



UAS4EUROPE Events on 15 March 2017 – Conference Report

Universities of Applied Sciences: Maximising Success in Horizon 2020 and Beyond – Learn! Network! Lobby!

Key Messages

- Universities of applied sciences (UAS) are well placed to participate in Horizon 2020 and the Ninth Framework Programme, but more can be done to improve their participation.
- Besides shortcomings on institutional, national and European level, many UAS researchers lack international networks and therefore struggle with the challenge to find suitable partners outside their own region.
- UAS may find it hard to compete with traditional universities (e.g. in terms of excellence) but they are a valuable key player in the innovation chain of every country and have a lot to offer. UAS should try to turn their 'unique differences' into advantages.

Report

On 15 March 2017, UAS4EUROPE, an emerging network for universities of applied sciences in Europe, brought together more than 200 researchers, research officers, policymakers and rectors from almost 30 European countries – some of them very experienced on EU level and others utter newcomers. The conference consisted of a daytime event and a high-level evening reception.

The aims were:

- **to learn** more about the possibilities that European funding programmes, especially Horizon 2020, offer for UAS, to understand how to prepare a good proposal, and to find out which key ingredients are needed for a good participation of UAS in Horizon 2020 and beyond;
- **to network** with UAS from other European countries and also with other stakeholders from the field of research and innovation;
- **to lobby** for a better integration of UAS in the European research and innovation area by identifying and addressing the obstacles on institutional, regional, national and European level.

Brendan Hawdon of the European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, provided an overview of the current state of Horizon 2020 and the preparations for its successor, the Ninth Framework Programme (FP9). With regards to the mid-term evaluation of Horizon 2020, the Commission set up a High-Level Group (HLG), organised a stakeholder consultation and is planning to publish a staff working document in May, publish the report of the HLG in June and issue the Commission communication on the interim evaluation as well as the Horizon 2020 work programme 2018-2020 in October. The proposal of the Commission for FP9 is expected to be published in spring 2018. Referring to FP9, Hawdon presented several issues to be dealt with. These discussions vary from



grants versus loans and disruptive versus incremental innovation to bottom-up versus top-down approaches, the role of defence research and cohesion mechanisms in FP9. On the basis of the first outputs from the interim evaluation, the Commission can so far say that stakeholders e.g. wish continuity with Horizon 2020 ('an evolution, not a revolution'), want the Commission to keep the societal challenge-based approach and the support for both research and innovation in one programme, and argue for a further simplification.

Virginia Puzzolo of the Research Executive Agency (REA) provided practical tips for preparing a Horizon 2020 proposal, based on her own experience. The presentation showed the critical success factors as well as the structure of the calls and topics. According to Puzzolo, the crucial point is to address the topic text to a 100 percent and to take additional documents into consideration. That's for example a reason why applicants should be very careful with resubmissions. Projects should illustrate how their outputs will contribute to the impact described in the topic text, enhance innovation, create new knowledge, and strengthen competitiveness and growth. The dissemination and exploitation of research results are vital steps on the way towards these goals. Puzzolo pointed out that especially an excellent exploitation chapter can be a huge plus for universities of applied sciences. A clear understanding of the evaluation process and the work of the evaluators is essential for being successful.

Panel discussion

Before lunchtime, a panel was convened with researchers, evaluators, representatives and coordinators from UAS and a SME. The panel discussed the key ingredients for a good participation of UAS in H2020 and beyond. First the 180 visitors of the daytime event were asked to raise their hand if they already applied for H2020: half of the visitors confirmed.

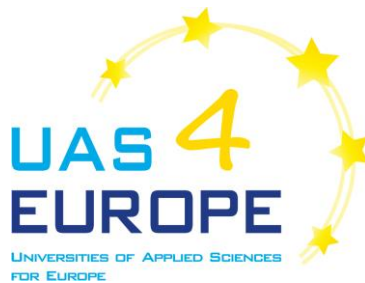
- **Roswitha Wiedenhofer** (FH Joanneum, Graz) confirmed that the willingness of UAS to participate in H2020 is high. The Austrian UAS already sent 120 H2020-projects to the Commission of which 107 as partner and 9 as coordinator of a consortium. But the success rate is still low: only 3 projects with UAS as partner were approved by the Commission and only 1 was accepted in which an Austrian UAS was a coordinator of a consortium.

