

CALL: H2020-IBA-SwafS-Support-1-2020

TOPIC: Support for the Research and Innovation Dimension of European Universities

PROJECT: Transforming Open Responsible Research and Innovation through CHARM (TORCH) www.charm-eu.eu/torch

SCOPE OF THE POLICY BRIEF

In this second policy brief, the European Universities pilot I alliances are asked to report on the progress made through cooperation in selected R&I areas and provide a last set of recommendations to the European Commission for further policy development.

Policy background:

In order to strengthen strategic partnerships across the EU amongst higher education institutions, the European Commission targets the emergence of “European Universities” by 2024 by funding alliances from across Europe. The ambitious mandate aims to trigger systemic, structural and sustainable institutionalized cooperation between higher education institutions. As a complement to the Erasmus+ action geared towards supporting higher education cooperation models, Horizon 2020 supported the research and innovation dimension of the alliances between European universities, in line with their shared, integrated, long-term joint strategy and in synergy with their education dimension.

This initiative is one of the flagships of the [European strategy for universities](#) that aimed at supporting and enabling universities to adapt to changing conditions, to thrive and to take a leading role in the recovery of Europe, and in making our society greener, more inclusive and more digital. The adoption of this strategy was accompanied by a Commission [proposal for a Council recommendation on building bridges](#) for effective European higher education cooperation.

In parallel, the [European Research Area Policy Agenda](#) sets out 20 voluntary actions for the period 2022-2024, including several of which are relevant for universities. The feedback from the alliances helped co-shape the ERA Policy Agenda 2022 – 2024, such as ERA actions 1 (sharing of data), 3 (reform of research management), 4 (strengthening careers), 5 (gender equality), 7 (knowledge valorisation), 8 (research infrastructures), 13 (empowering universities), 14 (engaging citizens), 15 (role in R&I ecosystem), 17 (research management capacity).

Feedback on Progress (max 3 p)

1. Please describe the **challenges** your Alliance encountered in Reporting Period 2 regarding cooperation between universities in the field of R&I in relation to the institutional change areas (transformation modules) foreseen.
2. Please describe how you **tackled these challenges**. Based on your project’s experience (and if applicable), briefly outline case(s) that you consider as **good practice** and of interest to other universities or to policy-makers.
3. Please describe the **tangible progress** that individual partners as well as the Alliance as a whole have made in terms of introducing changes in their entities as a result of this project. Please elaborate on whether the inclusive and integrated cooperation approach of your alliance helped accelerate institutional change of all partners (e.g. through sharing of practices from institutions with strong expertise or infrastructure in specific areas to institutions without).

Policy Recommendations (max 1-2 p)

1. Please illustrate with concrete examples on how your Alliance will integrate the work or builds bridges between the work performed on the transformation modules developed under H2020 with the [Erasmus+ part funded of the Alliance project](#). Please provide the current state-of-affairs and / or future strategies on building bridges.
2. In case your Alliance obtained the [European Excellence Initiative: Acceleration services in support of universities project grant under Horizon Europe](#), please illustrate with concrete examples on how your Alliance will work or builds bridges between the work performed on the transformation modules developed under H2020 with the Excellence initiative funded project?

Good practice cases or concrete examples under 1. and 2. could be provided (but not excluding other examples) in the context of the Commission [proposal for a Council recommendation on building bridges](#) for effective European higher education cooperation in the context of:

- *Policy topic 1: facilitating transnational cooperation*
- *Policy topic 2: strengthening careers*
- *Policy topic 3: digital transition / platform*
- *Policy topic 4: access to excellence*
- *Policy topic 5: increasing global competitiveness*

3. Other recommendations (if not covered above).

FEEDBACK ON PROGRESS

The TORCH Project has developed across two distinct phases: Reporting Period 1, focused on landscape and gap analysis around the Transformational Modules; and Reporting Period 2 (RP2), dedicated to defining a set of Policies/Strategies (priority areas), emerging from the previous analysis and in line with the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 actions, which guide the future CHARM-EU R&I dimension:

- Working towards reforming **Research Assessment**.
- Fostering **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity (DEI)**.
- Championing **Open Science**.
- Promoting inter- and **Transdisciplinary Research** driven by societal challenges.
- Intensifying **Cooperation** between universities.

