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Bringing together multiple HEIs to find the ways to cement the third mission and increase university-business interaction

HEInnovate has been used in Albania to help understand the concept of the entrepreneurial university for academics, and to explore the facilitators and barriers to implementing the concept in higher education institutions (HEIs).

The exercise began in 2016 as part of a PhD project in the Faculty of Economy at the University of Tirana. A PhD student discovered HEInnovate online, and its status as a European Commission and OECD instrument that helps identify strong and weak areas to move forward, made it a natural choice to underpin the research.

HEInnovate was used as the theoretical framework to examine two main questions:

- The status quo of Albanian universities in terms of their strongest and weakest aspects
- How Albanian universities can build on their existing strong areas and improve the weaker ones

To conduct the research, five public HEIs were selected, two in Tirana and three in other smaller regions in the country. All academics at the five universities were invited by email to participate in the HEInnovate self-assessment exercise, and over 370 responses were received. After data analysis, a select number of senior management representatives from the five universities (e.g. rectors) were interviewed.

The entrepreneurial university was a new concept in Albania and did not have a common definition among stakeholders. The self-assessment exercise found that entrepreneurship had been encouraged by top management in Albanian HEIs, though in practice this was often informal. The newness of the concept proved to be both a barrier and an enabler to undertaking the research. While the concept required a lot of explanation before engaging

individuals, once briefed, consultees showed high levels of interest in the topic and the results of the study, making significant potential for follow-up activity, from academic articles to further research.

The HEInnovate exercise was timely, following the introduction of new legislation to encourage university-business interaction in 2015. A number of benefits arose from the PhD project, including helping the selected HEIs to understand how to orient themselves towards innovation and cement their third mission. The PhD project also helped HEIs to understand how to address a lack of diversity in their financial income through closer cooperation with the private sector, and how to deepen knowledge transfer with private sector partners, beyond internships and placements.

The PhD project has already identified shared areas for action and is a first step towards further work. The results of the PhD study are used to increase awareness and examine further routes for application. There is a strong desire among stakeholders to follow up the first exercise with a workshop. There is also potential to further explore across other universities what can be done in each of the HEInnovate dimensions and regarding socio-economic impact. There have been ongoing discussions around conducting a focus group with experts to discuss the results further and establish cooperation based on the HEInnovate instrument.

This paper was prepared by Martin Wain from Technopolis Group with the input from Bruna Papa (Niçka), Lecturer at the Management Department, Faculty of Economy, University of Tirana

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