but IP and commercialisation are dealt with by start-ups. Examples of good practice in different systems included the Ecole Polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) in Switzerland where there is a start-up unit dedicated to supporting various undergraduate students on entrepreneurial tracks with specific internal funding. At the Technical University of Denmark (DTU), there is close collaboration between industry and researchers/students with integrated innovation models as a default in all Master degrees. RWTH

Aachen University has a Center of Entrepreneurship for the support of students and scientists to set up their own business.

Ecosystem differences can relate to how universities are regulated, some respondents pointed out, but may also depend on whether there is cooperation between universities and strong industrial players, whether there are fiscal incentives available to the latter for this purpose, and whether they have chosen to set up in ways that would foster more integration with the technology ecosystem, e.g. with incubators and technology transfer offices. One EIT KIC respondent pointed out that EIT RIS countries are at a disadvantage because large industrial companies often do not have research centres in those countries.

The importance of working with industry and other external players was emphasised several times. *"Bridging the valley of death between TRL 3 and TRL 6[3] requires other skills and more important, cooperation with partners outside the comfortable silo of the HEI,"* was how one respondent put it.

The brain drain from the EIT RIS countries was also mentioned by one HEI respondent as a reason for underperformance, without specifying whether this was a cause or effect.

3.1.2 The constraints: the HEI perspective

While for some HEIs, it is **the management attitude of universities** which can determine whether an HEI is innovative and entrepreneurial, others identified **systemic constraints**, both regulatory and financial. According to one response, the lack of resources makes it difficult for universities to invest in cross-sectoral education, even when they wish to. Participating in EIT KIC or EIT activities was considered a key factor in building the innovative and entrepreneurial capacity of HEIs.

Several respondents felt that **organisational rigidity** places constraints on being innovative, for example in relation to opportunities for young teachers, career structures, courses of study and a focus on short-term results. In some cases (e.g. Spain), the rigidity is imposed by the central government.

A number of **barriers to teaching staff being innovative,** and hence to HEIs' performance, included being judged on the basis of research results, publications and success in attracting grants combined with the strict requirements attached to public research funding ("impact", "market orientation", "including stakeholders"), the absence of incentives to commercialise research results or insufficient support to students to pursue entrepreneurial ideas. One respondent pointed out that HEIs that are only focused on training students, and not heavily engaged in

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[3] TRL=Technology Readiness Level (See Annex G of Horizon 2020 Work Programme 2018-2020 for the full list)

research activities, may also find it challenging to be innovative and entrepreneurial. Having a non-profit remit was also identified as a barrier.

3.1.3 The constraints: the perspective of other entities

The responses from the research institutes and the EIT KICs were along the same lines as those of the HEIs which are summarised above: **ecosystems vary, but there is a general problem of universities not having an entrepreneurial and innovation mindset**, and of often being hampered by regulation and funding, even when they would be interested in developing their innovation and entrepreneurship capabilities further. Other reasons included the absence of entrepreneurship courses, the absence of practice-oriented education, learning by rote, inadequate foundations laid at secondary school level, inhibitory IP regimes, the lack of angel and seed funds, the absence of the right ecosystem to support students with good ideas (e.g. technology transfer offices, incubators, validation labs, science parks). The importance of working not only with industry but with society as a whole was also raised.

3.2 Mobilising resources effectively

Question: How do you think the EIT can mobilise resources through Knowledge Triangle Integration (bringing together business, research, and education) in the most effective way possible to address these issues?

Respondents supported the need for a more integrated approach (as implied by the question). The predominant themes were strengthening the brokerage role of the EIT / EIT KICs, disseminating good practice more extensively, and achieving stronger synergies with other EU initiatives. A range of ideas were put forward for scope-changing initiatives and operational changes, and for different forms of exchange of best practice or matchmaking.

3.2.1 Overarching issues, scope changes, operational changes

Overarching issues

There were three themes which came up several times in answer to this question:

- Strengthening the EIT KICs' brokerage role;
- Improving synergies with other EU programmes and initiatives
- Doing more to disseminate good practice.

Strengthening the broker role

The need to **strengthen the broker role of the EIT** across the Knowledge Triangle was felt by several respondents to be the result of the gap between the EIT's current ambition and implementation, inter alia because of complexity in the structure of the EIT and the EIT KICs. One respondent said *"EIT's basic model in combining companies, universities and research institutions' interests on both research and education to build long-term capacity in the KI communities is a well-functioning model. However, the activities are hardly reaching outside the immediate hub or co-location. There are few mechanisms to activate partners to take part to KIC educational activities."* This was echoed by other respondents, who called for EIT KICs to support HEIs in the identification of the most relevant business, research and education entities beyond those directly relevant to themselves, reaching out to students and even citizens as well (as some have already done). *"Get the people out of their silos"* was the view of one respondent, which was representative of a number.

One HEI respondent felt that the EIT KICs sometimes compete with HEIs rather than reaching out to them. However, experience with the EIT KICs clearly varies, since another HEI respondent said: *"An important and valued role of the EIT KICs is the facilitated networking and matchmaking*

arrangements, bringing our researchers in contact with relevant industry representatives, who are ready and willing to collaborate on innovation projects."

One HEI respondent felt that the increasing emphasis on financial sustainability (a requirement another HEI respondent described as "unrealistic") and on short-term impacts of projects has been detrimental to the EIT KICs' ability to work on Knowledge Triangle Integration (KTI) to the same extent as in the past.

Improving synergies with other EU programmes and initiatives

A number of respondents stressed the brokerage role that the EIT / the EIT KICs can play in developing **synergies with other EU programmes**. Some doubts were also expressed as to whether the EIT or EIT KICs were in fact the right mechanism for providing the support to become more innovative and entrepreneurial, as opposed for example to the ERDF[4], creating European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) or collaborating with university alliances.