These priority areas provided a framework for the design and implementation of seven Pilots and the formulation of five Action Plans (Figure 1). This experience was then retrospectively used to shape and refine the Policies/Strategies.

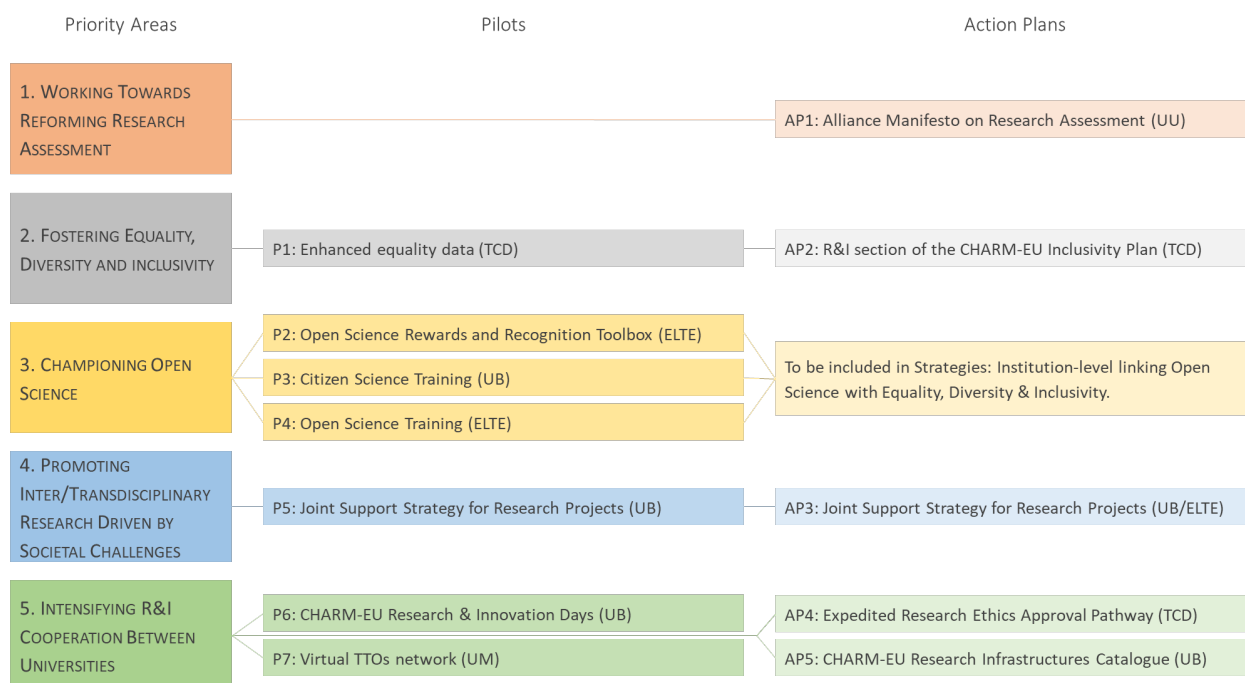


Figure 1. TORCH priority areas (Policies/Strategies), pilots and action plans.

In this section of the Policy Brief, first, we present a list of the challenges faced during RP2. Then we offer an overview of the strategic and practical approaches we employed to overcome those challenges. We highlight some noteworthy practices and insights that could be useful for other universities, fellow Alliances and policymakers. We conclude with a description of our progress on prompting institutional changes at the partner and Alliance levels.

Challenges Encountered

The challenges laid out below can be categorized in three types: Alliance internal dynamics (first two), issues related to specific actions (third), and “external” challenges (last one).

