

The EIT beyond 2028: Strengthening Europe's Innovation Ecosystem

Universities, as generators and disseminators of knowledge and skills, are a key pillar of the knowledge triangle. They are a necessary actor in the membership base of the Knowledge and Innovation Communities, and central to the goals of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). Our member universities, committed to the instrument's mission, have actively engaged with the EIT and KICs since they were created. Based on our members' extensive experience, we emphasise our concerns regarding the instrument's effectiveness and added value within the EU's research and innovation ecosystem. We believe that maintaining the EIT in its current form is not sustainable, and it risks slowing down the EU's innovation capacity by precluding funding from reaching other more impactful initiatives.

We identify a critical need to reduce the administrative burden, ensure the integration of the complete knowledge triangle and clarify the added value of the EIT. We stress that, without reforms along these lines, the EIT and its KICs will lose relevance, effectiveness and efficiency, which would seriously question their continuation beyond 2027.

Reducing the administrative burden for universities

According to the EIT Regulation,¹ "KICs shall have substantial autonomy to establish their internal organisation and composition, as well as their agenda and working methods" (art. 7.2). As KICs operate in different thematic areas, this provision was intended to give them the flexibility to adapt their governance and organisational structures to the specific needs of their sector. However, comprehensive universities' administrative structures remain largely the same across all thematic areas of activity. As a result, universities participating in several KICs have to adapt their internal processes to the different governance models and requirements of each KIC. What provides valuable flexibility for KICs and their industry partners can create significant administrative complexity and costs for universities, potentially outweighing the benefits of participating in a KIC.

In the future, a distinct collaboration model between universities and the KICs should be created. Once a university starts collaborating with one KIC, it should be able to use the same blueprint to collaborate with every other KIC. This model must be common across all KICs, ensuring that universities do not need to incur additional administrative burdens to participate in different KICs at the same time. It should include a streamlined and common membership scheme for universities, distinct financial obligations that are adapted to the financial model of universities and alternative mechanisms to membership allowing universities to establish short-term and project-based collaboration with KICs.

Additionally, to further reduce the administrative burdens of participating in the KICs' and EIT's activities, we recommend that administrative procedures related to funding calls are conducted through the EU's funding portal, instead of only doing so through KICs' individual platforms. This would allow beneficiaries to navigate these opportunities more intuitively through a single channel, instead of having to deal with several portals. Moreover, it would increase transparency of the KICs' funding activities and streamline the

¹Regulation (EU) 2021/819 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 on the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (recast). [Regulation - 2021/819 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

administrative participation process, as beneficiaries would already be familiar with the platform and application procedures.

Sustaining a complete knowledge triangle across KICs' lifecycles

KICs are expected to integrate the knowledge triangle while becoming financially sustainable. As KICs reach maturity and EU funding is reduced, we have observed that their focus shifts towards ensuring a return on their investments and enhancing profit-maximising activities. While we support the need for funding for innovation activities to become self-sustaining, such an aspiration is deeply problematic for universities given their publicly funded education and research missions. We do not call for additional core funding for KICs. Rather, we call for greater attention to how existing resources are distributed, so that education and early-stage research are not progressively displaced by activities with greater revenue-generating potential.

First, we deeply regret that education and early-stage research actions are being increasingly left behind or overlooked in favour of more profit-maximising activities. Older KICs redirect their attention towards actions targeting higher TRLs and innovation capacity-building. The imperative of reaching financial sustainability should not come at the expense of addressing all elements in the knowledge triangle, as this threatens KICs' *raison d'être*. Universities also have a relevant role to play in knowledge valorisation, by transforming breakthrough research into marketable solutions. For this reason, we recommend amending article 10 of the EIT regulation on "principles for the evaluation and monitoring of KICs" to include dedicated KPIs across each dimension of the knowledge triangle, as well as on their effective integration. Evaluation should therefore assess not only performance within each pillar, but also the extent to which KICs demonstrably connect and reinforce these activities in a systemic manner.

Second, the emphasis on financial sustainability can make it challenging for KICs to fully take into account the diverse needs and characteristics of their members. As we highlighted in our position paper '[Lessons learned and way forward: The Guild's recommendations for Horizon Europe](#)', KICs make no distinctions when asking for returns on their investments.² They fail to acknowledge how the value of education-related and early-stage research activities lays beyond the profit they raise, or that the relevance of some members should not only be evaluated in terms of their ability to pay back the KICs' investments. These dynamics erode the attractiveness of KIC membership for higher education institutions. Thus, we invite the EIT to consider waiving the request for a return on investment when it threatens the contribution and participation of specific and central publicly-funded actors within the knowledge triangle.

Clarifying the added value of education activities

The EIT is one of many instruments within the EU's extensive R&I landscape, making the allocation of funding across these instruments inherently competitive. Funding is allocated on the premise that each instrument delivers clear added value that cannot be achieved more effectively through other initiatives. However, this premise is challenged by the current EIT model, as its added value remains uncertain and insufficiently clear.

² The Guild, (2023). Lessons learned and way forward: The Guild's recommendations for Horizon Europe. <https://www.the-guild.eu/publications/position-papers/the-guild-s-recommendations-for-horizon-europe.html>

To begin with, a significant number of the activities presented in the EIT's education guide 2025 overlap with other existing EU initiatives.³ This raises doubts about whether the EIT's and KICs' education activities should be financed at the expense of other equivalent EU initiatives, which in some cases are more far-reaching.

In addition, the exclusive use of quantitative indicators to evaluate education actions does not allow to fully capture the impact of such activities. For example, in multiple communications the EIT refers to the number of individuals 'trained' through diverse schemes. Quantitative indicators fail to illustrate key dimensions to comprehensively evaluate impact such as the components of a given training programme or how the skills learned by users are being applied. Moreover, there is no publicly available information on the methods used to define the numerical values shared by the EIT and KICs in communications.

Given the growing overlap with other EU initiatives, the EIT and the KICs should only receive funding to perform activities where they demonstrate a clear and measurable impact. The HEI Initiative is an example of an activity that delivers distinctive value. For this reason, we recommend that the EIT reviews its education portfolio, either by aligning with the Commission on shared objectives or by clearly defining the distinct added value of its educational activities relative to other initiatives. Furthermore, we invite the EIT and KICs to adopt a mixed evaluation methodology that combines both quantitative and qualitative indicators as part of the impact assessment of educational activities, to ensure that the potential added value of such activities can be clearly identified. Along these lines, we call for more transparency and clarity on the methods used to gather and compute the indicators. Finally, when designing education activities, KICs should consider the relevant national legal frameworks to ensure that basic legal requirements of participation, such as imposing a language of instruction or requiring tuition fees, do not result in a *de facto* exclusionary measure for some universities that might encounter contradictions with their national legislation.

³ EIT KICs Education Guide 2025. <https://www.eit.europa.eu/library/eit-kics-education-guide-2025>