Several respondents stressed that the EIT should in general be working jointly with external partners from the world of education, industry and research on **developing programmes**. In this context, one EIT KIC stressed that the EIT cannot expect to solve issues related to the KTI on its own and should therefore concentrate on joint and complementary programmes, i.e. filling gaps.

Disseminating good practice

Several respondents stressed the role EIT KICs should play in **disseminating good practice**, not only from their own activities by providing structures and organisation models for funding all partners in the Knowledge Triangle, but also from existing good practices within universities and in their collaboration with business and research and technology organisations, and national instruments. One of these HEI respondents highlighted the new trend towards co-creation, a model in which a researcher and a potential practical user work together or a university and a large company conclude a multi-annual contract without aiming to solve a particular problem, but to explore the frontiers of knowledge.

Other issues

Some respondents queried whether the EIT's current approach is appropriate. One argued that the non-profit nature of universities is not sufficiently taken into account in the current approach.

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[4] European Regional Development Fund

This respondent supported working with industry, but felt that the current approach overemphasises commercialisation, while universities' core business is research. The conclusion this respondent drew is that there needs to be an adjustment of the TRL values as well as the establishment of clear co-funding structures with lower co-funding rates for universities.

Another respondent felt that it should not be a requirement that students innovate and be entrepreneurs, as the ultimate goal of universities is not to push the creation of start-ups. Making that an indicator could lead, one respondent argued, to unintended and negative economic and social consequences for young people when such start-ups fail. The importance of HEIs being embedded in society and not isolated from the community around them was also highlighted.

Scope changes

There were a number of proposals seeking new initiatives or changes in scope of existing activities in order to mobilise resources and/or improve the KTI process. However, **measures to support students and universities predominate** in the list below, perhaps reflecting the fact that HEIs were the widest group among the respondents:

- make it easier to transfer results from Universities to companies;
- increase engagement with universities' Technology Transfer offices, including incubators and accelerators, co-workers, alumni, employer organisations and VET (Vocational Education and Training) providers, including VET Centres of Excellence;
- better integrate the EIT's educational offering in universities' educational programmes and degrees. This would require the EIT KICs to align their activities with European guidelines and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS);
- provide more room (funding) for local experiments in less dynamic ecosystem areas;
- establish university-alumni-company start-up matchmaking hubs where students can take their ideas and build on existing "student start-up support", where it exists;
- create national EIT Open Fora feeding into an EU-level Open Forum involving all HEI stakeholders: students, staff (incl. professors, researchers, administrative and technical staff), industry (both SME and large companies), regional, national and international associations and government – a "bottom-up approach", seeking commitments at different levels;
- create specific innovation programmes in EU universities;
- provide more support to researchers in the final phase of projects;
- invest in University spin-offs where University professors are shareholders/founders;
- create an open and confidential platform for exchange within research projects and as a direct contact network to industry and to create the potential to generate joint projects;

- hold EIT workshops, bootcamps on specific topics;
- increase the number of entrepreneurs teaching in universities;
- promote teacher and student exchanges, summer schools, MA programmes, internships;
- build a "start-up factory" around universities and ensure a support system for highly motivated students;
- enable EIT funding for smaller projects between HEIs;
- provide EIT funding for regional KTI clusters;
- fund projects designed around KTI;
- fund excellent and innovative workplaces.

Operational changes

A number of comments covered potential changes to existing programmes in order to increase effectiveness. Several respondents criticised the EIT for **bureaucracy** in general, or criticised specific requirements for not adding value, e.g. insisting on KPIs on activities, results and outcomes, KCAs (KIC Complementary Activities) or the sustainability requirement. One respondent suggested that grants should be solely based on ideas.

There were complaints from several respondents about the **one-year cycle**. They criticised it for creating the need to recruit before the Business Plan is approved (thus running the risk of not being able to complete the project) and to offer repeated 1-year contracts to employees. It also creates a bottleneck when reporting on one year coincides with applying for the next. The difficulty of being effective within a single year is compounded, it was pointed out, by a 2 to 3 month dead period because summer holidays take place at different times in different parts of Europe. One respondent welcomed the amendments in the EIT legislation which will make it possible for the EIT to sign multi-annual grant agreements with EIT KICs for two or three years but felt that it takes 5-10 years to achieve sustainable results.

3.2.2 Strengthening the ecosystem

Visibility and engagement

A recurrent theme was the need to **raise awareness among HEIs outside the EIT community about the activities of the EIT** and the opportunities to participate in projects, and simultaneously provide support to partner HEIs to become more innovative and entrepreneurial (through funding, capacity-building and/or the creation of new education programmes.)

While some respondents took it as a given that awareness-raising is needed, one respondent suggested as a first step assessing the needs and then developing measures to increase the awareness on innovation and entrepreneurship at the targeted universities. A suggestion from another respondent on how to raise awareness was to have **EIT "ambassadors"** in EIT RIS countries who would be funded for this role[5], while another respondent said that the EIT should have field representatives in EIT RIS countries.

There were also calls for:

- better definition of the course offering;
- promotion of digital and online possibilities;
- fewer, comprehensive and well-structured events, with broad attendance – in regard to geography as well as the Knowledge Triangle.

Capacity-building / Knowledge-sharing

The importance of disseminating **best practice or success stories** came up several times. Good practice examples coming from respondents (who either saw them as such or whose enthusiasm for their success suggested they could be regarded as such) included the ifempower.eu programme, funded by Erasmus+, international university/business cooperation for potential female entrepreneurs, the formation-rma.eu platform to train research managers.

