KA2: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

Pilot call for proposals: EAC-A03-2018

Deadline: 28 February 2019 (12.00 noon Brussels time)

Erasmus+ Programme

EPICUR

European Partnership for an Innovative Campus Unifying Regions

APPLICATION:

ANNEX 2-2: MISSION STATEMENT

(To be attached to the e-Form)

EN Version 2018

Our Vision

Our European University for the future – EPICUR – is a place where all our boundlessly mobile students, doctoral candidates and staff irrespective of their nationality, mother tongue, cultural or socio-economic background, acquire a broad, interdisciplinary, academic perspective strongly rooted in our European traditions.

Nearly seven decades after the European integration project has started, Europe now finds itself in a global and multipolar world in which a united European voice is more relevant than ever before. Today Europe stands at the crossroads of both internal and external challenges, ranging from political instability and ageing populations to climate change and proliferating digital technologies.

EPICUR is ready to address these challenges by bringing together the unique experience, knowledge and creative potential of European regions and cities. We build bridges between the creative academic communities of eight leading European universities, serving as intellectual hubs to the surrounding research and innovation landscapes and beyond. Our current and future generations of students, as well as researchers and staff, will become aware of the importance of European Identities: Europe's multilingualism and cultural diversity is strength, rather than a weakness, and mobility is an indispensable asset of learning.

In a spirit of mutual trust, reciprocity, and responsibility, and in fair partnerships with other world regions, we connect our activities for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Europe of tomorrow.

Our Mission and Core Values

Located in campuses across Europe, EPICUR will contribute to shaping the European Education, Research and Innovation Area by inviting a new generation of European citizens to engage in interdisciplinary, multilingual, research-inspired teaching and learning as well as cutting-edge research and innovation.

We will (re)design our curricula for an academic education of tomorrow and offer a novel European classroom experience in a multilingual, diverse and stakeholder engaging environment of an inter-university campus without borders. This experience enables our students to evolve into well-informed, open-minded and responsible European citizens capable of creating new knowledge and to become drivers of transnational innovation.

We will combine our resources and competences for strengthening performance in research and innovation and will provide stimulating and multi-disciplinary environments to our researchers.

- **Multilingualism and interculturality**: one of EPICUR's main strengths is its expertise in multilingualism, language teaching and inclusive language governance. This expertise will be connected to nurturing intercultural skills. This approach will enhance the inclusive nature of our academic programmes;
- **Boundless mobility**: EPICUR will connect traditional and experimental elements of physical *and* virtual mobility to facilitate and intensify seamless movement and connectivity of our students and staff across our campuses. By doing so, EPICUR creates opportunities for developing personalised study plans;

- **Innovation in Education**: EPICUR will deploy didactic approaches derived from Liberal Arts & Science education in devising innovative teaching formats to be implemented at partner universities. These approaches, by nature, are characterised by a spirit of free enquiry enabling students to make complex connections across disciplines, cultures and institutions;
- **Unity in diversity**: not only does EPICUR build on rich experiences in facilitating regional cross-border collaboration in existing networks like Eucor – The European Campus, EPICUR serves as a gateway to other regional networks, including the Black Sea Universities Network, the CASEE Regional Network for Central and South Eastern Europe and the Baltic University Programme, allowing EPICUR to share results with our peers across the continent;
- **Complementary strengths**: we believe in the joint strength and power of our alliance. Harnessing resources and complementary competences will allow us to offer globally competitive and sustainable solutions to European and world issues;
- **Social Responsibility**: we regard the dialogue between academia, economy and society as a cornerstone for the idea of a European university. We will continue our efforts to foster an entrepreneurial mind-set among students and researchers and encourage civic engagement;
- **Global outreach**: we are convinced that sharing our expertise beyond our alliance will benefit students, researchers, teaching staff and colleagues and inspire institutional innovation across Europe and beyond.

