



A7.3, O3: A virtual office of Strategic European Projects



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Beneficiaries

- Aalborg University, Denmark
- Dublin City University, Ireland
- Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania
- Linköping University, Sweden
- Tampereen Korkeakoulusäätiö sr, Finland
- Hamburg University of Technology, Germany
- Universidade de Aveiro, Portugal
- Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain
- University of Stavanger, Norway
- Università degli Studi di Trento, Italy
- University of Twente, The Netherlands

Abstract

The rationale for creating a joint virtual office for the ECIU University is the need for a strategic approach to external funding as well as capacity building. EU public funding for educational cooperation, research and innovation will be instrumental to the development and strengthening of the alliance. To stay at the forefront and provide the alliance with a tool to work proactively, we establish the Strategic European Projects Office (SEPO) as a joint structure integrated in the alliance.

The main goal of this platform is to scan opportunities in external funding, match bottom-up initiatives of member institutions with strategic objectives of the alliance towards 2030 and build capacity through sharing of experiences and community building. The SEPO consists of two expert groups: 1) research & innovation and 2) educational cooperation coordinated by a European funding adviser. The two groups met jointly in Brussels on the 1st-2nd February 2022 to establish operations and develop the joint platform. The feedback gathered from this joint meeting of expert groups are integrated into this deliverable.

This brief report builds on the background information provided in D7.3.2. **The SEPO handbook**, which is included as an annex, is published with the launch of the SEPO platform in the joint meeting of the expert groups in Brussels. The handbook will be revised in the 2nd quarter of 2022 following joint meetings of the expert groups.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	3
1.1	Background.....	3
2	Objectives.....	3
3	Features of the Strategic European Projects Office	3
4	Launch event 1.-2. February.....	4
4.1	Context and agenda	4
4.2	Discussions and decisions.....	5
5	Summary.....	6

Symbols, abbreviations and acronyms

AAU	Aalborg University, Denmark
DCU	Dublin City University, Ireland
EC	European Commission
ECIU	European Consortium of Innovative Universities
KTU	Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania
LiU	Linköping University, Sweden
TAU	Tampereen Korkeakoulusäätiö sr, Finland
TUHH	Hamburg University of Technology, Germany
UA	Universidade de Aveiro, Portugal
UAB	Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain
UiS	University of Stavanger, Norway
UNITN	Università degli Studi di Trento, Italy
UT	University of Twente, Netherlands

1 Introduction

Guided by the *ECIU University Vision 2030*¹ the alliance needs to match bottom-up cooperation interest with strategic goals and planning. The Strategic European Projects Office (SEPO) is set up through WP7 to proactively engage in external funding and capacity building for the purpose of moving towards a true European University.

1.1 Background

On the 19th of March 2021, the ECIU Executive Board decided to support alliance funding for staff equal to 2 FTE to support the SEPO platform, acknowledging the ideas on the set-up and processes of the Strategic European Projects Office (SEPO) as an instrument to get more external funding in the ECIU University.

In the following Executive Board meeting 17th-18th of June 2021, further decisions were made concerning extra capacity. Concretely, one FTE would be based in Brussels to work on business development and networking in the Brussels dimension and one FTE would be based at one of the member universities to lead and coordinate SEPO activities in the realm of EU public funding.

On the 21st of October, the ECIU Expert Group on Educational Cooperation Policy and Programmes was established to complement the R&I Group in the SEPO platform and complete the expertise on EU public funding for university missions. These two groups will form the basis of the SEPO platform.

A European funding adviser was hired in January 2022 to lead and coordinate the work of SEPO. Laura Paternoster, based at University of Trento, started in this position on the 1st of February 2022.

2 Objectives

The main objective of this deliverable is to document establishment of the joint virtual project office as a platform for external funding and capacity building in the ECIU University alliance.

The SEPO will be a unit within the ECIU University that

- a) scouts and presents opportunities within external funding for the ECIU University vice-president groups,
- b) organizes the writing process and supports it through institutional grants offices
- c) creates a community of experts who will train project supporters and work with the ECIU Brussels office to leverage the opportunities of EU programmes

3 Features of the Strategic European Projects Office

The ECIU University proposal states the following on the establishment of SEPO:

The ECIU University will gradually fill up with new cooperation projects funded by Erasmus+, Horizon 2020 and many other national and regional funding schemes. The importance of making the projects

¹ Adopted by the ECIU Executive Board on the 28th-30th of October 2020: <https://www.eciu.org/about-eciu#vision>

work synchronously and provide support for each other cannot be [over]estimated. Erasmus and many other funding schemes are designed to build step-by-step partnerships and alliances. To support and develop cooperation projects in the alliance, a Strategic European Projects Office (SEPO) is established based upon the collaboration of the existing EU working group. This solution is envisaged as a virtual office which will be tasked with examining funding opportunities and propose them to the initiatives of the alliance following needs-based mapping in the other work packages.²

Within two years following this description, the new era of policies for the European Education Area, the European Research Area, Digital Agenda and the European Skills Agenda³ signal a strong support for synergies between core activities of higher education and aligning with the needs of stakeholders and learners. Synergies are also at the core of the new *European Strategy for Universities*⁴ launched by the European Commission on the 18th of January 2022. SEPO will focus on harnessing these synergies for the good of the member institutions and the alliance vision.