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[5] Similar suggestions were made in the context of the EIT RIS consultation.

3.3 Helping universities become more innovative and entrepreneurial

Question: What concrete measures should the EIT and its KICs consider to help universities become more innovative and entrepreneurial?

Responses to this question in many instances included suggestions or covered areas that had already been mentioned in the previous two answers.[6] There was a desire to see the EIT fund a range of new activities, including not only educational programmes but also infrastructure, and projects and programmes across the full innovation development cycle. It was also suggested that the EIT and the EIT KICs could help HEIs develop project-based / real-life learning. Respondents were also looking for more flexibility from the EIT and the EIT KICs in their requirements, and for more dissemination of best practice.

3.3.1 Overarching issues, scope changes, operational changes

Overarching issues

The overarching issues identified in helping universities become more innovative and entrepreneurial fell into the following categories:

- a desire to see the EIT fund new activities or fund activities differently;
- a concern that the funding cycle is too short;
- a concern that funding is skewed too much towards the later stages of the project cycles;
- a desire for more flexible funding requirements in some areas;
- a desire to see participation in EIT activities opened up in new ways.

Scope changes

Proposals for measures which would change the scope of current programmes or require new initiatives included a range of new areas to fund or develop. Many of the suggestions concerned **educational programmes or the involvement of HEIs in existing programmes**, but there were two which expressed a wish to see the EIT **fund infrastructure**. Most of the suggestions on education programmes came from HEIs.

Several respondents argued that the EIT needs to **fund projects along their whole maturity cycle**. An argument in support of this was that it would enable greater diversity and the financing of more innovative ideas, whereas at present the increasing requirement for financial sustainability pushes

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[6] Sometimes, respondents promote the same idea in answer to several questions. This form of duplication has been taken into account in reporting on the responses so that the idea is only reflected in the first answer in which it occurs.

the receiving organisation to apply for innovative projects with a higher TRL and thus very close to market. According to one respondent, this process results in projects that are based on core industrial innovations, while academic research only represents complementary activities. To allow university-born innovation, the timeline for commercialisation and financial sustainability should be prolonged, this respondent argued.

Two other respondents asked for **longer timeframes**, with one suggesting not only longer-running projects but also a lower TRL at the project start: *"innovative solutions need time, are risky and are sometimes not developed enough in the beginning."* This respondent pointed out that short projects (~1 year) are not compatible with cycle durations of scientific staff/PhD students at universities (3-5 years). The short timeframes, it was argued, force universities to make a broad range of proposals in the hope that some will be successful without being able to plan strategically.

One respondent asked for a longer-term view overall: *"A better-defined long-term collaboration strategy is needed between the EIT and the EIT KICs. The current system, where the expectation changes annually, creates uncertainty and concern in the partners, which is one of the biggest threats for an ecosystem."*

There were also **strategically oriented proposals** (notably from EIT KICs) on how to support HEIs in becoming more innovative and entrepreneurial, such as:

- addressing the categories as listed in HEInnovate, while mobilising the Regional Innovation Impact Assessment (RIIA) and Smart Specialisation Strategy (SSS) frameworks;
- supporting HEIs in analysing their needs, setting their strategic objectives and priorities in order to ensure commitment at the highest level and guarantee motivation;
- fostering in the participating HEIs a broad vision of entrepreneurship, including not only business aims, but also a mindset open to non-business and societal objectives;
- making the EIT KICs' portfolio of methods, tools and best practices available to support HEIs in developing and implementing their plans to achieve their objectives;
- assisting HEIs in establishing the ecosystem around them;
- funding scientifically validated research into entrepreneurship education to provide an evidence base for measuring HEIs' entrepreneurial and innovative levels (for mor detail see under 'Operational changes').

The proposals for **funding or developing new activities in the area of education** were to:

- fund physical infrastructure where the skills and capacities can be applied, such as labs, co-working spaces, makerspaces, etc.;

- involve more companies in student projects, allocating more resources to individual work (tutorials, small groups), and providing labs and equipment;
- fund "crash-test business" laboratories;
- promote cross-disciplinary education, including training on transversal skills in specialisation areas, promoting cross-fertilisation;
- develop new courses in collaboration with universities from well-developed ecosystems;
- develop business development and technology transfer courses for non-EIT KIC member HEIs;
- provide learning materials, train-the-trainer programmes, methodologies;
- develop / offer PhD programmes;
- develop case studies for use with undergraduate programmes;
- promote challenge-based and practice-oriented education;
- promote project-based learning opportunities / working with real-life challenges;
- develop online courses for students, professors and teachers;
- open up EIT educational programmes to (doctoral) students all over Europe;
- implement the innovation and entrepreneurship (I&E) module more (and promote it more);
- develop Innovation&Entrepreneurship modules for HEIs as many do not have entrepreneurship courses or modules;
- develop HEI-based lifelong learning programmes for adults;
- provide capacity-building for Technology Transfer Offices (skills, processes, staff, PoC funds, pitch competitions) (which should lead to creation of more spin-offs);
- provide financial incentives to organise innovation-related courses
- establish joint / complementary EIT / EIT KIC programmes and programme participants to increase the innovation performance of the universities and the number of talents coming from the universities and establishing start-ups in the subject year;
- provide EIT KIC rewards/a label to those universities who offer innovation as a compulsory course within their scientific education programmes;
- develop educational and campus projects aiming at improving teaching in a sustainable way;
- promote student, professor, teacher exchanges (possibly with free scholarships);
- organise summer schools, study tours, mentoring;
- organise or offer financial incentives for hackathons, job fairs, competitions – competitions were suggested by several respondents, including one who suggested providing financial support to individuals willing to patent their innovation through competitions.