According to Roswitha there are still two important working points for UAS in H2020:

1. UAS are still in the wrong networks and the importance of a strong connection with the traditional academic universities is crucial to have a higher success rate in approval
2. UAS have to focus more on A1 and A2 publications which are an indispensable to get the H2020-application approved by the Commission

Roswitha also nicely offered some best practices to stimulate UAS-fundraisers and scientists to participate in H2020:

1. Austrian UAS Joanneum provide € 5.000 extra for UAS-staff members if they participate in H2020
2. If the Commission approves the application of an Austrian UAS, this will be taken into account by the UAS-managers' team for further career opportunities of these staff members



On a future policy level UAS need to lobby more to highlight more the visibility, the strengths and the identity of UAS so the Commission gets a clear picture of the added value of UAS. On the other hand, the UAS should ask the Commission to create the possibility to allow more smaller consortia in H2020 or FP9.

- **Nina J. Zugic** (British Council & Evaluation-Assessment Expert of the Commission) pointed out that UAS need to collaborate more to augment the success rate. Also the quantity of the proposal is not important, but the quality: the Commission approved already proposals of just 44 pages only.
- **Thomas Wintgens** (FHNW, Northwestern Switzerland) advised UAS not jump too spontaneously into H2020. A lot of preparation time is needed: sometimes it takes years to write a good application. You need a strong network, which implies a lot of face to face meetings, and a strong research capacity. He pointed out that half of the proposals he manages, are approved by the Commission. He advises UAS to develop a real team with at least 2 policy officers/fundraisers, a financial controller who is able to work with different money currencies (if countries outside the EU are involved in a project) and an experienced administrative executive. He had a more pragmatic vision on future developments: UAS have to adapt themselves first to the H2020-language and framework and only in a second stage try to lobby the Commission to adapt their H2020 program so it would be more suitable for UAS.
- **Panteleimon Panagiotou** (Bavarian Research Alliance) stated that a lot of UAS in the EU experience a very low government grant for research which implicates a limited staff in UAS. To counter this lack of staff he advised directors and managers of UAS on institutional level to finance extra personnel (FTE) who can collaborate and prepare H2020-applications. Another possibility is to discharge staff members, researchers and fundraisers of other tasks in the UAS so they are able to concentrate full time on writing an H2020-application.

The panel explained there is also a possibility for UAS to collaborate with UAS, universities and research centers outside Europe: the Commission foresees collaboration with ‘associated countries, e.g. Canada, Israel, South-East Asian countries. Besides the Commission offers ‘specific international cooperation programs’, but it is very important to check first which countries are involved.

There was broad agreement that Horizon 2020 is a suitable framework for UAS, but that mainly on the national and institutional level (UAS) changes would have to be made.

To facilitate networking, deepen discussions and gather further input from the attendees, the afternoon session was held in the form of **workshops**. The workshops were organised along big thematic lines – Health and Wellbeing; Environment, Food and Agriculture; Living and Working in the 21st Century; Energy and Climate Change; Enabling and Industrial Technologies, Digitalisation; Arts and Design – to ensure that people with similar background and interests were brought together. Best practice speeches allowed the participants to get into the topic and showed some first ideas on how



to be successful on European level. Below is a non-exhaustive overview of the discussed topics, ideas and suggestions:

Practical advice for UAS applying for EU funding:

The biggest topic discussed in several workshops and also during the other sessions turned out to be the challenge **to find the right partners** for EU projects and to get into emerging consortia. More experienced applicants advised their fellow participants to attend international stakeholder meetings and conferences, to use existing databases, networks (e.g. the Enterprise Europe Network or even LinkedIn) and topic-specific platforms, to approach multipliers, umbrella organisations, alumni and other associations, to scan literature, to use the recommendations and networks of existing partners, to connect with regional innovation and development agencies, to use non-Horizon 2020 projects to build up networks, e.g. COST actions, and to promote successful previous projects in order to establish contacts with new partners. International visibility and interdisciplinary work were seen to be key for broadening your network, just as much as personal interaction and an overall strategic approach.

