

Revitalise the European Institute of Innovation & Technology

Position dated 24 June 2024

The leading universities of science & technology united within CESAER acknowledge the efforts of the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT), established in 2008, to foster innovation ecosystems across Europe, particularly in integrating education and entrepreneurship. As we look to the future for the second half of Horizon Europe and with the start of the [design of its successor FP10](#), we offer our insights and recommendations on how to revitalise the EIT and ensure it stays fit for purpose to meet the stated objective while clarifying and reinforcing a complementary role in an increasingly complex and changing landscape.

This position paper builds on our previous positions to (i) fully acknowledge the central role of universities of science & technology in developing [deep tech entrepreneurship](#), (ii) [boost disruptive innovation](#) by fostering new mindsets and co-creating innovation and (iii) recognise [the crucial role](#) of universities of science & technology acting as the "glue" of innovation ecosystems playing an open and collaborative leadership role that goes beyond the more passive "third mission".

The EIT's mission to strengthen innovation ecosystems and foster entrepreneurial skills is commendable. However, in recent years the administrative burden and overregulation have grown, along with increased co-funding and backflow requirements, which detract from the EIT's primary focus. To revitalise the EIT and ensure its relevance, we propose to (i) return to the primary mission of EIT, (ii) reassess financing of EIT and (iii) enhance synergies.

1) Return to primary mission of EIT focused on training and education of talent and on innovation ecosystems

We recommend that EIT refocus on its core mission of innovation-focused education and training, particularly targeting early-career and young talent through industry-university ecosystems.

The knowledge triangle should be at the heart of EIT's innovation model; by bringing together excellent institutions from business, education, and research, they can jointly overcome barriers to innovation caused by silo mentalities and market fragmentation. However, the current funding criteria for the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) acts as barriers for universities to participate in innovation projects by requiring initial technology readiness levels (TRL) of at least 6 (with EIT Manufacturing's recent Call-for-Proposal starting at TRL 7). This limits the key role of universities of science & technology to mainly providing access to their pool of spin-offs and start-ups. Consequently, the initial knowledge triangle approach of the EIT is being gradually downgraded into a knowledge pipeline.

In contrast, there is an over-platformisation and a proliferation of competing initiatives linking education and industry, building communities. The competitive advantage of the EIT should

be its unique ability to integrate the knowledge triangle fully. By leveraging the combined strengths of business, education, and research institutions, the EIT can create a holistic innovation ecosystem. This approach can address challenges at multiple levels, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and ensuring a continuous flow of innovative ideas and solutions from concept to market, thereby enhancing Europe's innovation performance and competitiveness.

- We call upon the EU institutions to restore the primary focus of the EIT on training and education of science & technology talent through knowledge and innovation communities, particularly in the design of FP10.

By returning to its primary mission, the EIT can effectively contribute to shaping engineers (and professionals) of the future, as highlighted in our [white paper](#) of the same name. The EIT should ensure it capitalises on and adapts to the new expectations for today's workforce, educating and training individuals to provide them with the right tools to be active, trusted, and inventive professionals who innovate for the benefit of society. This, in turn, will enhance Europe's overall innovation performance and competitiveness, by playing to our strength and nurturing research & innovation talent, as developed in our [recent competitiveness position](#).

The increasing administrative workload and overregulation inhibit the EIT's ability to fulfil its primary objectives. Streamlining administrative processes and reducing regulatory burdens will allow the EIT to concentrate on its core mission of fostering innovation and entrepreneurial skills.

Additionally, the EIT's role in coordinating and facilitating KICs is essential but has been hindered by inconsistent approaches among KICs. This lack of consistency creates complexity and confusion, particularly for organisations involved in multiple KIC activities.

- We urge the EIT and the KICs to streamline their approaches, ensuring clarity and coherence in their operations.

We call upon the EU institutions to:

- Streamline administrative processes to reduce workload and enhance efficiency;
- Review regulatory frameworks to reduce overregulation and foster a conducive environment for innovation;
- In line with our [plea](#) for balanced cluster calls within the second pillar of Horizon Europe, we call upon the EIT to ensure that a full perspective towards innovation is embraced notably across all TRLs.

Returning to the primary mission of EIT also means focussing on what works well. This includes the development of talented, skilled and entrepreneurial experts through innovation-focused education, networking and training activities.

- We call upon the EU institutions to create a supportive environment for investing in innovation skills by implementing specific measures that encourage [growth, learning, and open mindsets](#). This includes funding programs that support experiential learning, fostering collaboration across disciplines, and creating safe spaces for experimentation where failure is viewed as an opportunity for growth. By adopting this problem-based approach, the EIT can help develop the diverse skill sets necessary to drive change through multi- and trans-disciplinary methods.