Phased Approach and Strategic Alignment. The phased approach adopted for the TORCH Project, encompassing landscape analysis (1st phase) and policy formulation (2ⁿ phase), faced challenges derived from the diverse universities’ approaches in aligning R&I strategies within Reporting Period 2 (1.5 years). Difficulties also included synchronizing priorities with the CHARM-EU educational project (ERASMUS+ limitations regarding R&I activities), integrating the R&I dimension into the ongoing governance model and regulatory obstacles to the development of certain initiatives.

Policy Development and Ambition Balancing. While establishing a common understanding for basic policies was achievable, developing full Policies/Strategies was a much more intricate affair due to political implications at the universities level. Furthermore, balancing the feasibility and ambition of the Pilots and Action Plans was challenging due to project constraints and uncertainty about future continuity. Ambition also had to be balanced against inconsistent funding mechanisms across Member States and the different funding models for our universities.

Joint Strategy for Research Support. Developing a joint strategy to support multidisciplinary research and strengthen cooperation on research projects proved to be complicated. This was related to the diverse priorities and baselines of the different members in terms of existing resources, engaging Research Management Administrators (RMAs) and regulatory obstacles (i.e. collecting and publishing data on gender equality, establishing a joint ethics approval pathway, creating a research infrastructure catalogue and access protocol, devising a joint approach to technology transfer, etc.).

Funding Dilemma and Associated Risks. Identifying suitable European funding calls to continue capacity building within the Alliance's R&I dimension was challenging, with options either falling short or not being broad enough for the Alliance's aspirations (i.e., the WIDERA call). While some research proposals have been submitted¹, there is a lack of 'fit for purpose' calls which could facilitate funded progression of the R&I support ecosystem. This could result in losses of engagement (on the part of universities or academic staff), of human resources (both project staff and researchers), of efficiency in implementing institutional changes initiated by TORCH, and of knowledge depreciation. Ensuring successful delivery of innovative policies ideally requires longer-term funding continuity.

Strategic Approaches to Tackle Challenges

Just as with the challenges, the strategies adopted to tackle them can be grouped into three categories below: internal working dynamics (first two), specific initiatives (good practices), and actions related to "external" challenges (last one).

Constant Interaction and Circulation of Proposed Actions. The TORCH Project Management Team maintained constant interaction with the different working groups (for Pilots, Action Plans, or WPs) and circulated the proposed actions to universities leadership, to ensure alignment and a shared vision across all levels.

Progressive Integration in Governance. Efforts were made to progressively integrate the R&I dimension into the overarching Governance model, emphasizing its role in serving all missions. Interactions with CHARM-EU governing bodies (Strategic Board, Executive Board, and Academic Council) facilitated alignment, exemplified by collaborative initiatives like devising the five Action Plans, the first steps to explore the setting-up of a network of the Alliance's RMAs, or the integration of results in Educational Activities (see more examples below).

Focus on Specific Actions. Specific actions, carried out under the umbrella of the five priority areas, helped accelerate progress in each area and fed into the formulation of Policies/Strategies. As mentioned, the lack of a clear continuation funding pathway resulted in a more conservative approach being adopted, focusing on actions which could be delivered within the TORCH contractual period. Some success stories are highlighted below (not a comprehensive list):