Proposals for **other new initiatives** were to:

- fund pure "applied" research projects with the possibility of using the results for future EIT innovation projects;
- enable special projects and programmes (on the Erasmus+ model);
- provide direct access to venture capital (as is planned for Horizon Europe);
- create an EU University Spin off programme where the EIT invests in start-up equity;
- provide rewards for projects that recognise and promote the specific nature of the participating HEI (see RIIA) to deploy and improve their innovation and entrepreneurial capabilities;
- introduce rewards for projects that measure (and give value to) the socio-economic impact due to the entrepreneurial criteria adopted along the projects' life;
- launch pilot schemes anchored in innovative enterprises with a constellation of supporting dedicated academic and research labs;
- collaborate with regional and inter(regional) programmes and projects in the EIT KICs' areas of activity;
- identify and develop a network of experienced venture business builders to build a business on the basis of science-based discoveries (i.e. bring in an entrepreneurial team, build a business based on technology). They would work with researchers with innovative ideas (e.g. involving them as technical consultants). The aim would be to enable researchers to continue their research, while relieving them from the burden of starting and running a business and to further improve the transfer of knowledge and technologies to industry and society.

Other proposals were to **widen the participation in EIT KICs' activities** in various ways, such as:

- opening up the EIT KICs' ecosystem of businesses;
- opening up networking and brokerage events for academics of universities not formally members of the EIT KIC, in anticipation of formal membership in a later stage;
- bringing problem owners and universities together, and acting as an interpreter to bridge the gap in culture and experience, stimulating bridging between HEIs and industry.
- allowing HEIs to join in EIT KIC actions (associate partners). One of the two respondents who raised this said it would improve the involvement of students and researchers at local level. open up calls for projects for academics of universities not formally a member of the EIT KIC, in anticipation of formal membership at a later stage.

Three respondents asked for **changes in the performance indicators** in order better to measure HEIss entrepreneurship performance. One said that the current KPIs are too business-oriented and do not properly include education, while another advocated *"less strict KPIs when it comes to commercialisation and product development within innovation projects, the overarching target of having to develop and release a product can sometimes paralyse innovation processes."*

Another respondent identified a more strategic **need for evidence-based measuring of the entrepreneurial and innovative levels of HEIs** since quantitative indicators such as the number of start-ups created or the number of entrepreneurship programmes for enterprise creation do not show these. Acquiring that data would require research into entrepreneurship education. HEInnovate could be used as a reference tool for the data acquisition; a tool such as EntreComp could be used to create a framework dedicated to entrepreneurial and entrepreneurship; while the RIIA framework could be used to infer the impact and role of the HEI within its ecosystem.

Operational changes

Two respondents wanted the EIT to drop the **co-funding requirement** for universities, because, one explained, it is incompatible with university financing concepts. One of these also said there should be no commercialisation requirement for universities, leaving this to the other parts of the knowledge triangle. The other wanted to drop the "return on investment" requirement. One of these respondents also argued for the simplification of the KCA element. Another respondent believed that there should be a "team diversity" requirement, in terms of involving people from universities, from industry, and that there would be merit in involving local policymakers as well.

3.3.2. Strengthening the ecosystem

Visibility and engagement

Awareness-raising was not a major issue for respondents in answer to this question, but one respondent did put forward a proposal for i**nternal ambassadors** to work with early adopters on HEI staff. The same respondent stressed the need for a student-centred approach that takes into account the characteristics of **Generation Z**, i.e. those born between the mid-1990's and the mid-2000's. Comments requesting more clarity or more information about EIT-offered possibilities may also suggest that there are communication/awareness issues.

Capacity-building / knowledge-sharing

All groups of respondents saw the need for good practices for HEIs to learn from. Proposals included:

- focusing on impact, concrete outcomes and networking with successful projects and between stakeholders (HEIs and companies);
- providing platforms for universities to share best practice and looking for challenges to solve they can tackle together and with industry and local start up ecosystems;

- a standard website for matching alumni with universities, which would also enable the EIT and EIT KICs to match research groups, companies and alumni internationally (a proposal from a start-up/scale-up);
- good practice tailored to local requirements (and not based on a one-size-fits-all) approach to help HEIs overcome the barriers causing them to under-perform;
- provision of fee-based connections through networking platforms, specific courses and consultancy services etc. between experienced universities in the EIT KIC network in the area of innovation and entrepreneurship and universities wanting to develop those areas. This would contribute to the EIT's financial sustainability.

3.4 Ensuring participation from across the EU

Question: How can the EIT and its KICs ensure that the new action to support HEIs involves participants from all over the EU, regardless of their level of innovation capacity?

Many respondents limited their answers to indicating that a requirement for greater diversity in new calls or actions is needed, while some addressed how the scope should be changed to achieve this. Some saw this solely as a question of a geographic spread, while others suggested different criteria to modify the make-up of participant types and different approaches to measuring success. Some respondents felt that making requirements easier to fulfil would of itself lead to greater participant diversity. The need of awareness-raising and particularly networking/knowledge-sharing emerged strongly in answer to this question.

3.4.1. Overarching issues, scope changes, operational changes

Overarching issues

Respondents agreed on the need for greater diversity, though several suggested that needs assessment/situation analysis should be carried out upfront before taking any measures.

An EIT KIC respondent suggested developing **a context-specific methodology**, together with an action plan, and subsequent monitoring and evaluation. The EIT KICs could support this by setting up a process through which HEIs discover their key improvement opportunities and act on them, and by providing specific support packages for key actions that could be mobilised if appropriate for an HEI's development plan.

