SUPPORT SERVICES
FOR STUDENT-BUSINESS COLLABORATION

Good practice collection of support services for challenge-based student-business collaboration in sustainable entrepreneurship

Good Practice Profile: ECIU University

ECIU UNIVERSITY

ECIU University
University alliance

Est. 2019
Europe
Twente

Size
14 member universities (uniting over 300,000 students and 46,000 staff) and more than 33 associates (including national and regional authorities, cities, enterprises, associations and agencies).

Joint governance structure: central office in Brussels, presidium, board, and institutional coordination (46 people from 14 member universities).

Geographic scope of activities
International (focus on Europe)

Type of intermediary
☐ HEI-external   ☐ HEI-internal   ☒ Hybrid

Intermediary set-up
☐ Single organisation
☒ Partnership of multiple organisations

Intermediation for SBC as
☒ Primary role   ☐ Secondary role

ECIU University is an **alliance of 14 HEIs across Europe**, including one university in Mexico. It enables learners, academic staff, and researchers to work together with businesses, but also NGOs and municipalities, to solve real-life challenges, focusing especially on solutions contributing to SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities. ECIU University represents one of the 50 European University alliances formed under the European University Initiative – the flagship initiative of the European strategy for universities which aims to support 60 transnational alliances of HEIs by 2024.

Background

ECIU University emerged in November 2019 out of the ECIU (European Consortium of Innovative Universities), a network of selected European HEIs founded in 1997. A common dimension of the HEIs participating in the network is the entrepreneurial orientation and the commitment to ensuring an institutional nature of innovation. The original focus of the network was placed on research cooperation, joint study programmes, expert groups and project- and problem-based learning. In 2019, the Erasmus+ project focus led to the organisational development towards the ECIU University which instigated a challenge-based approach to create learning opportunities across the HEI network. Following the pilot phase with small-scale experimentation with challenges and micro-modules from 2019-2022, the project partners are now more focused on building and growing innovation communities and hubs via both physical and virtual spaces, developing engagement platforms, looking at new target groups, employing central staff as well as exploring legal structures. ECIU University aims to create a "collaborative ecosystem where universities are key players."

Funding & Financing Model

- As a European University alliance, ECIU University receives funding through the Erasmus+ programme.

- Next to their Erasmus+ financial support as main source of funding, European University alliances can access additional funding schemes. ECIU University receives complementary financial support for its SMART-ER project (see "International and virtual collaboration") which is implemented under the EU Research and Innovation programme Horizon 2020 part "Science with and for Society" (SwafS).

- The long-term goal of ECIU University is to establish a sustainable funding model in collaboration with the European Union and national governments, moving towards a mixed funding model that combines free, cost-based and for-profit services. For instance, the concept of micro-credentials may be a suitable business model for ECIU University, allowing professionals to enhance their skills while contributing to a smart upskilling of Europe's workforce.

Intermediary Support Services & Activities

GENERAL SUPPORT

✕ Design, development and coordination of European learning pathways **with micro-credentials at the core,** and portfolio through combinations of learning offers from the 14 ECIU member universities.

✕ Setting the topics of focus related to the SDGs: circular economy, energy and sustainability, resilient communities, and **transport** and mobility. These are complemented by additional focus topics such as entrepreneurship, technology and innovation, transversal competencies, and language learning.

✕ Provision of technical infrastructure and tools such as the ECIU Digital Experience Platform to enable online matchmaking, building of communities of practice, multi-stakeholder collaboration and exchange on a European level.

SUPPORT FOR COMPANIES AND OTHER SOCIETAL STAKEHOLDERS

✕ Coordination and contact with external stakeholders who are not only seen as challenge suppliers, but are also actively involved in the challenge process, participating as external specialists, co-learning members, or solution adopters.

✕ Set-up of and coordination of Local Partnership Arenas in which potential challenge ideas are developed by company and public sector representatives together with academic staff and learners.

✕ Organisation of Society Quest Events (SQE) during which several external stakeholders can present the problems they face in their respective region – whether as a company, municipality, regional development agency, or NGO – and enter into discussion with ECIU University staff to frame the problem and determine the right format for challenges. The SQE provide opportunity for external stakeholders to humanise the challenge through personal narratives and storytelling.

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Intermediary Support Services & Activities

TEACHER- AND STUDENT-SPECIFIC SUPPORT

- Offer and coordination of two ECIU University learning opportunities for learners, including students:

  - **Challenges:** Courses that engage teams of students, academic staff and external stakeholders such as business representatives to solve real-life problems using the CBL approach. These can range from a few days to several months.

  - **Micro-modules:** Supplementary courses that are offered by ECIU member universities and provide additional knowledge and skills helpful for engaging in challenges. Micro-modules can be selected flexibly based on the learner's needs and may take the form of online courses, study packages, summer schools, research projects, or industry courses.