- Development of the TORCH **Research Challenges**. Even though not part of its prescribed goals, TORCH supported six teams in developing research proposals that targeted different European funding calls, three of which were successfully submitted: [Water4All](#) (granted); [HE Tackling inequalities in the green and digital transitions](#) (not granted); [MSCA-Doctoral Networks](#) (pending evaluation). This last one, as a test for the future CHARM-EU joint Doctorate Programme.
- Development of **"side" Research Projects**. As a result of increased engagement across CHARM-EU, additional research proposals are being developed which include a number of CHARM-EU partners. This indicates that the cooperative support structures, including research offices, are enabling researchers to reach out to their fellow CHARM-EU researchers.
- Creation of a **Research Support Tools**, including a [directory of institutional research support units](#), the [CHARM-EU Guide of Experts](#), and the [TORCH Collaboration Networks](#) app, in order to promote the creation of new multidisciplinary scientific networks that will help advance the Alliance's Common Science Agenda.
- **Open Science** related initiatives, such as: CHARM-EU Open Science Days at ELTE ([first](#), [second](#)); CHARM-EU [Open Science Recognition Award](#); Citizen Science certified training programme at UB and materials made available in English
- Organizing the CHARM-EU **R&I Days 1st Edition**. [Building Multidisciplinary Research Proposals: A Co-Creation Workshop to Address the Water Global Challenges](#). With the aim of testing new ways to foster collaboration in societal challenges-driven

¹ We clearly differentiate between funding opportunities for the progression of the R&I support ecosystem versus funding for researchers themselves to collaborate.

multidisciplinary -research.

- Creation of the Alliance's **TTO Network**, to share good practices and foster cooperation in knowledge and innovation transfer.
- Organization of **Open Forums** aimed at sharing good practices, facilitating networking, showcasing results of the Science with and for Society projects, and discussing key joint messages for the future of the European Universities initiative. TORCH [2nd Open Forum](#) (Dublin, March 2023; 15 fellow Alliances represented).
- **Promotion and leadership** of the organization of the [Science with and for Society in European Universities Alliances: Cross-Alliances Forum 2023](#) (Brussels, November 2023; 32 fellow Alliances represented).

Procuring Research & Innovation Funding. In order to continue with the development of the CHARM-EU R&I dimension started via TORCH, different opportunities have been explored (to cover comprehensive strategies or specific actions), such as: the WIDERA call (TRISC proposal, not granted); the HORIZON-CSA Piloting communities of expert facilitators to improve industry-academia-public sector co-creation (participation in the RECONNECT5.0 proposal, not granted); ERASMUS+ (participation in the ESEU project, granted). In addition, the CHARM-EU Strategic Board (Rectors) is discussing how to maintain the momentum regarding R&I while potential fit-for-purpose funding options arise.

The TORCH Project has effectively addressed multifaceted challenges in building up CHARM-EU's R&I dimension. Through constant interaction and iteration, progressive integration with educational initiatives (see Policy Recommendations below) and a focus on specific actions that feed into the Alliance's priority areas, TORCH emerges as a source of valuable insights for the ERA Policy Agenda and the European Higher Education landscape. Transnational and intercultural cooperation is needed to address global societal challenges, and this requires significant cross-institutional efforts, which are more sustainably and efficiently carried out under a long-term cooperation scheme. Within this scenario, CHARM-EU has been in regular contact with REA and DG RTD, as well as with the FOR-EU1 group, to convey the Alliances experiences and views for the implementation of the ERA strategy.

Progress on Institutional Changes

The **TORCH Project's tangible progress during RP2 is aligned with specific actions outlined in the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024**. Principal connections are with Action 13 (empowering universities) and Action 17 (research management), along with other key actions: reform of research assessment (A3), strengthening careers (A4), gender equality (A5), research infrastructures (A8), engaging citizens (A14), and R&I investments and reforms (A20).

At the Alliance level, CHARM-EU is aligned with the emphasis ERA's Agenda places on reforming the research assessment system (A3) and promoting sustainable research careers (A4), which connect with TORCH Action Plan 1, Open Science practices, DEI, etc. The TORCH partners' commitment to CoARA reflects the importance attached to this transformative process, with Alliances recognized as key contributors. The Project's **success in fostering shared experiences among diverse research support structures** (RMAs, TTOs, research infrastructures, etc.) corresponds with the ERA call to empower HEIs and enhance the strategic capacity of RPOs (A8, A17). TORCH's orientation to multi- and transdisciplinary research focused on societal challenges exemplifies the spirit of collaboration advocated through ERA actions to enhance research quality, performance and impact (A5, A13, A20).