The approach advocated by an HEI respondent was a **needs assessment** through a survey to identify the real requirements of the different target HEIs, so that the EIT could then develop differentiated strategies and programmes. This HEI respondent pointed out a potential paradox: organisations/countries with low innovation capacity will have low success rates as EIT grants become more and more competitive, but lowering the bar conflicts with the EIT's objectives. Thus, the EIT either has to construct dedicated pathways for these countries to receive additional support and guidance, or has to promote specific entrepreneurial training to help these countries increase their capabilities (a very lengthy process). Meanwhile, the EIT could actively assist these organisations/countries (through networking and collaboration) to participate in innovation projects, even if just as complementary partners and to "learn innovation" on the way.

Most of the responses to this question either suggested ways in which **existing programmes could be adapted to increase diversity**, ranging from simply setting quotas to developing new criteria for eligibility, or suggested capacity-building measures to help lower capacity universities to improve.

However, one HEI respondent suggested setting up **a specific diversity-based funding scheme** to ensure participation by different types of HEI: public, private, polytechnics, universities, teaching and/or research-oriented, different levels of scientific indicators, etc; different types of companies (SME, larger ones); different maturity/experience of consortium in funded projects to address the problem that: *"If only those with a profound experience in international projects are funded, the less competitive consortiums will never have the opportunity to be funded."*

Several respondents thought the EIT should be **looking differently at what constitutes success**. They advocated using different or additional criteria: entrepreneurial initiatives and entrepreneurial attitudes, different levels of maturity/experience in consortia; the number of highly skilled or high potential people in a lesser-known region; a requirement that "less evident" countries be represented; encouraging the involvement of new HEIs by formal analysis of new innovation models (e.g. the models empowering environmental policies) and evaluation of the potential socio-economic impact.

Another pointed out that being a member and part of an EIT project is very much restricted to high impact HEIs and large companies, when a large percentage of European regions have HEIs with a fundamental role and impact at the regional level, but not so much at the international level. This respondent suggested that a scheme or reference tool is needed to measure the impact these HEIs have in their ecosystem and abroad. Otherwise, there is no possibility for them to improve and become international.

Three respondents suggested that **there are in fact already models** for integrating HEIs with lower or moderate innovation capacity in:

- the EIT Health Regional Innovation Scheme;
- the fact that partners from several different CLCs have to participate in a project;
- the rules for setting up consortia for Horizon 2020 projects.

Some respondents suggested that there are fundamental problems to be addressed that go beyond making adaptations to encourage diversity:

- reversing the brain drain by encouraging staff / innovator / student exchanges through scholarships, hoping that most people will return to underperforming regions to go alongside other reforms in society to improve general attractiveness to individuals as well as business;
- avoiding the risk of some know-how dying out by means of EU-set competence targets that countries or areas have to meet. There is otherwise a risk that certain universities will leave it to others to pursue these (when they in fact do not);

- improving the quality of teaching of entrepreneurial subjects. A number of respondents raised this, including one who expressed concern about some distance between curricula and the socio-economic context, often combined with an excess of focus on theoretical research issues a comment similar to those in answer to other questions on the need for students to work with real-life cases.
- re-thinking the whole mechanism because state aid laws currently limit the possibilities for HEIs to join in the innovation activities with their own IP.

Scope changes

Suggestions on changes to the scope to achieve greater participant diversity largely dealt with **capacity-building** outside existing programmes, but some also envisaged **widening participation in existing programmes** or **allowing new project formats**:

- provide financial incentives for less developed universities to take part in training programmes and research or for them to host complementary and joint programmes, with the latter to be funded from their RIS Hub budgets;
- set minimum standards for innovation knowledge to be included in curricula and provide financial support to reach that level;
- extend some EIT KIC campus programmes to RIS universities, with pre-defined allocations for EIT RIS universities;
- provide support to HEIs that are or would like to pilot new ways of working, such as developing and testing new practices based on identified practical needs, and/or building on programmes with different levels of maturity;
- permit smaller and early-stage projects to continue successful collaborations without the need to scale up and thus force expansion;
- offer a new form of participation as "complementary" project partners, where those with low innovation capacity would learn through networking and collaboration and receive help to increase their capabilities at the same time.

Operational changes

A number of proposals dealt with **the way in which existing programmes operate**:

- a rough allocation of the funds available across the countries;
- reserve some funds to EIT RIS countries;
- hold calls open to all HEIs in which evaluation criteria should include the level of commitment and the benefits of the project (which should be higher for less developed universities);

- remove revenue or co-funding requirements for education actions (a point made in response to other questions), with it being argued by one respondent that *"It is not realistic, as the EIT label brand is not so strong, that the universities would pay for that."*
- offer more flexibility in reporting requirements for partners.

3.4.2 Strengthening the ecosystem

Visibility and engagement

A number of respondents suggested that the EIT needs to boost its visibility through more or better communication to attract new participants, using different channels to generate top-down and bottom-up interest. They stressed the importance of explaining the possibilities offered by collaborating with the EIT and EIT KICs (including the benefits compared to H2020 collaborative projects). One made the case for "EIT / KIC persons in charge" at university level, i.e. a form of ambassador similar to the one proposed in answer to other questions.

