**OpenU European HUB application – Summary**

EADTU participates in a proposal for a call on ”European policy experimentations in the fields of Education and Training led by high-level public authorities”, notably *the creation of a European-wide hub for online learning, blended/ virtual mobility, virtual campuses and collaborative exchange of best practices.* For the European Commission, this hub will be an instrument to promote online course/curriculum collaboration and virtual mobility in Europe. It will include:

(i)  Trainings for academic staff on innovative pedagogies and curriculum design; spaces for discussions/fora where teachers could exchange material and best practices and advertise training opportunities;

(ii)  *Blended and digital learning*, for instance through the setting up of virtual classrooms: spaces where universities/companies/research centres from different countries could organize joint virtual interactive classrooms, allowing groups of students, teachers and professionals to collaborate and interact with one another on specific topics or projects/courses/modules);

(iii)  *Blended mobility*: the platform could be used to better prepare Erasmus+ KA1 participants for their individual mobility and foster cooperation after the mobility. In the context of KA2 (Strategic Partnerships, Capacity Building, Knowledge Alliances, Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters) it could facilitate transnational cooperation and complement mobility activities supported by these projects. Finally, it could be used to test new activities combining short-term physical mobility with a longer-term virtual exchanges period, to cater for needs of students which cannot or do not want to go for long-term mobility abroad;

(iv) The platform could host *collaborations* between HEIs and employers, and offer students the possibility to access work-based learning activities or work on projects proposed by employers. The platform should be developed as a host environment for existing EU, national or regional platforms and their activities, with the purpose to expand them and scale them up at European level.

This action of the European Commission has been discussed with the European Commission in 2017. The hub as conceived by the EC is a strategic instrument for innovation, international collaboration and mobility. EADTU was invited by an existing consortium to be involved in the construction of this hub and to deliver the educational framework of it. By doing this, it its positioning the expertise and the online courses of open and distance teaching universities in the European Higher Education Area.

The proposal on the European Hub to be built will consist of the following parts:

(1) The digital infrastructure for HEI to cooperate at a transnational level as well as to digitalize student and staff journeys.

(2) The policy experimentations, which will cover three spheres to co-create and co-deliver innovative pedagogies for transnational cooperation and internationalized curricula:

1. learning sphere,
2. student and staff mobility sphere,
3. cooperation sphere.

The overall goals of these experimentations are firstly to find ways to generate innovative and competitive learning and cooperation programmes increasing the attractiveness of the EHEA and secondly to reduce individual as well as institutional efforts for administrating the student and staff journey.

The proposed project of developing a European online Hub differs from many other policy experimentations. Not only because of the variety of (technical) functionalities and interoperability that has to be implemented, but also with regard to the different dimensions of Higher Education Systems that will be addressed within the project: cooperation, mobility, teaching and learning.

Within the experimentation cluster, two HEI consortia, one lead by Paris 1 and one lead by Rennes 1 will follow partly different paths. Both consortia will act in different inter-institutional environments, that allows to cover a wide range of contextual factors: starting with very different administrative routines and ending with very heterogeneous pedagogical course conceptions as well as formal implementations of the courses. In the end, the two consortia are two distinct and complementary experimentation groups enabling to experiment the Technology Readiness Level of the online hub and the underlying methodologies in a setting whereby a broad variety of use cases will apply.

Due to the multi-layered nature and explorative character of the project we decided to take *action research* as our methodological anchor. This methodology fits perfectly with field trials as a methodical design. That means, “learning from action or concrete experience, as well as taking action as a result of this learning” (Zuber-Skerrit 2001: 2).

**Spheres & Working Hypothesis:**

**Learning ‑ did OpenU:**

a) enable learners to be timely informed about various forms of learning opportunities?

b) support academic staff in promoting innovation in teaching and learning?

c) enable easy access to existing learning resources and opportunities?

**Cooperation ‑ did OpenU:**

a) enhance the visibility and usefulness of existing tools and resources?

b) provide adequate guidance for developing new forms of transnational/cooperative learning?

c) enable a considerable increase of cooperation at bilateral and multilateral level?