At the institutional level, **progress is strategically aligned with fostering RRI across multiple levels**. As described in detail in the RP2 Technical Report (Parts A and B), impacts can be tracked across partner through: the development of gender equality measures, leveraging the work carried out around DEI practices (mentioned by UB, TCD, ELTE); the integration of R&I standards that enhance social responsibility, inclusiveness and sustainability (UB, TCD, UU, ELTE); actions to improve the development of a social corporate responsibility dimension to foster responsible innovation (UB, UM); and engagement with multiple stakeholders for R&I decision-making (UB, TCD, ELTE, UM). Not only are these targeted changes functioning at the Project or university level, but in some cases their impact extends to public authorities, researchers, businesses, industry R&D, individual citizens and NGOs.

Impacts regarding **fostering Open Science, promoting Citizen Science, enlarging the scope of R&I activities**, and constructing close collaboration within the CHARM-EU R&I dimension are also reported by UB, TCD, UU and ELTE. These changes, directed at the partner universities, researchers, individual citizens and NGOs, demonstrate a commitment to transparency, collaboration, and enriching the research process by ensuring that it is not only academically rigorous but also socially relevant and inclusive.

Finally, the **mutual learning exercise carried out with TORCH builds trust and accelerates institutional change** through the involvement of universities' leadership and strategic offices in a process that promotes self-appraisal at the highest levels, thereby contributing to future policies and strategies that go beyond what could be achieved had we not been members of an Alliance.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, CHARM-EU provides some recommendations for policy based on the TORCH Project’s learning process and outcomes, in response to the following REA’s policy topics proposal:

- Specific examples of how CHARM-EU will integrate the work on the transformation modules developed under TORCH with the Erasmus+ Project, focused on the educational dimension, along with the current state of affairs and **plans to integrate all missions**.
- Good practice cases and concrete examples, in relation to CHARM-EU added value, are provided in the context of the **Commission proposal for a Council recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation** regarding five Policy Topics (PT): PT1, facilitating transnational cooperation; PT2, strengthening careers; PT3, digital transition/platform; PT4, access to excellence; PT5, increasing global competitiveness.

CHARM-EU submitted a proposal to the European Excellence Initiative: Acceleration services in support of universities project grant under Horizon Europe (TRISC: Transdisciplinary Research & Innovation for Sustainable Cities). The evaluation was above the threshold but not high enough to access the funding. Even if this call cannot be considered a continuation of the SwafS project (different aims, as well as restrictive rules and regulations to cover all the R&I capacity building objectives of the Alliance), several actions were designed based on the experience of TORCH, and the TRISC proposal is foreseen to be embedded in future CHARM-EU proposal submitted to new European calls. We see the European University Alliances as a widening tool themselves, perhaps more efficient in terms of balance, as the initiative considers the widening countries as full equal partners.

Integrating TORCH Results from the Transformation Modules into CHARM-EU’s Educational Dimension

The integration of TORCH’s outputs into the whole of CHARM-EU involves a strategic approach that recognizes the synergies between research and education, although certain limitations must be acknowledged. While some results and proposed actions can be seamlessly integrated into a number of education-related activities, not all R&I priorities can be accommodated within the current Erasmus+ four-year plan (due to eligibility constraints and budgetary considerations), and they will require the efforts invested so far to be consolidated via different means.

The future path of CHARM-EU’s R&I dimension is currently under discussion within the Alliance’s governing bodies. Decisions on the implementation of the Action Plans are expected to be finalized by mid-2024, and included, along with the Policies/Strategies, in the 2024-2030 Strategic Planning to be delivered in June 2024. The TORCH Project Management Team has provided the Strategic and Executive Boards with a set of recommendations, with both bodies remaining central to decision-making processes that ensure the integration of all missions. This input, encompassing Pilots, Action Plans, and other relevant initiatives, will be crucial in shaping the Alliance’s strategy going forward. One Executive Board member, card holder of the R&I area, ensures the R&I initiatives are undertaken. Additionally, Action Plan 3 proposes the creation of a new position to manage the RMAs network, the holder of which would liaise with the Executive Board, particularly regarding European funding and research strategies.