Capacity-building / knowledge-sharing

The importance of networking, and experience- and knowledge-sharing was repeatedly stressed. The types of activity proposed included:

- Networking and matchmaking events (on- and offline). One model cited was the Joint EIT Health Germany and EIT Health Innostars Symposium in late October 2020. One respondent called for all stakeholders to be involved, i.e. university staff and not just researchers (which reflected a number of points made by others about including university staff in this type of activity. This would include, but not be restricted to, staff of Technology Transfer Offices). Other models cited were Erasmus+ and the European university networks that were selected under the European Universities Initiative, with which the EIT could create synergies since they are also working on activities aimed at reinforcing cooperation with non-academic actors. It was also suggested that the EIT should fund travel to networking events.
- Exchange of best practice of cases and knowledge-sharing, ensuring that this is tailored to the specific features of HEIs' local ecosystems but also bringing together participants or projects at different levels of maturity or development. One respondent said this could also include practices aimed at investing in the organisation of support services such as Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Offices, Corporate Relations Departments, Incubators etc., and facilitating their interaction with other university services supporting public engagement, innovative education and education for businesses, etc.
- Innovation centres, where participants from all over the EU could easily form discussion and research groups, irrespective of their level of innovation capacity. The EIT could

capitalise on already existing and planned initiatives such as the Digital Innovation Hubs and the networks of research centres in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) announced in the Commission's White Paper on AI.

- Mentoring or tandem programmes between partners from different countries, including partners at different levels, train-the-trainer programmes, learning materials and programmes.

3.5 Obstacles to HEI participation in EIT KIC networks and activities

Question: What factors are currently preventing HEIs in Europe from becoming members of the EIT KICs' networks or from participating in the EIT KICs' activities?

Respondents to this question identified some structural issues, such as the need for EIT KICs to put more emphasis on education and building relationships with HEIs, and barriers to participation for smaller HEIs. However, there were a significant number of comments about cost, complexity, the administrative burden and transparency. These were often allied with comments that the benefits are not clear enough to outweigh those two disadvantages and suggestions on improving the visibility of the EIT.

3.5.1 Key factors

The factors identified as currently preventing HEIs in Europe from becoming members of the EIT KICs' networks or from participating in the EIT KICs' activities were:

- the absence of high-quality entrepreneurial education in HEIs;
- lack of connections between EIT KICs and higher education institutions;
- cost and complexity in a context where the benefits of participation are not well understood;
- the administrative burden;
- a lack of transparency;
- inflexibility

Both EIT KIC respondents and other respondents highlighted these issues.

The absence of high-quality entrepreneurial education

The **lack of quality entrepreneurial education, which was specifically highlighted in response to other questions,** was implicitly recognised as an inhibiting factor in answer to this question because a number of respondents believed the EIT KICs should play a role in promoting high quality, innovative entrepreneurial education (instead of focusing mainly on business creation, according to one respondent). That should include student scholarships, one respondent suggested, because of their impact on the participating HEIs by integrating them in the Knowledge Triangle.

The lack of connections between the EIT KICs and HEIs

Two respondents said the EIT KICs need to align their activities better with the needs of universities. An EIT KIC respondent stressed the need for **better connections with universities,** as without these, there is a "*lack of information and trust.*" The other respondent, who was from an HEIsaid that more could be done by certain EIT KICs to actively support universities and other partners. *"Many KICs have been acting much more as advocacy actors and venture capitalists rather than serving the needs of the university community. [This] does not meet the original EIT aim to foster interaction between European universities and industry/society."*

Other respondents felt that the EIT needs to **provide mechanisms for second and third tier universities to move up a tier**, i.e. from third to second, and from second to first. Such mechanisms could include allowing them to initiate or lead innovation projects despite their lower capacity or having different levels of participation in EIT KICs. One respondent pointed out that the benefits for the partner come from being active in the network, but if a specific research area is not core for a university, it is difficult for them to maintain the high level of activity that participation implies.

One EIT KIC respondent pointed to a constraint: "*The KICs have to keep their membership balanced and aim at organic growth. Therefore, they cannot absorb all HEIs in Europe. If they did, they would disrupt the triangle. However, the [EIT] KICs can contribute to creating awareness about the need to boost innovation capacities in the EU and support HEIs that are sufficiently motivated to design and implement their strategic trajectory towards increased innovation capabilities together with their core ecosystem."*

However, there were also respondents who laid the fault for non-participation at the door of the HEIs rather than the EIT because *"the HEIs themselves lack vision and a level of maturity in the area of innovation & entrepreneurship skills"* and they do not have the professional capacity to initiate and maintain participation in the networks. One respondent believed some HEIs see the strength of the EIT innovation approach and the EIT KICs' consolidated practice as a threat to their autonomy and may also fear entering a competitive environment and being subject to scrutiny.

Cost and complexity

Cost and complexity were identified as a generic barrier by a number of respondents, including those from EIT KICs, both in terms of the amount of the membership fee and the co-funding requirements (and the level of the latter), and in terms of the HEIs' lack of funds. One HEI respondent pointed out that any university with a fully-fledged entrepreneurial mission would want to be involved with several EIT KICs, but this is not feasible for most of the universities, especially smaller or younger ones. Another pointed out that the industry can be reluctant to join

a consortium because they will be expected to carry the cost of the universities' meeting the co-funding requirement.

Those who identified cost as a barrier often added a comment to the effect that **the benefits which come with paying that price are not well understood**. One respondent commented that the EIT activities are too profit-driven. Another argued that the change of focus to later stage projects and the amount of funding per project have made EIT funding unattractive compared to other national or EU sources because most HEI projects are in an early phase.

Changing the focus of funding from early projects to later stage projects negatively affects HEIs, one respondent pointed out, since many of their business and innovation projects are in an early phase. Considering the size of the funding received for each project, the net worth is low and other funding resources, either within the EU or on national level, are therefore more attractive.

There was also criticism that **funding is not equitably distributed** because it is mainly directed to founding members and CLC activities. This leaves the other partners needing to support their participation through their other funding sources. Moreover, affiliated entities of EIT Hubs cannot get funding from some programmes because of budget limits set for the Hubs (and affiliates), who are mainly universities.