The SEPO is headed by the European funding adviser, Laura Paternoster, who is based at the University of Trento. The funding adviser leads and coordinates the working processes for strategic calls and coordinates the two expert groups in R&I and Educational Cooperation.

4 Launch event 1.-2. February

SEPO was launched on the 1st-2nd of February 2022 in a joint meeting of the expert groups on R&I and educational cooperation together with the new European funding adviser. This meeting laid the foundation for joint efforts and developments for the next phase of the alliance, the start-up phase.

4.1 Context and agenda

In discussing the feasibility of a physical meeting in the current scenario of Covid-19 restrictions, we decided that the overall benefits of gathering experts for a physical launch would outweigh the risks. The decision to organize a physical meeting of the expert groups was made in December. A total of 28 attendees participated in the joint hybrid meeting. The majority of participants joined online due to restrictions of either travel or health, but in the physical meeting room 11 attendees were registered. Mask wearing was mandatory throughout the meeting and there was a recommendation to self-test for Covid-19 on the morning before attendance.

Agenda Tuesday 1st of February:

12.00-13.00 Lunch
13.00-13.10 Welcome (Trym, Jörg)
13.10-13.45 tour de table
13.45-14.00 Introducing the new ECIU Funding Advisor (Olga)
14.00-14.30 SEPO & the Expert Groups (R&I and Educational Cooperation) (Trym)
14.30-14.50 Break
14.50-16.00 Communication and decision making regarding external funding (SEPO working methods) (Jörg, Olga, Trym, Funding Advisor)
16.00-17.00 Digital Europe by Silvia Merisio, DG Connect, digital skills

Agenda Wednesday 2nd of February:

² ECIU University proposal text pp. 49-50

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/education/>

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_365

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09.15-11.00 The new ECIU U Erasmus+ proposal and alignment with ECIU Roadmap (Monica, Luisa)

11.00-11.20 Break

11.20-12.00 The Expert Groups R&I and Educational Cooperation and the respective VP-group. Terms of Reference and aims of the Expert Groups (Trym, Jörg) - Science Management: Community of Research Managers and certification (EARMA) (Olga, Trym, Jörg)

12.00-13.00 Mission on Climate-neutral and smart Cities by Marnix Surgeon Philippe Froissard, Head of Unit DG RTD

13.00-14.00 Closure and Lunch

Twitter screenshot from the event:



4.2 Discussions and decisions

As the agenda above shows, the expert groups members discussed a number of aspects of external funding and cooperation. The decisions have been integrated into the SEPO handbook attached to this document. A few vital points on the division of responsibilities between the expert groups and the SEPO platform will be reiterated here:

SEPO:

- has a main focus on external funding opportunities using EU public funding

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- organizes information on calls for proposals of external funding aligned with the ECIU University Vision 2030
- initiates proposal writing following decisions by the Presidium and Vice-Presidents groups to act on calls. The writing team will be composed of experts by ECIU University member institutions, upon indication by each institutional representative in the two expert groups

The expert groups:

- focus on community building and trust among partners
- develop capacity through sharing experiences and training activities
- link to the ECIU Brussels office, EU programmes and institutional units and channels

SEPO core team

In order to establish efficient ways of communication and cooperation, the joint meeting decided to establish a SEPO core team, consisting of the European funding adviser, the head of the ECIU Brussels office and the two chairs of the expert groups.

This team will meet once a week to coordinate information and update on cooperation and external funding initiatives. The SEPO core team will establish a Terms of Reference document for SEPO itself, complementing the Terms of Reference for the expert groups.

The team is in charge of updating the eciu.org web page on EU affairs and engagement with EU policy and programmes.

The attached SEPO handbook provides a full description of the organizational structure, the working methods and processes as well as criteria for strategic project development. This handbook exists as a separate document to facilitate frequent updates and revisions.

5 Summary

SEPO is a platform to proactively align the strategic vision of the ECIU University with the initiatives of academic groups and member institutions. The goal is to strengthen the communities of the ECIU, the ability to strengthen developments of key instruments of the ECIU University and build a truly European university open to the world. The handbook annexed to this report details the working processes, criteria and methods used in the SEPO platform.

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