How we will achieve our objectives

- by **nurturing multilingualism**, **language acquisition and intercultural awareness**. The consortium will develop a deliberate and carefully considered model language policy, facilitating the partners to develop as bi- or multilingual universities;
- by establishing **boundless connectivity** and **free movement of our students and staff** across our European campuses, using forms of traditional physical mobility and virtual tools;
- by developing **models for innovative, student-centred teaching & learning**, drawing upon expertise from our Liberal Arts and Sciences programmes. These programmes are built around themes and topics addressing major European and world issues and teach students ways of integrating insights from a variety of subjects and fields;
- by providing thriving **frameworks for research activities**, enabling academics to jointly drive forward new ideas or to explore new fields of research and innovation and by facilitating collaboration with excellent students via research-oriented teaching.
- by **establishing a European academic node** as EPICUR's partners serve as **gateways in connecting various adjacent regions and networks across Europe**;
- by developing **sustainable governance structures** catering for substantive long-term collaboration in teaching and research.

A long-term strategy for an enhanced and sustainable cooperation: EPICUR in 2025

EPICUR's vision on teaching and learning as on research and innovation evolves to reflect societal challenges, academic and technological developments and educational innovation, while also seeking to shape these changes. By doing so, EPICUR aims at preparing future generations of European students to become tomorrow's leaders and making a meaningful contribution to solving complex problems.

By 2025 EPICUR will have established an engaging learning environment, enabling students and lecturers to approach complex European issues from a variety of academic and societal perspectives. EPICUR links this learning environment to research by promoting dynamic research collaborations, taking advantage of complementarities and creating European added value.

Nurturing multilingualism, language acquisition, and intercultural awareness

In a world where higher education is increasingly internationalised, questions concerning the choice of language of instruction, multilingualism and intercultural competences will be central to the ways in which our European University functions in teaching, research, innovation and administration and how it will contribute to the shaping of the European Education Area by 2025.

EPICUR addresses the European Union's aspiration that new generations of Europeans will be able to speak at least two European languages in addition to their mother tongue. We consider **multilingualism, language acquisition**, and **intercultural competencies** vital for the development of our European University. Language is key to fostering educational quality and research impact, facilitating learning experiences, nurturing social cohesion and mutual understanding, and improving employability. Likewise, it is crucial for our ambitious goals with regard to enhancing mobility of students, researchers, teachers, and staff and the development of joint and flexible curricula.

We are aware of the tensions between necessary academic admission requirements concerning language proficiency and our ambitions of widening the social diversity of the student body and facilitating the access of under-represented and disadvantaged groups.

As an alliance of universities with strong links into their surrounding regions, EPICUR is especially committed to protecting linguistic diversity within Europe. We are mindful about the complex linguistic environments affecting our partner universities and their surrounding regions, such as national level language policies, local linguistic diversity, special demands of border regions, an internationalised student body, and increasing international collaboration in research and innovation.

> ➢ The efforts of our alliance in the field of multilingualism will be framed by a deliberately and carefully considered **model language policy**, to increase language awareness among all those who study or work at the university, to actively promote institutional bi- and multilingualism and to provide partner universities and interested peers across Europe with tools for developing as bi- or multilingual universities in line with the requirements of the European Education Area. This language policy will be entailed by a step-by-step implementation plan for each partner university.

> ➢ EPICUR will **strengthen language programmes and linguistic support** at all partner universities through encouraging cooperation and sharing of best practices.

> ➢ We will jointly contribute to protecting Europe's rich linguistic diversity by **strengthening co-operation in the field of Small European Languages (i.e. joint curricula, joint degrees)**, and better **acknowledging competencies in languages other than the major European Languages**.

> ➢ We strive to strengthen **intercultural competences** and integrate them into our curricula.

Facilitating boundless connectivity and free movement of students and staff on a European 'inter-university' campus

The main objective of EPICUR is to turn free movement of our students, lecturers, and staff – be it physical, virtual, or blended – into a day-to-day experience of teaching and learning.