Administrative burden

There were a significant number of responses criticising the **administrative burden**. One respondent replied with a one-word answer on the factors acting as a disincentive to taking part (*"red-tape"*), while an EIT KIC respondent put it more diplomatically as "*complex organisation and objectives*".

As in the case of fees and co-funding (see above), comments about the bureaucracy were often accompanied by comments that the **offsetting benefits are not well understood**, or not worth it because the amount of money available is not enough. There was also a comment that it is not clear what additional benefits accrue to core members from participation compared to the benefits for external entities. The KCAs were also felt to add a level of complication.

The complaints about bureaucracy, including inter alia "unintelligible" acronyms, related both to the application processes and reporting requirements "*with a high level of control from EIT*" (which is perceived as distrust). Smaller universities and companies, several respondents argued, are not in a position to handle the administrative burden, so that the gap between large and small becomes wider.

Specific issues raised were:

- the success fee without any guarantee of profitability;
- the plans for revenue-sharing (which would not be possible in Scandinavia);
- the requirements on financial sustainability;
- differing financial sustainability requirements across the EIT KICs, exacerbating the complexity;
- the difficulty of finding time from a heavy teaching load to take part in brokerage events;
- short project durations that are incompatible with sustainable results or sustainable employment of scientific staff and increase the administrative burden.

Lack of transparency

One respondent expressed concern about the **low degree of predictability** between and even within annual project cycle(s) – which makes planning activities and hiring very risky. EIT Health was specifically criticised for changing the conditions for funding after the 2019 applications were approved, which had made the EIT seem arbitrary and unreliable.

One respondent said that the lack of transparency and **clear rules of participation** that are consistent for each EIT KIC had been major issues for universities. The models of partnership and activities differ from one EIT KIC to another, preventing the development of common and accessible activities for universities to participate in, one respondent said, giving as an example the fact that some EIT KICs require a university to bring in an industry partner.

There is also a perception that EIT KICs are a "**closed shop**", where existing members are unwilling to "*share the cake*". More specifically, one respondent said that it is difficult for an institution not involved with an EIT KIC from the outset to join later because only a limited number of memberships are allocated to HEIs and the allocation is applied geographically. Another respondent made a similar point, stating that this restricts these universities to participation in projects with small budgets.

The EIT was also considered **inflexible** in acknowledging specific national contexts, where language and cultural limitations for some activities makes it difficult to scale them to pan-European level. This respondent gave the example of education activities for medical professionals that often need to be in the local language and relate to local structures and challenges.

A similar comment was that: *"KIC partners' opinions quite often are not taken into account by [EIT] KIC headquarters, which could lead to more and more universities leaving the [EIT] KICs in the nearer future. Considering the fact that suggestions of [EIT] KIC partners are often simply ignored*

by the [EIT] KIC management, those rather high membership fees, especially for core partners, can no longer be justified."

Another factor cited was the **lack of information about the impact of HEIs at the regional, national and international level other than through the rankings**. These are based on scientific indicators such as scientific publications and patents, when there are other indicators which could be relevant, e.g. their progress over time.

3.5.2 Strengthening the ecosystem

Issues around visibility and communication of the advantages of being part of the EIT Community were frequent. As noted above, a number of respondents attributed a perception that costs of participation and administrative burden are high to the benefits and opportunities of participation not being understood. Several respondents said in this context that the EIT brand is not strong enough. One respondent highlighted a lack of local players in innovation ecosystems that are familiar with the EIT KICs and with the impact they could have.

According to one HEI respondent, universities often still see EIT KICs as research funding instruments. The university joins an EIT KIC because of an individual researcher's need without a wider strategic plan which takes into account the innovation and education side, and the fact that EIT KICs are about educating new generations in an entrepreneurship/innovation mindset.

Suggestions for improvements in communication and visibility ranged from improving the website to dealing with a misconception that the EIT KIC networks are only for specific institutions or EU institutions, and lack of clarity about who can and cannot be members, from easier communication with EIT KIC managements to more information on calls for proposals and activities, success stories and statistics.

4 Conclusion

There was consensus in this consultation that HEIs as a general rule need support from the EIT and the EIT KICs to become more entrepreneurial and innovative. There are exceptions since Europe has some top-tier universities, but the hypothesis that the EIT and the EIT KICs have a role in improving the situation was well accepted.

A critical step in that is for the EIT and the EIT KICs to be better known and for there to be a better understanding of what they do and the benefits of working with them. Improving the visibility of the EIT and the EIT KICs, and sharing knowledge and building capacity more, is not just a question of working with teaching staff and students, but also of engaging with administrative staff, technology transfer offices, incubators and accelerators.

There was a very wide range of suggestions of what the EIT should fund, but the overarching theme was that it would be desirable for the EIT to develop more educational programmes and funding schemes targeting HEIs. The EIT is seen as being particularly well placed to foster project-based education based on real-life situations.

A better understanding that the EIT is not just a research funder and that it is not the "closed shop" it is sometimes perceived to be outside the EIT Community would help offset the disadvantage of the administrative burden associated with involvement with the EIT. That administrative burden is perceived as heavy. Respondents wanted greater flexibility in applying existing requirements in order to reduce the administrative burden, but also suggested the use of a more diverse set of criteria in assessing eligibility to participate in EIT and EIT KIC criteria to make it easier for small, or second and third tier HEIs to become more innovative and entrepreneurial.

In conclusion, therefore, respondents to this consultation were aligned with the direction of the EIT's future plans to integrate a wider number of HEIs into innovation value chains and ecosystems; establish deeper and broader new activities that build on previous policy initiatives and take an inclusive approach to participation in its new action.