Our new Erasmus+ project (CHARM-EIGHT, the proposal for which was written during TORCH RP2) includes many connections with R&I. Furthermore, a number of examples are mentioned in a document sent to the Commissioner². These connections are key in the CHARM-EU Strategy and are shown in Table 1, with potential correspondences between TORCH areas and proposed actions (Pilots and Action Plans), ERA PTs, CHARM-EIGHT current Work Packages, and CHARM-EU existing joint structures.

Table 1. TORCH Policies/Strategies, ERA PTs, Action Plans and Pilots, and their potential connections with CHARM-EIGHT and CHARM-EU joint structures.

TORCH Policies/Strategies	ERA Policy Topics (links with TORCH Policies/Strategies and Actions)	TORCH Actions (WPs, Pilots (P), Action Plans (AP), others)	CHARM-EIGHT & CHARM-EU
1. Working Towards Reforming Research Assessment	· PT2 - Strengthening Careers	· AP1 - Manifesto on Research Assessment	· WP3 - Educational Practice (and the planned joint innovative Doctorate Programme)

² ‘Where Education and Research Meet in European University Alliances’ (not public document).

2. Fostering Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity	· PT2 - Strengthening Careers	· WP3 (Cross Cutting Principles) · P1 - Equality Data · AP2 - R&I Section of CHARM-EU Inclusivity Plan	· DEI Office · WP1 - Governance · WP9 - Internal Dissemination & Networking · WP10 - CHARM-ifying Activities
3. Championing Open Science	· PT4 - Access to Excellence · PT5 - Increasing Global Competitiveness	· WP6 (Mainstreaming Open Science Practices) · WP7 (Public Engagement) · P2 - OS Rewards and Recognition Toolbox · P3 - Citizen Science Training · P4 - Open Science Training · Open Science Dashboard	· WP3 - Educational Practice (Educational programmes, transversal training for PhD students · WP4 - Implementation, Piloting and Evaluation of Educational Portfolio · WP9 - Internal Dissemination & Networking · WP10 - CHARM-ifying Activities · WP11 Professional Development for academics
4. Promoting Inter-/Transdisciplinary Research Driven by Societal Challenges	· PT1 - Facilitating Transnational Cooperation · PT2 - Strengthening Careers · PT4 - Access to Excellence · PT5 - Increasing Global Competitiveness	· WP4 (Common Science Agenda) · P5 - Joint support Strategy for Research Projects · AP3 - Joint Support for Research Projects · CHARM-EU Guide of Experts	· WP1: Governance · WP3 - Educational Practice (and the planned joint innovative Doctorate Programme) · WP4 - Implementation, Piloting and Evaluation of Educational Portfolio · WP7 - IT Strategy · WP10 - CHARM-ifying Activities · WP15 - Worldwide Non-Academic Stakeholder Consolidation and Expansion
5. Intensifying R&I Cooperation Between Universities	· PT1 - Facilitating Transnational Cooperation · PT2 - Strengthening Careers · PT4 - Access to Excellence · PT5 - Increasing Global Competitiveness	· WP5 (Cooperation Universities-Enterprises) · P6 - R&I Days · P7 - TTOs Network · AP4 - Expedited Ethics Approval Pathway · AP5 - Research Infrastructures Catalogue	· WP1 Governance · WP7 - It Strategy · WP13 - External Relations Strategy · WP15 - Worldwide Non-Academic Stakeholder Consolidation and Expansion

Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Building Bridges for Effective European Higher Education Cooperation