While strongly advocating the **essential role of physical mobility and face-to-face interactions** for teaching and learning, we consider digital technologies to be an essential element and as a significant method for overcoming distance and stimulating inclusiveness in our alliance. Making use of digital technologies (for example based on design thinking) will help us to bridge the gap between different academic calendars and to eliminate existing obstacles with regard to registration, transfer of student records, and access to services and knowledge (Open Access).

Embracing Digitalization and the Democratization of Knowledge will allow us as well to extend the unique experience of our inter-university campus to lifelong learners and non-traditional learners. We re-affirm diversity as a guiding principle of our alliance and will minimize existing obstacles to the participation of under-represented and disadvantaged groups.

Student's learning on a European inter-university campus will be largely personalised, including various forms of formal, non-formal and informal learning. We will advocate for a better validation of skills and competences developed through non-traditional forms of learning and experiment with novel approaches to assessing learning progress.

- ➢ EPICUR will facilitate the physical mobility of students at all levels through **introducing mobility windows in study programmes** of the partner institutions, beginning with the fields of Sustainability Research, Liberal Arts & Science education, and Small European Languages;
- ➢ We will jointly develop **joint learning & teaching modules** and **digital lecture content** (with built-in activating features allowing for interaction), beginning with the fields of Sustainability Research, Liberal Arts & Science education, and Small European Languages. These elements will rely on formats of blended learning and will be easily integrated in existing curricula among our alliance;
- ➢ We will broaden the spectrum of **short-time mobility options**, including research oriented, cross-university Master Labs;
- ➢ We will step up our efforts to **increase the number of joint study programmes** among our partners;
- ➢ We will work towards **joint degrees** whenever appropriate and will develop solutions to simplify their awarding, so that a customized choice of study content on our inter-university campus can be followed by the awarding of degrees by at least two partner universities.
- ➢ We will establish a **Collaborative Virtual Environment** and **the necessary technical support** for supporting the inter-university Campus with regard to virtual classrooms, registration, and learning assessment. This tool will be based upon existing current infrastructure and content of the participating universities.
- ➢ Drawing on the concept of gamification, we will develop an **innovative system for integrating non-formal and informal forms of learning and cross-disciplinary skills and competences** into existing standard means for comparing the volume of learning.
- ➢ We will extend the use of the **European Student Card**, once fully operational, to all partners of the alliance

Developing models for innovative, student-centred teaching & learning

We believe that the pressing challenges Europe is facing today can best be addressed by encouraging critical and open dialogue among students and academics, and examined through a multitude of approaches, including perspective from stakeholders beyond the university. The global challenges of the future demand new, creative and collaborative ways of thinking and specific competencies from the coming generations of Europeans.

EPICUR will explore and implement **novel cross-disciplinary approaches and innovative curricular solutions** for a true European academic education, deploying didactic approaches derived from Liberal Arts & Science education. These approaches, by nature, are characterised by a spirit of free enquiry enabling students to make complex connections across disciplines, cultures and institutions, enhancing our students' ability to cope with the complexity and unpredictability of the world of tomorrow.

Liberal Arts and Science Education will become a central pillar of EPICUR. We will use this framework as a cross-disciplinary instructional lab for testing and implementing new approaches to student-centred teaching and learning.

Strategic initiatives until 2025

- ➢ EPICUR will implement an **inter-university (Virtual) European University College for Liberal Arts and Sciences** offering joint study programs in Liberal Arts and Science Education between the partnering universities.
- ➢ We will establish a **cross-European network of Liberal Arts and Sciences**, serving as pilot for further common courses of studies (including regulation concerning mobility and recognition).
- ➢ Drawing on expertise from our Liberal Arts and Sciences programs, we will **develop highly innovative smaller teaching and learning formats** with a focus on student-centered learning and interdisciplinary, challenged-based approaches. These formats will be easily accessible to all students of our alliance and will be crucial stepping-stones in the development of innovative complementary curricula among our partners.