Annex 1: Consultation questionnaire

Basic Questions

- Name and surname:
    - (free text)

- E-mail:
    - (free text)

- Name of organisation:
    - (free text)

- Type of organisation:
    - Higher education institution
    - Research institution
    - Corporate/industry
    - Start-up/scale-up
    - National authority (e.g. national ministry, science and innovation agency, parliament)
    - Intergovernmental organisation (IGO)
    - Non-governmental organisation (NGO)
    - European institution (European Commission, European Parliament, etc.)
    - EIT KIC
    - Other

- Organisation's location:
    - Choose from a list of countries (all)

- Position in the organization:
    - (free text)

- Have you participated in an EIT activity before? (multiple choice)
    - EIT Community event
    - Innovation project
    - Education programme
    - Venture support
    - Other

o   Not yet

- Are you currently a member of the EIT Community (EIT KICs and their partners, EIT Alumni)?
  o   Yes/No

- Which one of the following areas of activity are you most interested in?
  o   Business support
  o   Education & training
  o   Innovation-driven research activities
  o   Ecosystem-building/connectivity

- Publication privacy settings:
  o   Anonymous: Only your answers to the following - type of respondent, country of origin and contribution - will be published. All other personal details (name, organisation name etc.) will not be published.
  o   Public: Your personal details (name, organisation name etc.) will be published with your contribution.

Thematic Questions

1. Why do you think Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Europe are underperforming in terms of their capacity to be more innovative and entrepreneurial?
   Free-form

2. How do you think the EIT can mobilise resources through [Knowledge Triangle Integration](#) (bringing together business, research, and education) in the most effective way possible to address these issues?
   Free-form

3. What concrete measures should the EIT and its KICs consider to help universities become more innovative and entrepreneurial?
   Free-form

4. How can the EIT and its KICs ensure that the new action to support HEIs involves participants from all over the EU, regardless of their level of innovation capacity?
   Free-form

5. What factors are currently preventing HEIs in Europe from becoming members of the EIT KICs' networks or from participating in the EIT KICs' activities?
   Free-form

Submission of Supporting Documents

If you wish to upload additional documents (e.g. Position Papers), please do so here:
⬆ (upload file here)

☐ I agree with the personal data protection provisions.
☐ I consent to being included in the EIT Stakeholder Database for future contacts.

Annex 2: Additional contributions

Respondents to this consultation were given the opportunity to submit position papers. Two did so.

Young European Research Universities

With position papers from September and November 2019, the **Young European Research Universities** (YERUN) addressed the proposed dedicated action for the EIT to boost innovation capacity in universities not part of the EIT KICs. The November 2019 paper addressed concerns about the questioning as of November 2019 of the need for the proposed new EIT intervention domain to promote entrepreneurship and innovation capacity development in European higher education.

YERUN regarded this proposal as a positive spill-over of the EIT's education agenda to a wider community which could help transform higher education. For YERUN, it was self-evident that the EIT must target higher education institutions beyond those that are already established EIT KIC members, as these obviously already classify as entrepreneurial and innovative and are embedded in powerful innovation ecosystems.

YERUN called for this new intervention domain to be implemented through EIT KIC activities because EIT KICs are mature partnerships composed of strong innovation actors (business, Research and Technology Offices (RTOs) and universities). The EIT KICS and their constituents have the expertise to promote entrepreneurship and innovation capacity development in HEIs. YERUN identified the most needed activities as promoting knowledge sharing, best practices and capacity development for students, researchers and support staff in HEIs not involved as EIT KIC partner organisations.

An earmarked and meaningful budget for this action was essential to safeguard its concrete implementation, YERUN said. The action could be carried out synergistically with other instruments, such as the ERASMUS programme. It would not undermine the knowledge triangle concept, but rather strengthen an essential side of the triangle, moreover the one that serves the other actors of innovation community (business, government, citizens). YERUN concluded that the action would grant the EIT a much needed additional proof of societal impact.

A potential action to support the cultural standing of the EIT

The paper "**A potential action to support the cultural standing of the EIT**" was submitted from a member of the EIT Alumni Association provided suggestions on broader themes than the new EIT Action on Higher Education. In particular, it suggested that the EIT Alumni Association that it could itself be the best body to *distil* significant arguments from the EIT KICs' experience and to *develop* a discussion on the role of technology in addressing social and environmental issues. It suggested doing this with the help of the EIT KIC Alumni Communities and EIT Headquarters.

The paper identified 4 crucial questions on the (integrated) role of Research, Innovation and Education:

o What principles should drive the *transformative power* of technology when applied to social processes and individuals' behaviour? How can the inclusive impact of the innovation steps be predicted to inspire responsible choices?
o How should the Research, Innovation and Education efforts face *societal inequality* and the *decline* of *social cohesion*?
o How should the Research, Innovation and Education efforts deal with the profound and urgent *environmental* dilemma?
o How can technology support the creation of *consciousness* and *participatory attitude* in communities and individuals?

Addressing these issues through the Alumni Association, who are working in many areas of specialisation and many parts of the world, would be consistent with the Association's aims, which include to: "*…share a common vision for creating positive social impact through innovation and entrepreneurship*".

The Association would therefore be a suitable *crossing point* of the *initiatives* taken by the existing EIT KICs. This position should facilitate the mining of the most significant achievements in the *responsibility* framework and the elaboration of *meaning* around them, and carry out a broader debate on the long-term impact of technology-based innovations and to connect them to the *grand challenges* of our age.

Showing how the EU-supported Research, Innovation and Education advances are responsibly oriented to create social and environmental benefits for the future generations could represent a valuable contribution to improve European citizens' sense of belonging.