**Mobility ‑ did OpenU:**

a) enable a greater number of mobility flows to take place?

b) enable more diverse mobility flows during the experimentation?

c) enable qualitative and impactful mobility?

**EADTU’s Contribution to OpenU**

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| EADTU will be responsible for updating the methodologies and guidelines (WP2) regarding innovative/cooperative/trans-national learning activities to set the basis for the experimentation activities. EADTU will then support the creation of expert communities around priority areas, as well as the organisation of the international and local training sessions and webinars.  EADTU will also be in charge of coordinating the dissemination activities (WP5). They will operate the overall dissemination strategy, proposal annual communication plans and implement the activities, with the WP leaders.  In addition, EADTU will be member of the Open-U steering Committee, to contribute to the ongoing management of the project under the leadership of Paris 1. EADTU will also join the annual consortium meetings. |

**The implementation cluster – working document**

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| **Users**  The primary users of the platform will be:  a) students browsing and partaking learning opportunities on the hub and related platforms in search or transnational education or mobility opportunities  b) academic staff cooperating via the platform to create and co-deliver (new) curricular opportunities and embedding mobility of students into their curricula;  c) administrative staff being able to access lifelong learning opportunities across the continent and manage this digital hub in a streamlined fashion.  d) alumni/professionals, employers/HRD with each an entry. This is important for short degrees/micro-credentials and MOOCs. The MOOCs for the European labour market project of EADTU and EMC is approved.  **Description of the main functionalities of the hub**   1. **Learning sphere**   The learning sphere will be based on existing resources and tools and will display some overview of educational provisions available. The ambition of the hub is to provide learners a full overview of learning opportunities: full- time degree programs, short degrees, e-learning courses, OER, MOOCs and to lead them to the specific information and registration facilities of universities, university networks, OER and MOOC platforms.  *i. Blended or online degree education*  The online hub will link with online infrastructure for learning opportunities, allowing learners to follow online courses and programs. Students can do this also while already partaking a program at a given university in a mobility scheme. The blended or online learning component can be both synchronous and asynchronous, providing access to either virtual classrooms or the provision of blended/online learning activities within a university e-learning infrastructure (LMS).  Blended and online learning can enhance the flexibility/ scalability/access, quality and cost-effectiveness of courses and curricula, and of collaborations containing mobility . Maturity models for blended and online education will be described (now developed by KU Leuven, TU Delft, Edinburgh, Aarhus, Dublin…)  The single authentication facility enables students to navigate on connected institutional course catalogues and to join virtual classrooms or blended/online learning activities/courses without further creating a personal account on the host university online infrastructure. On the other side, the LMS of European university members should provide access to their learning opportunities at the same title/restrictions/rights as their local students.  This would allow universities to upscale their international courses and programs.  *ii. Short degrees*  Short degrees are usually offered to alumni, professionals and other adult learners (at work) for continuous education / continuous professional development. In the meantime, all sorts of micro-credentials are launched by universities and MOOC platforms, which are similar and sometimes replace online short degrees (micro-masters, nanodegrees, flexible programs, etc. (see Class Central[[1]](#footnote-1))  EADTU is working on a project on blended and online short degrees (e-SLPs) which aims at providing increased visibility and participation to short degree programs, providing scalability, high quality and cost-effectiveness.  OpenU will to enable users to gather the information about such learning opportunities via the connected online course catalogues.  *iii. MOOCS / OER*  The European MOOC consortium is supported by EADTU. OpenU will look into enabling the single login mechanism, using eduGAIN and at displaying their learning offer on the hub to enable students to have a full overview of educational offer in this area. In a new European project on MOOCs for the EU labour market, EADTU and EMC cooperate with companies and national public employment services, which have a network coordinated by the European Commission. It will find out how MOOCs and short degrees can be delivered in all European countries with their support. Employment services evolve to national bodies for updating professionals at all levels, given the longer career paths and the evolution of the knowledge and innovation.  Some universities use Edx (US) as a platform.  OpenU gives students, staff and other users also the opportunity major OER depositories, e.g. Openlearn, France Université Numériques Thématiques,…  *iv. Online Course catalogues*  The online hub will make it possible for universities to connect their online course catalogue to the hub to a) make their course and curricular offer available to students of their European University and b) feed into the tools for cooperation described below. Note: Each individual university will be offered to connect their course catalogue either via Erasmus Without Paper or the Online Learning Agreement API.  For each learning activity, students enroll at the university for the course or program choosen by them.  Integration level: Link of the university online course catalogue to the platform (pushing data).  **b. Cooperation sphere**  This section will look into development methodologies, guidelines and tools for enhanced academic cooperation between partner universities.  *i. Taxonomy of collaborations with methodologies and guidelines*  EADTU will provide a taxonomy of collaboration formats on different levels of granularity, ranging from joint seminars and think tanks to joint doctorates (see table). This will contain basic concepts on the design of blended and online collaboration and related mobility schemes for each format, based on recent European projects. References will be made to innovative approaches to such design in the literature by the university networks and the MOOC platforms and will continuously can be fed in into the taxonomy.  *ii. Repositories of proven practices/innovative pedagogies for collaboration and mobility*  For each collaboration format, a repository of proven practices/innovative pedagogies for international collaboration and mobility will be developed. These practices and pedagogies are based on teaching and learning design dimensions as described in the taxonomy, as applied in practice. The repositories will inspire academic staff initiating new collaborations and mobility schemes.  The experimentation cluster will be able to make use of this taxonomy and update it all along the project implementation and beyond.  Initially, each repository will contain examples from past pilots in European project. The universities in the experimentation cluster will also provide each ten examples of innovative pedagogies in their institutions (see experimentation cluster). The community of practitioners will continuously further update and enrich the repositories.  An expert group will approve pedagogies for adoption in the repositories. This expert group consists of experts involved in the projects (incl. universities, MOOC platforms, and for some aspects enterprises), on which the taxonomy is based and on leading experts of participating networks/universities in the experimentation cluster, in particular from teaching and learning, ICT for education and internationalization services.  *iii. Continuous professional development of multipliers*  *CPD for multipliers* is organized by the implementation cluster. Multipliers use OpenU to enhance the scalability, quality and effectiveness of international education, collaboration and mobility. Main multipliers are teaching and learning, ICT and internationalisation services. CPD for multipliers is mainly focusing on the design and development of international learning activities, courses and curricula and related mobility schemes. This is to be conceived as the CPD side of all the concepts and guidelines and innovative pedagogies developed.  The expert group as conceived in ii. is responsible for CPD of their peers in European universities. Major components of this CPD are:  MOOCs on blended and online education and collaboration as developed by current projects and MOOCs already available on MOOC platforms.  Webinars on specific topics (e.g learning communities, e-assessment,…), involving leading experts (e.g. from the TESLA project for e-assessment  Two CPD seminars/workshops every year for peers in European universities.  For these activities, the expert groups seeks collaboration with the EFFECT project of EUA[[2]](#footnote-2), the EMPOWER program of EADTU[[3]](#footnote-3) and the EAPRIL/EARLI networks[[4]](#footnote-4).  *CPD for teaching and support staff* in universities is organized on site (by the multipliers mentioned) as this will reach-out to all teaching staff interested in combination with staff of support services concerned who collaborate to implement institutional strategies.  *CPD for university leaders*, including aspects of institutional policies (see also cluster 3), will be organized by university networks as the partner institutions will be most familiar with this level.  The expert group can support the organisation of CPD activities within universities and university networks on demand.  Integration level: Integrated on the platform  *iv. Teaching assignments*  To support mobility of academic staff members between member universities, a tool shall be made available to allow universities to open calls for temporary teaching assignments complementing their teaching needs. The project will build upon an expanded version of a platform developed under another project (pending confirmation of project application).  Integration level: Linked to the platform with a joint authentication mechanism  v. Cooperation in research and doctoral education  OpenU will facilitate as well cooperation in research and doctoral education by (a) promoting open PhD positions; (b) providing academic staff and PhD students the opportunity to reach out for research partners (other PhD students or business/industry partners), especially when aiming at interdisciplinary research and innovation opportunities; (c) supporting universities in international doctoral education by designing a space for doctoral collaboration and joint PhD degrees, based on experiences in university networks/institutions in the Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorate Framework and the Marie Curie Actions, with the possibility of involving business partners in the process; d) facilitating access business and industry clusters from various locations around Europe to conduct joint research and innovation activities.  OpenU will also link with the online platform of the European PhD Hub[[5]](#footnote-5) (released for testing in December 2018).  Integration level: Linked to the platform with a joint authentication mechanism  **c. Mobility sphere**  *i. Mobility schemes: opportunities and conditions*  The mobility sphere will be introduced by a mobility matrix for physical, blended and online/virtual mobility are described with involving mobility schemes as presented in the taxonomy and in relation to specific tools made available on OpenU.  Mobility schemes are based on institutional agreements or on agreements within networked or joint course or curriculum collaboration (e.g. networked or joint seminars, projects, master degrees, micro-masters,…), since there are direct consequences for enrollments, examinations and the delivery of credits and awards or degrees.  Also, for each mobility a tripartite learning agreement is requested to guarantee the rights of the students and the educational provisions/services delivered by institutions. OpenU seeks to automate these agreements as far as possible, based on EUF tools (see below). |