The [Commission proposal for a Council recommendation on building bridges](#) mentions, among other structural and operational issues to be addressed for enabling deeper transnational cooperation, that the “lack of sustainable long-term funding for institutionalized transnational cooperation is hindering their development and deep transformation across their missions. A longer-term outlook would provide better opportunities to build capacity and sustainable alliances in order to attain the charted ambition level”. CHARM-EU’s vision on the design of a support system covering all the Alliance missions, in line with the quote above, is reflected on the ‘Joint Alliance Statement on the Investment Pathway’³, by which Alliances expressed their full commitment to making the European Universities Initiative a success in the long-term, and “call on the Member States and the EC to urgently support the establishment of holistic and sustainable long-term funding to deepen transnational cooperation of European University alliances across all their missions in a coherent way”. This document embraces the following main ideas:

- **Transformative Vision.** The Alliances aim for a transformative and sustainable future, extending beyond short-term projects, emphasizing the long-term nature of the European Universities initiative.
- **Comprehensive Support System.** The Alliances stress the need for a comprehensive support system covering all missions (education, research, innovation, and transfer to society), recognizing shared competence between the EU and Member States in R&I and exclusive national competence in education.
- **Holistic Funding Model.** The Alliances propose a sustainable investment pathway integrating resources from the EU and Member States, transcending the current Erasmus+ framework, involving various funding sources such as Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, Interregional Innovation Investments, and Member State funding, among others.
- **Member State Engagement and Integrated Research Agendas.** The Alliances stress the importance of engaging Member States in the implementation of the European Universities Initiative to ensure a coherent approach, and propose aligning European and national research agendas to streamline research proposal development, reduce the administrative burden, and facilitate the internationalization of research.

Right before this Policy Brief is submitted, the European Alliances met with the EC to discuss the Investment Pathway (December 12, 2023). Three scenarios were presented. Scenario A contemplates the contribution of a portion of funding from FP10 to Erasmus+ in a joint call. This scenario reflects most strongly CHARM-EU’s request for a unified, simplified multi-mission holistic pathway. The other two scenarios (B: just having separate calls, i.e. as it worked so far with Erasmus+ and SwafS; C: Erasmus+ providing funding for some actions, but not including all the activities already identified as R&I capacity building to increase excellent research teams and proposals) don’t seem to be addressing the European Council approach and mandate.

³ [‘Joint Alliance Statement on the Investment Pathway’](#) (September 29, 2023).

With regards to CHARM-EU's specific examples of R&I activities and capacity building initiatives bridging with educational actions, a (non-exhaustive) list includes:

- **Transdisciplinary Skills Development.** Objective: Create a critical mass for interdisciplinary collaboration. Importance: Address societal challenges through human-centred approaches. Action: skills set development in research and education. *Links with PT1, PT2, PT4, PT5.*
- **Research and Education Synergies for Enhanced International Collaboration (Including Widening Efforts).** Context: Higher education in widening countries evolving toward holistic approaches. Impact: European University Alliances driving positive change. Focus: Linking education, research, society, and entrepreneurship. *Links with PT1, PT2, PT4, PT5.*
- **CHARM-EU Educational and R&I Principles.** Core: RRI practices integrated into educational principles. Approach: Education-research-innovation ecosystem fostering transdisciplinary, inclusive environment. Outcome: Cultivation of future-generation researchers with circulation of cross-sector talent. *Links with PT1, PT2.*
- **Research-Based Master's Programme.** Innovative approach: Integrating external actors, collaborative projects, and sustainability challenges. Student Participation: Students offered opportunities to join research projects during master's studies. Continuing Education: Developing programmes for professionals, and integrating research and collaboration with students. *Links with PT1, PT2, PT4, PT5.*
- **Transdisciplinary Approaches.** Need: Intensive and trusted transdisciplinary approaches within educational options. Implementation: Genuine challenge-based joint research and educational programmes with external stakeholder engagement. Structure: Knowledge Creating Teams (KCTs) leading collaborative efforts informed by sustainability themes. *Links with PT1, PT2, PT4, PT5.*
- **Professional Development and Competency Building.** Leadership Programmes: Development for staff based on innovation and change research. Skills and Capacities: Training for students and staff, and professional support for talent development and retention. Incentives and Recognition: Systems to support transformation in HEIs. *Links with PT1, PT2, PT5.*
- **Open Science and Research Assessment Reform.** Training in Open Science: Early integration into student philosophy, including citizen science. Research Assessment Reform: Addressing the synergetic nature of research and education, aligned with ERA actions and the EEA. *Links with PT1, PT2, PT4, PT5.*
- **Doctoral Programme and Research on Education.** Transdisciplinary Doctoral Programme: Development focused on recognizing shared collaboration. Research on pedagogical approaches: Studying innovative methods for skills training. *Links with PT1, PT2, PT4, PT5.*
- **Innovative Approaches and Widening Agenda.** Innovation Ecosystem Development: Including physical research hubs and innovation hubs. Sustainability Challenge Platform: Core element linking external stakeholders, academics and students for collaborative research. *Links with PT1, PT4, PT5.*