- Screening and final selection of suggested challenges collected within the ECIU University network, based on criteria such as relevance and impact potential of the challenge as well as there being no solution to the challenge.

- Services management via a virtual ECIU Office for Learners' Services, built up around common e-mail inboxes and a network of admission officers from all member HEIs who handle pre-application and post-application requests. Gradually, and in response to evaluation results, more options for individualised support systems to increase user-friendliness and quality have been created and added.

- Central organisation of the admission process to challenges via the ECIU platform (while actual admission takes place at the member HEI).

- Coordination and provision of financial support for mobility of students and academic staff in the frame of challenges and micro-credentials through a dedicated ECIU mobility fund or from Erasmus+.

- Provision of the ECIU Student Community, a digital student community platform offered via Facebook for all students of ECIU member universities. In the community, students receive information regarding ECIU Students' News and Events and can share tips and best practices regarding challenges, mobility and social interaction.

- Coordination of the ECIU Student Agora, a forum for students to offer support to each other in the context of challenges and micro-credentials. Since launching in 2021, student representatives lead several focus groups to facilitate cross-cultural discussion among students about the future of education.

- Provision of a motivation scan for students to determine the most suitable challenges or micro-credentials based on individual needs and interests.

- Training of academic staff through workshops on CBL principles, roundtables to foster exchange and peer feedback as well as a tandem system ("PraxisDUO") at each university.

- Operation of Innovation of Education Labs at each member university where academic staff can provide and receive support in implementing challenge-based education in their classroom. The labs are both physical and virtual spaces where academic staff innovate and deliver classes, meet other academic staff and share experiences and best practices in CBL.

- Annual issuance of the ECIU Team Award to interdisciplinary academic staff teams of ECIU member HEIs who promote innovative teaching and learning practices.

- Upon challenge completion, students receive an ECIU University certificate or an e-sealed micro-credential, with the option of applying for a diploma supplement.

- Issuance of a European Learning Passport which documents the learner progress and obtained competencies through participation in challenges and micro-credentials and allows for renewal or adding of further learning offers.

- In the future, ECIU University will offer localised support for learners through its ECIU Learners Service Centres which will be located at each ECIU member HEI.

Curricular Integration

× In the pilot phase, ECIU University embedded challenges in preexisting university modules as this allowed for quick implementation. At the same time, it experimented with extra-curricular short-term formats which did not offer ECTS such as the Creathon format. From this, formats emerged which combine flexible forms of co-creation all while providing a regular educational programme, an example being the InGenious project.

× The current framework foresees students being enrolled in one of the ECIU member HEIs and having completed at least 120 ECTS to be eligible for participation in ECIU University's learning opportunities. The possibility for participation of students outside the ECIU University network is granted in some cases.

× In the long-term, ECIU University is moving towards an educational model that includes students from the member universities, but also continuous learners looking for upskilling and reskilling of their competencies and skills. This is in line with its goal of making education more flexible, going from offering degree-based to challenge-based learning pathways.

× Depending on the workload and learning outcomes, between 1-30 ECTS points are awarded for participating in selected challenges or micro-credentials.

× ECIU University experiments with different ways of integrating the CBL approach into the curriculum, e.g. development of the Strategic Challenge concept which fuses a team challenge with working on a Master's thesis linked to the topic of the challenge. The first Strategic Challenge "ECIU Master's Challenge: Climate Neutral Campus Europe" was launched in 2022.

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International & Virtual Collaboration

* ECIU University operates a "hybrid space model" to ensure the delivery of both educational services at the local level as well as the wider European level through providing digitally enabled flexible learning possibilities.

* ECIU University places digital transformation at the core of its ecosystem. Its vision for 2030 is to function "as a hybrid, digitally enabled learning, innovation and knowledge space with fit for purpose, low-cost, high-quality and people-centric services." To bring this vision to life, it is developing an IT-enabled European "inter-university campus." This includes the development of an ECIU Digital eXperience Platform (DXP) with customer journeys for key stakeholders. A minimum viable system was launched end of 2022 and will be further developed in several steps until 2030. This includes the use of AI systems to support the matching of learners' needs with educational content. Preceding the launch of the ECIU DXP, challenges were posted via the ECIU University challenge platform (CHAD) as well as handled manually via the ECIU main website. Further platform development and expansion is aimed at empowering "European people and organisations to build open European knowledge-creating teams where societal stakeholders together with learners and academics solve real world challenges."

* To connect its campuses and communities, ECIU University has developed an educational metaverse that can be accessed anywhere, anytime. The ECIU Extended Reality (XR) Campus was launched in September 2021, providing learners, including students, with an environment for enhanced learning as well as interaction with academic staff and societal actors such as companies. For example, students can interact in small groups in virtual rooms which will adapt based on the themes discussed. The XR Campus was developed by Helsinki-based virtual reality creator Zoan, in cooperation with ECIU member Tampere University.