2) Realign funding model of EIT away from profit outcomes and towards training and educational outcomes

Public and not-for-profit institutions, such as universities, face distinct challenges in participating in the EIT due to their different missions and societal roles compared to for-profit entities. The current financing model does not sufficiently account for these differences, making it difficult for many institutions to engage effectively. However, it is crucial to ensure that universities of science & technology remain involved, as their participation is essential for the vitality and success of innovation ecosystems, and their unique societal role in training and education at the highest level. They contribute cutting-edge research, foster interdisciplinary collaboration, and provide a steady pipeline of skilled graduates, all of which are indispensable for driving innovation and ensuring the EIT and KICs can achieve their full potential.

“Flowback” requirements, aimed at securing returns on investments, are particularly detrimental to public institutions like universities. These requirements also lead to wasted resources and discourage risk-taking behaviour, essential for innovation. Moreover, the administrative workload and overregulation related to financial reporting further burden universities participating in EIT activities.

We recall that the objectives of the EIT and the KICs include to “strengthen sustainable innovation ecosystems across Europe” and to “foster innovation and entrepreneurial skills”. These are primarily capacity building and educational and training activities, not profit-making activities. Requirements to generate financial surplus can therefore be counter-productive to the intended objectives.

To address these challenges, it is imperative to move away from a profit-focus and remove flowback requirements and adopt a more flexible approach focused on effectively funding innovation ecosystems and training and education outcomes. Clear guidelines should be established upfront regarding how partners of KICs contribute to covering costs, ensuring transparency and fairness. Additionally, a broader definition of sustainable funding, including in-kind contributions, should be embraced to accommodate the diverse needs of participating institutions.

We call upon the EU institutions and member states to:

- Provide sustainable funding that balances competitive and non-competitive funding streams to enable universities to experiment and take risks in supporting talent across various career paths in research and innovation.
- Exclude public institutions such as universities from flowback requirements and requirements to generate profit.
- Reassess the EIT’s financing model to ensure sustainable support for its initiatives without imposing excessive co-funding requirements.
- Realign the financial sustainability of the KICs by clarifying the division of labour, coordination, and cooperation among co-location centres. This will optimise resource allocation and enhance the effectiveness of KIC activities.
- Encourage the EIT to allocate resources or secure new EU funding to support innovative activities within the KICs, fostering a dynamic and responsive innovation ecosystem.

3) Enhance synergies

Effective monitoring and assessment are pivotal for the success of the EIT and its KICs. However, there is a need for improvement in this regard, as the current system often lacks comprehensive evaluation and learning mechanisms. Additionally, while synergies between the EIT and other European instruments like the European Innovation Council (EIC) are emphasised, their practical implementation remains unclear. This lack of clear integration hinders the engagement of universities and limit the overall impact of these programs.

To address these challenges, the EIT must prioritise the establishment of robust monitoring and assessment frameworks across all its activities. This entails implementing systems for gathering and analysing data, as well as mechanisms for incorporating feedback and lessons learned into future endeavours. Furthermore, enhancing synergies between the EIT and the EIC requires concrete actions, streamlining administrative processes, and fostering collaboration between the two initiatives.

We call upon the EU institutions to:

- Streamline and standardise the monitoring and assessment processes within EIT and KICs by using the EU portal platform.
- Enhance synergies between the EIT and the EIC as well as between the KICs themselves, through practical measures, such as joint funding initiatives, shared resources, and coordinated activities.
- Consider enhancing synergies between the EIT and other relevant EU programmes, notably the European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) part of Horizon Europe, to further boost the creation of inclusive innovation ecosystems in Europe.
- Ensure that EU-level instruments are attractive, complementary, and evidence-driven, with a focus on maximising impact and efficiency.
- If certain instruments fail to demonstrate their effectiveness or cannot effectively integrate with other initiatives, consider discontinuing them to optimise resource allocation and streamline the research and innovation landscape.

Our association and its Members offer to continue being a proactive and constructive partner, leveraging the unique role of universities of science & technology in research & innovation ecosystems connecting from the local through the European to the global levels.

For more information and enquiries, please [contact](#) our Advisor for Innovation & Sustainability, Louise Drogoul.

Please reference this document using <https://zenodo.org/records/12515581>

Rooted in advanced engineering education and research, [CESAER](#) is an international association of leading specialised and comprehensive universities with a strong science and technology profile that advocate, learn from each other and inspire debates. Our Members champion excellence in higher education, training, research and innovation, contribute to knowledge societies for a sustainable future and deliver significant scientific, economic, social and societal impact.

