

**Report 4.4:
Impact assessment of the calls for cooperation
PhD Hub
Connect – Research – Innovate
Erasmus+ (GA No.588220)**

Introduction

Report R4.4 focuses on the results generated after the opening of calls for cooperation by the local PhD hub partners. The report analyses the attractiveness of the calls and the advancements of ongoing research activities. It also investigates the funding mechanism adopted for these joint activities and their transnational nature.

Methodology

The methodology followed logical steps in order to understand the procedure, the aspects and the attractiveness of the calls. To evaluate the attractiveness of the calls and the success of the platform, a questionnaire was distributed to all the partners that issued calls for cooperation. The questionnaire used open-ended questions in order to allow analytical answers from the participants. Background information on the existing calls were gathered in advance, forming a flexible set of questions and allowing each time the participant to unfold relevant knowledge. The evaluation was conducted taking into consideration the minimum number of calls expected according to the Key Performance Indicators (KPI), agreed by the consortium. The data into consideration with respect to attractiveness were the duration of the proposed collaboration, the salary and the number of views on the platform.

Results

There are two different types of calls, the “PhD offers” and the “cooperation offers”. The PhD offers are issued by universities and describe the field of research and the duration of the PhD program. The cooperation offers refer to a broader concept of collaboration between organizations and young researchers. In this field, apart from academic institutions, private companies have the opportunity to express their interest as well.

In the field PhD offers there are 50 calls of collaboration. The first offer was published in September 2019. The duration of the proposed PhD degrees was 36 months and the funding options were not publically available. Going through the calls it was observed that out of 50 calls, only 12 calls are related to social sciences while the rest are focused on engineering and computer science. In addition, there is a variation between the views of each call according to the field of expertise. In social sciences there were approximately 250 views per call and in engineering there were approximately 350 views. The highest amount of views was reached

in calls relevant to computer science, artificial intelligence and deep learning, with each call reaching on average 500 views. This observation could be related to the reduced number of calls in social sciences, which could form a bias in favor of engineering and computer science.

There was one call with a requirement of a masters or a PhD degree, on computing and image processing that reached 2883 views. This call was the only call with a direct research contract for 18 months, was not related to the completion of a degree and had a fixed salary funded by a specific European project. The aforementioned observation could indicate that the visitors are more attracted by rather short-term research assignments and potentially are familiar with research activities. It also indicates that a specific funding framework (i.e. EU project) with a predefined salary increases the attractiveness of the call and the relative interest from the viewers.

In the field for “cooperation offers” there were calls for innovation festivals and hackathons to PhD awards by Microsoft Research UK and open offers for collaboration from big corporations such as Hellenic Petroleum. The offers from corporations are open offers for research proposals, i.e. the company is willing to discuss and support new research ideas relevant to the activities of the corporation. Excluding event invitations, there were approximately 100 views per call, a number significantly reduced compared to the section with the PhD offers. This variation can be explained as the cooperation offers are only visible to local hub members, while the PhD offers are visible to any visitor (even if not logged in/registered) – thus reducing considerably the outreach potential. As the institutions that participate in the program want to engage people across Europe this attribute of locality, for this type of offers, could be a barrier. The visibility of the cooperation offers to all the members of hubs should be examined further, as it could safeguard the added value of becoming a member to a PhD hub. The registration of more members could potentially safeguard the validity of applications and expressions of interest.

Evaluation of the calls and suggestions for improvements

With respect to the PhD offers, the number of calls reached the desirable KPI set by the consortium. Although there was an attempt to evaluate the calls for cooperation from different perspectives it should be noted that the anticipated interest from candidates was not reached. Therefore, the feedback on the calls was very limited and the evaluation was conducted from the feedback given by the institutions that issued the calls. There are two reasons for the lack of feedback from candidates. One reason is the number of visitors in each call. The potential distribution of the PhD Hub opportunities in a wider audience could attract more candidates. The exposure of the calls to a wider audience will be strengthened, before the end of the project, due to the dissemination activities. The second reason is the wide portfolio of research activities in the PhD Hub, that does not allow the formation of targeted audiences. As the calls increase in numbers there could be more clustering that could guide researchers towards their field of expertise. The clustering could be formed

according to the nature of the call (academic or corporate), field of research, duration, salary range etc. The clustering could work as another filter in the search engine of the hub. A first clustering option, as a pilot case, could give an insight on the success of the method.

With respect to cooperation offers, the number of calls is currently limited. Only 11 calls have been issued, out of which only 1 from Hellenic Petroleum is an open call for collaboration from a corporation. However, there are institutions and corporations in the consortium that are willing to issue calls later in the year. Thus, the timeframe that institutions and corporations are in need of research personnel varies significantly. Therefore, the evaluation of these calls, their nature and attractiveness, should be explored further. Furthermore, the nature of the calls varies significantly at this section and there is no clear distinction between corporate offers and academic events. The only call from a cooperation was not related to specific contracts, with predetermined salary and duration, and was mixed with invitations to events. Thus, distinguishing corporate interest from a single event invitation was challenging in the list of offers. The formation of a new list of calls only for events could make the distinction more prominent. Furthermore, more detailed offers with analytical description of contract conditions will make this section of cooperation calls more attractive. A detailed template, with predefined questions, could be available in the hub and could guide the institutions to more attractive calls.

Conclusions

Overall, the website is well structured, and the calls are easily accessible. There is an increasing number of calls on the website and a significant number of views in each calls. Thus, the scope of the project is fulfilled and the interest in the PhD platform is constantly increasing. It appears that the PhD offers gather more views than the cooperation offers. This outcome could be expected as the calls for cooperation are visible only to the members of the local hub, while the PhD offers are visible to visitors across Europe. However, the registered members are constantly increasing, making the calls for cooperation available to more potential candidates. As the number of calls increases a clustering of the calls according to the field of expertise could make the website more accessible to the candidates. Dissemination activities to a wider audience and additional calls for cooperation from industries could strengthen the activities of the PhD Hub and enhance transboundary collaborations across Europe. As the PhD platform attracts more candidates and calls for cooperation, the aforementioned improvements could further enhance the attractiveness and the visibility of the offers and the Hub.