Providing thriving frameworks for the next generation of young European researchers

As an alliance of universities bringing together the whole triangle of knowledge, EPICUR emphasizes the **essential link between research and teaching** at all stages of academic education. Our objective is to contribute to securing Europe's competitive leadership position on a global scale through using synergies to work together on complex scientific and societal challenges.

EPICUR will develop joint measures enabling the identification and the use of synergies, facilitating cooperation especially for young researchers. High potential fields, as suggested by an analysis of our research profiles, are for example *Sustainability Research*, *Quantum Sciences and Technology*, *Personalized Health and Neuroscience* as well as *European Identities and Languages*. We aim to combine the high potentials of our universities and jointly create **creative spaces for driving research questions** in a vibrant, inspiring and multi-disciplinary environment.

Strategic initiatives until 2025

- ➢ We will provide **custom-fit activities** and support exchange, especially for EPICUR's young researchers (e.g. research internships);
- ➢ We will search additional funding to develop and implement **joint fellowship programs or joint project groups** between our partner universities.

Establishing a European inter-regional academic network

EPICUR profits from rich experience of co-operating in distinct cross-border, European, and international contexts. In our respective regions and cities, we act as strong focal points for education, research and innovation and knowledge transfer. Additional to this intraregional impact we act as gateways to different regional networks and clusters. We are prepared to take the next step and **create a novel, transnational network** by connecting these collaborative regional networks and creating synergies at European level.

EPICUR will support the economic and social cohesion and, wherever feasible, **support regional smart specialisation strategies and cluster policies by strengthening research and innovation**. Through building bridges between the local societies and entrepreneurial ecosystems surrounding our partner universities, we will develop novel and dynamic partnerships between universities, and their economic, political and social stakeholders across Europe. Through connecting university networks on a meta-level we will facilitate scientific exchange across our regions. Through research internships with external partners from academia, business and civil society we strengthen the anchoring of our institutions within our regions and enable outreach towards the partners' regions.

Strategic initiatives until 2025

- ➢ EPICUR will implement a **meta-network of regional and cross-border university networks** to foster sustainable cooperation between European regions and to reach out to Europe's adjacent regions.
- ➢ We will facilitate exchange of best practices, mutual learning and dissemination of knowledge between stakeholders from our respective regions and cities;
- ➢ We will develop a **research internship programme** for our graduate students with partners from academia, business partners and civil society to improve the employability;
- ➢ We will strengthen the connections between the partner universities, civil society and their surrounding entrepreneurial ecosystems through developing **formats of service learning.**
- ➢ We will strengthen innovation within our regions and by **fostering entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship** among students. The aim is to create entrepreneurial spill overs to adjacent regions and across Europe.

Developing sustainable governance structures

EPICUR aspires to become a role model in developing **sustainable governance structures** for university alliances. We will draw on our long-standing experience in managing cross-border higher education networks in establishing efficient governance and management structures. We will ensure a fast and effective communication across all levels of our universities, transparent decision-making, and avoid duplication of services, structures, and processes. EPICUR has foreseen the necessary tools to guaranty our success by implementing a comprehensive **quality assurance system.**

While sharing the same objectives, the diverse character of HEIs in our alliance and their locations reflect the diversity of continental Europe's higher education system. As a key governing principle we will respect the **autonomy and diversity** of the alliance's members. That said, we will create new models for governance and communication that benefit our alliance, such as the development of a model language policy for bi- and multilingual universities.

EPICUR builds on **inclusiveness**. We will promote an open and innovative operational culture, where students, researchers, teachers and staff at all levels of the participating universities will be equally able to become involved and to co-create the further development of our European University.

Strategic initiatives until 2025

- ➢ We will further improve the outlined **model governance structure**.
- ➢ We will develop and implement a comprehensive quality assurance system.
- ➢ We will collaborate closely with all relevant bodies of the European Commission to develop a **feasible legal organisation** of future European Universities.
- ➢ Students and staff will have the possibility to become involved in co-creating our European University through representation in boards as well as through innovative forms of user-generated fora.