By the connected open course catalogue, OpenU also opens the opportunity of open mobility, this means mobility which is not covered by a previous institutional agreement. Nevertheless, this requires some conditions to avoid side-effects, such as undesired and outnumbering applications for open mobility. The EPICS project has provided some solutions. A learning agreement remains always needed.

*ii. Development space for collaborative programs and mobility*

OpenU will include a development/incubator space with templates for the development of collaborative courses and curricula and related mobility schemes, related to the guidelines for the educational formats in the taxonomy, e.g. for the development of virtual seminars, networked programs with mobility windows, joint programs with embedded mobility, MOOCs and exchange mobility,…

These templates can be inserted on collaboration spaces used by teaching staff and support services when developing collaborations and mobility.

Integration level: Integrated on the platform

*iii. Erasmus+ App*

The Erasmus+ App is about to become the single access point for students when aiming at studying abroad. The App will be made available to allow students to browse learning opportunities before/during/after studying abroad.

Integration level: Linked to the platform with a joint authentication mechanism

*iv. Online Learning Agreement*

The Online Learning Agreement platform and the related Erasmus+ Dashboard will be connected to the online hub to enable the connection of the online course catalogue of participating universities. In addition, the connection of these two platforms will allow for universities which wish to rely on them for managing their mobilities to have an integrated approach of managing staff user access.

Integration level: Linked to the platform with a joint authentication mechanism

*v. Erasmus Without Paper*

Erasmus Without Paper is in the process of linking existing student information systems across the continent for facilitating the transfer of data between higher education institutions for the purpose of streamlining the administration of student mobility. The OpenU project will require at some point to automate the transfer of academic attributes of students, including academic achievements, hence the project implementation will help to study such needs and outline a development plan for EWP to provide adequate solutions these new use cases. As outlined above, some universities will connect their course catalogue through EWP instead of the Online Learning Agreement.

1. <https://www.class-central.com/report/moocs-microcredentials-analysis-2018/?utm_source=newsletter_august_2018&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=cc_newsletter> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [www.eua.be/activities-services/projects/current-projects/higher-education-policy/effect](http://www.eua.be/activities-services/projects/current-projects/higher-education-policy/effect) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://empower.eadtu.eu/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://eapril.org/>

   <https://www.earli.org> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [www.phdhub.eu](http://www.phdhub.eu) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)