* ECIU University features three Challenge Innovation Hubs set up in northern, central, and southern Europe: Innovation Hub North coordinated by Linköping University (Sweden), Innovation Hub Mid coordinated by Hamburg University of Technology (Germany), and Innovation Hub South coordinated by Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain). These are used as physical and virtual spaces for co-creation, formulation, and revision of relevant challenges as well as development of a new model for results valorisation.

* ECIU University is supported by the ESEU (European Status for a ECIU University) project, of which all ECIU members as well as national authorities and European organisations are a partner. The project explores the possibility of a European legal status for European universities as an institutionalised instrument to achieve deeper and longer-term forms of cooperation between European HEIs.

* Based on the rapid development of digital infrastructures across Europe, ECIU University is establishing the European Virtual Research Institute SMART-ER to facilitate international connectedness of regions.

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ECIU UNIVERSITY

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⬦ Impact

VISION & MISSION STATEMENT

ECIU University envisions a European ecosystem based on "open and inclusive collaboration connecting societal stakeholders, researchers and learners" who jointly develop solutions to future societal challenges for real impact. Its mission is to create a playground for collaboration and learning opportunities by championing an innovative "university model based upon co-creation." The main elements of its Vision 2030 make up "open community", "cutting-edge technologies", "innovative co-creation model", and "European education and research".

RESULTS

- In the ECIU University pilot phase 2019-2022:
  - more than **82 challenges** and **126 micro-modules** have been offered through the ECIU platform,
  - more than **600 learners**, including **400 students**, participated in challenges,
  - more than **150 academic staff members** co-created learning opportunities and challenges,
  - more than **100 companies, NGOs and public organisations** submitted their challenges.
- ECIU University represents a collective effort to enhance the societal impact of universities in Europe at the local, national, and European levels.

SUCCESS FACTORS AND ENABLING CONDITIONS

- As a university alliance of the European Universities' initiative, ECIU University benefits from the substantial financial resources offered by the initiative and the political attention it receives.

- Trust and familiarity built among the partners during more than 20 years of collaboration help to deliver on ECIU University's ambitions to innovate higher education in Europe through CBL.

- Uniting the experience of 13 European HEIs has built a strong momentum, combining different expertise and backgrounds to experiment with new educational models. For instance, ECIU University builds on each member university's strengths, allocating topic foci based on existing expertise, e.g. Tampere University taking the lead in digital learning, Dublin City University taking the lead in micro-credentials.

- User-centred development: Students are actively involved in the development of the ECIU University, e.g., through participating in vision workshops and informing input for joint policies.

- ECIU University's board is made up of members of all member universities, but also includes societal stakeholders, such as people from industry, social entrepreneurs, local mayors and students.

- ECIU University demonstrates organisational flexibility and future orientation as it has recognised the need for flexibility among students and the increased need for lifelong learning. Based on these insights, it has developed an innovative educational model open to all kinds of learners, from students to citizens.

- Clear branding as the European challenge-based university with a focus on SDG11.

Exemplary Challenge Format: **CO$_2$ reduction plan for Scania Lithuania**

In its first challenge submitted to the ECIU University platform in spring 2022, transport company **Scania Lithuania** asked students to help the company **reduce its CO$_2$ footprint**. Over three months, an international team of four students from various engineering fields at the Kaunas University of Technology in Lithuania, the National Institute of Applied Sciences in France, and University of Stavanger in Norway, developed a CO$_2$ reduction plan, **mentored by a university professor** and lecturer at Kaunas University of Technology.

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RESULTS

×   The students developed a comprehensive sustainability plan and CO$_2$ footprint reduction package for Scania Lithuania, which included proposals for fuel saving and electricity generation, including a plan for the installation of solar cells. The student team also included an employee reward system for motivating employees to reduce their CO$_2$ footprint through electricity, office supplies and fuel savings.

×   According to the students, participation in the challenge helped them gain new knowledge as well as experience in teamwork, time planning, creative thinking and presenting ideas.

×   Challenge owner Scania Lithuania is planning to implement some of the sustainability plan elements over the next two to three years, saying the plan will help Scania Lithuania take steps forward on its sustainability journey.

×   As noted by the professor mentoring the student team, the students' developed ideas are not only important for the challenge owner Scania Lithuania, but also of relevance for other Lithuanian companies intent on reducing their environmental impact.

×   One of the solutions regarding printing optimisation proposed by the students will be implemented at one of the faculties at Kaunas University of Technology.

PUBLIC CONTACT DETAILS
ECIU University
www.eciu.org
https://engage.eciu.eu/

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