Building up a network takes time, and so does being successful. This is a second finding discussed in several workshops. To be successful, applicants need to **build up experience**, e.g. by learning from successful applicants, starting in less challenging programmes than Horizon 2020, using these programmes as step stones, and starting as a small partner in a consortium. On the other hand, applicants need to **adapt to the given framework conditions**, get to know them and learn how to deal with them. One of the conditions of European funding in general is international cooperation and a European added value. This means broadening of perspective, considering the wide range of contexts between countries, regions and cities, and consistency with EU policies and major initiatives.

Challenges and advantages of UAS:

Besides a lack of international networks and experience, a lot of participants saw mainly **structural problems** as a main obstacle for successful participation in European funding programmes, especially when it comes to resources and also institutional support. Often PhDs who could take care of the proposal preparation are a 'missing link' at UAS and research capacities are too small. To solve this issue, some UAS researchers have fallen back on students to carry out specific tasks and had good experiences. With the aid of programmes like Erasmus+ or Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions, students can be trained for international cooperation. Broad consensus was reached that additional funding for the proposal preparation phase – for networking, building up consortia, and proposal writing – would help deal with these challenges.

Further challenges which are not UAS-specific and experienced by other actors in the field of research and innovation, too, are **brain drain**, the **low success rates under Horizon 2020** and simplified but still very **complex funding mechanisms**. Besides that, especially disciplines from the non-technical fields like social sciences, humanities, arts and design struggle with a **lack of recognition** by European funding



authorities and sometimes even on institutional level, finding themselves downgraded to second hand assets for technological or economic research.

On the other hand, UAS have a lot to bring to the table. Especially their **end user and citizen-centred approach** as well as their **innovation-oriented research with focus on impact** were seen as crucial in addressing the global challenges of our time. Thanks to a demand-driven approach and close links to industry, UAS are perfectly qualified to **foster entrepreneurship, knowledge transfer and co-creation**. However, the exclusive focus on technological readiness levels and product-oriented impact was seen very critical by many UAS researchers. Besides that, UAS with their strong focus on education are excellent partners when it comes to **capacity building and training the workforce of tomorrow** with respect to the needs of a modern working world.

Suggestions for UAS-internal improvements:

At the moment, UAS are underrepresented not only in EU-funded projects but also in public perception, including the perception of funding authorities and other relevant stakeholders. Several workshops raised these issues and discussed on how to better advocate for UAS. First of all, **awareness raising** among key players in the field of research and innovation was seen as necessary. As stated, UAS have a lot to offer and have a lot of expertise to bring to the table. One way of doing this and improving their chances of being integrated in consortia would be **to map UAS competencies and strengths** and **to showcase UAS success stories and their impact**, e.g. on the regional level. Another one could be **to position UAS researchers as experts** in advisory boards or as evaluators.

Furthermore, many UAS researchers saw the need to **strengthen collaboration** with successful actors, like universities. In many cases, universities are more experienced and well-connected. Powerful collaborations can also contribute to the visibility of UAS and help them demonstrate their added value for projects in practice.

Thirdly, a **clear positioning** of UAS was seen as crucial. Amongst others, UAS often have close links to regional actors, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, through them UAS are also able to contribute significantly to the regional development.

Suggestions for FP9:

UAS are valuable actors in the European research and innovation landscape and eager to contribute their expertise for achieving excellent science, industrial leadership and tackling the societal challenges of our time. To be able to do so, the participants of the UAS4EUROPE conference had several suggestions for improvement for the upcoming framework programme.

To mention a few:

- **Further simplification**

Although a lot of progress has already been made, more simplification is needed, especially with regards to funding schemes and scheme-specific rules



- **Streamlining and linking existing programmes**
Like the European Commission, UAS welcome synergies between existing programmes – however, in practice this linkage has not been working out well so far
- **Improvement of the evaluation process**
Better feedback from the evaluators or even some kind of interaction with them could help with writing better proposals
- **Higher success rates**
E.g. by means of more specific calls to reduce inadequate applications and by using the two stage procedure (with a very strict 1st stage so that success rate in stage 2 is 1:3) for broad topics
- **Grants instead of loans**
In many countries, UAS and other academic stakeholders are not allowed to take out loans
- **Fair reimbursement of staff**
In due consideration of wage discrepancies between European countries, wages must be fair for the single researchers
- **Keep the focus on impact, but broaden the perspective**
To play a distinctive role for society, science needs to have impact. However, impact can be much more than economic impact. Think about societal impact.
- **Don't forget social sciences and humanities, arts and design**
They should receive a greater focus by raising the amount of calls addressing their specific expertise as a central theme.