CHARM-EU Good Practices and Added Value in the Context of Policy Topic 1 (facilitating transnational cooperation), Policy topic 4 (access to excellence) and Policy topic 5 (increasing global competitiveness)

Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinary Research Driven by Societal Challenges. TORCH's commitment to multi- and transdisciplinarity marks a departure from traditional cross-border collaborations within the Framework Programme. By fostering collaboration across disciplines and the involvement of non-academic actors, the Alliance enriches the depth and breadth of research endeavours, enabling a comprehensive exploration of complex challenges that demand transdisciplinary perspectives. Not only does this strategy accelerate institutional change at R&I-intensive universities, but its positive impact also extends to institutions with a less pronounced focus on R&I, acknowledging the crucial role of transdisciplinary and interculturality in devising innovative solutions. Research excellence requires an excellent R&I support structure which ensures RRI, along with the engagement of civil society to guarantee the transdisciplinary approach. These aspects need to be part of a new definition of excellence.

Focus on Competitive European Funding Calls and the Creation of Scientific Networks. TORCH has actively engaged in initiatives aimed at strengthening collaboration within the context of the European competitive funding scheme. An illustrative example of this is the Alliance's focus on addressing sustainability issues through the development of a number of research challenges linked to specific SDGs, while developing RRI, which facilitated the establishment of international networks and encouraged the formation of research teams dedicated to tackling critical global questions. The submission of three project proposals resulting from an open participatory process with researchers, while not an initial objective of TORCH, shows the Alliance's adaptability and willingness to pursue additional goals that are aligned with its overarching mission.

Long-Term Institutionalized Cooperation. CHARM-EU's institutional commitment to long-term cooperation and the development of a Common Science Agenda means the Alliance is perfectly positioned to offer an adaptive environment for collaborative research that can contribute in many ways to the ERA and to the European Strategy for Universities (see examples above). This encourages the formation of partnerships of researchers which can submit research proposals conceived in a bottom-up manner, not only within CHARM-EU but also with universities outside the Alliance and/or with other Alliances or HEIs, including those in widening countries. Beyond the Alliances' framework, R&I collaborations typically operate at the project level, lacking high-level joint institutional support. CHARM-EU provides an umbrella structure that facilitates multidisciplinary contact between researchers willing to tackle complex research questions, by leveraging external stakeholders and garnering support from strategic administrative units and universities leadership. This also increases the possibilities for researchers (especially early-career ones) to boost their international cooperation networks. In addition, there is high potential to include partners' local ecosystems.

The development of a Common Science Agenda, grounded in members' priorities, strengths and complementarities, plays a key role in creating shared research support strategies and structures. This approach is aligned, for instance, with the formulation of Action Plan 3, which proposes the creation of a RMAs' network (along with its evolution to a joint research support office) or Action Plan 5 (catalogue of research infrastructures and access protocol).

This policy brief reflects only the author's view and the European Commission/REA is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101017229