

EIT Stakeholder Forum 2020

Background for the Online Consultation: *New EIT Action to Support the Innovation Capacity of Higher Education Institutions in Europe*

Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are increasingly playing an important role in the innovation process. While some HEIs are actively involved in innovation activities and form a core part of innovation value chains, many are not well-equipped for the innovation age. Some of the biggest obstacles to the success of HEIs in the field of innovation are a lack of relevant capabilities, incentives and sustained support.

To become more integrated in innovation chains and play a stronger role in local economies, HEIs need to develop differentiation strategies, cooperate effectively with businesses, promote an entrepreneurial mindset in students and staff, and better manage digital transformation. In other words, **they need to become more entrepreneurial and innovative organisations.** This requires a clear strategy, a focused methodological framework and strong institutional support.

Based on its experience in fostering knowledge triangle integration that directly supports innovation capacity-building and the development of innovation ecosystems, the **European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)** is uniquely positioned to support the development of entrepreneurial and innovative HEIs within the framework of Horizon Europe.

New Action to Support HEIs

In June 2018, the European Commission published its proposal for Horizon Europe, the next research and innovation framework programme that will succeed Horizon 2020. The EIT has been prominently placed in the proposal's Pillar III – Open Innovation. In July 2019, the Commission proposed an update to the [EIT Regulation](#) and a new [Strategic Innovation Agenda for 2021-2027](#), which will determine our future strategic priorities. The Commission's proposal gives an enhanced mandate to the EIT and suggests several [new features](#), including **a new action to boost the innovation capacity of higher education.**



HEIs in Europe need to be more innovative in their approach to education, research, and engagement with local innovation ecosystems, including business and civil society. This requires a clear strategy, methodology and resources. The EIT is perfectly placed to support the development of entrepreneurial, innovative HEIs within the framework of Horizon Europe.

The Commission proposal includes the following:

- **The EIT will integrate a wider number of HEIs into innovation value chains and ecosystems** through the activities of its Knowledge and Innovation Communities (EIT KICs). It will ensure that its educational programmes are more open and accessible to non-partners of the EIT KICs.
- **The EIT will build on strong policy initiatives such as HEInnovate¹ and RIIA².** It will design its activities in close cooperation with the Commission to ensure complementarity with relevant Horizon Europe programmes (e.g. Erasmus).
- **The EIT will steer and coordinate the implementation and monitoring of new activities**, which shall be run by the EIT KICs. Particular attention will be paid to the following: inclusivity in attracting HEIs beyond the KICs' partners, an interdisciplinary and intersectoral approach, resonance with the Commission's Smart Specialisation Strategies and the EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (EIT RIS).
- **The EIT will link its support for innovation in higher education to the EIT Label**, which is currently given to the EIT KICs' educational programmes. The EIT will extend the EIT Label to participating HEIs and lifelong learning activities that mobilise a wider group of students, adult learners and institutions (including VET institutions) beyond the KICs. The application of the label beyond the EIT community will provide structure on multiple levels (individual, programmatic and institutional).

The EIT will focus on HEIs from countries that are moderate and modest innovators³, as well as other low performing regions that wish to strengthen their innovation footprint and [Smart Specialisation Strategies](#).

¹ See <https://heinnovate.eu/en>

² See <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/regional-innovation-impact-assessment-framework-universities>

³ According to the [European Innovation Scoreboard](#)