Let's get political (evening event)

After a very practice-oriented daytime conference, the evening reception brought together a high-level panel, preceded by a keynote speech of **Keith Sequeira** of the Cabinet Moedas, European Commission. Sequeira explicitly welcomed the UAS4EUROPE initiative, offering one distinct voice for UAS, and its contributions to different public consultations so far, e.g. the midterm review of Horizon 2020. In his keynote, he focused on three topics: open innovation, one of Commissioner Moedas' top priorities; the current state of Horizon 2020 and the upcoming FP9; and the planning for the European Innovation Council (EIC) that is supposed to pilot as of 2018. Concerning innovation, the Commission is looking at current challenges on different levels. One is the regulatory and policy framework that could drive innovation. This year, an impact assessment will take place for the first time, looking at innovation as specific type of impact. Another angle is the level of private investments which is too low, according to Sequeira; and the third level is an optimal use of public money to stimulate innovation. This last point is linked closely to the EIC which is supposed to take a different approach to innovation. Up to now, innovation is funded mainly according to roadmaps and specific topics – but how to capture innovation that does not fit into these programmes, and that happens unexpectedly and outside defined areas? A new emphasis will be put on people and teams, like the European Research Council already does. Finally, the Commission is looking for ways to fund high-risk innovations, and Sequeira saw a lot of chances there especially for UAS. He underlined the role that UAS can play in terms of identifying these innovations, helping scale them up to European level, and



engaging with regions and society. Regarding the mid-term evaluation, Sequeira pointed out that, besides oversubscription, a lot of concerns have been raised with regards to the technology readiness levels, whether the focus is too much on close-to-market results and whether there is a gap between this focus on the one hand and the focus on fundamental research on the other. Also, he acknowledged that the interactions with regional and structural funds need to be got to work. For FP9, he announced a focus on excellence, openness and impact and confirmed that he is well aware of the problem loans pose for research institutions. Asked by the audience what he expects of UAS, Sequeira wished for input on how to get the interactions between the framework programme and the structural funds to work and encouraged UAS to cooperate with the regions and to discover new ways of easy and practical collaboration.

In the following panel discussion, Bavarian State Secretary Bernd Sibler, Luciana Vaccaro of the University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland (HES-SO), Armando Pires of the Portuguese Polytechnics Coordinating Council and Talita Soares of the European Association of Research and Technology Organisations (EARTO) discussed on how to work together with UAS in Horizon 2020 and beyond. There is a strong belief in ample opportunities for collaborating with UAS and in their role as connectors to the regions. The panellists were very fond of the 'Smart Partnerships for Regional Impact' (SPFRI) concept, which UASEUROPE will further elaborate in the coming months. Switzerland and Bavaria were showcased as best practices in terms of political strategies drafted to support UAS with engaging on European level. Talita Soares explained how EARTO as an advocacy organisation for research and technology organisations was able to become an integral part in the European research and innovation area and gave advice on how UAS could become a successful player in this context, too.

A final networking session completed a very informative and successful day.

UAS4EUROPE aims to strengthen the role of universities of applied sciences at the European level. It is a joint initiative from:

- **EURASHE** (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, representing over 500 institutions in 40 countries), Belgium
- **UASnet** (Universities of Applied Sciences Network, representing 8 European national rectors' conferences), Belgium
- **swissuniversities** (representing universities, universities of applied sciences and universities of teacher education in Switzerland, supported by SwissCore), Switzerland
- **Hochschule Bayern e.V.** (representing Bavarian Universities of Applied Sciences, supported by the Bavarian Research Alliance), Germany
- **Österreichische Fachhochschul-Konferenz** (representing Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences), Austria

For further information, please visit www.uas4europe.eu.