



Discover HEInnovate: Transforming Higher Education Institutions Webinar

Summary Note



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European
Commission



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Summary of the HEInnovate Information Session

Date: 12 June 2025

Time: 10:30–11:30 CET

Location: Online (MS Teams)

Speakers:

- **Loredana Lombardi** – Policy Officer, European Commission’s Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC, Unit C.1 – Innovation and EIT)
- **Jonathan Potter** – Head of Entrepreneurship Policy Unit, Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities, OECD
- **Flávia Colus** – Senior Researcher, PPMI (Part of Verian Group), HEInnovate Team
- **Juliana Vassileva** – Associate Professor, New Bulgarian University

Introduction

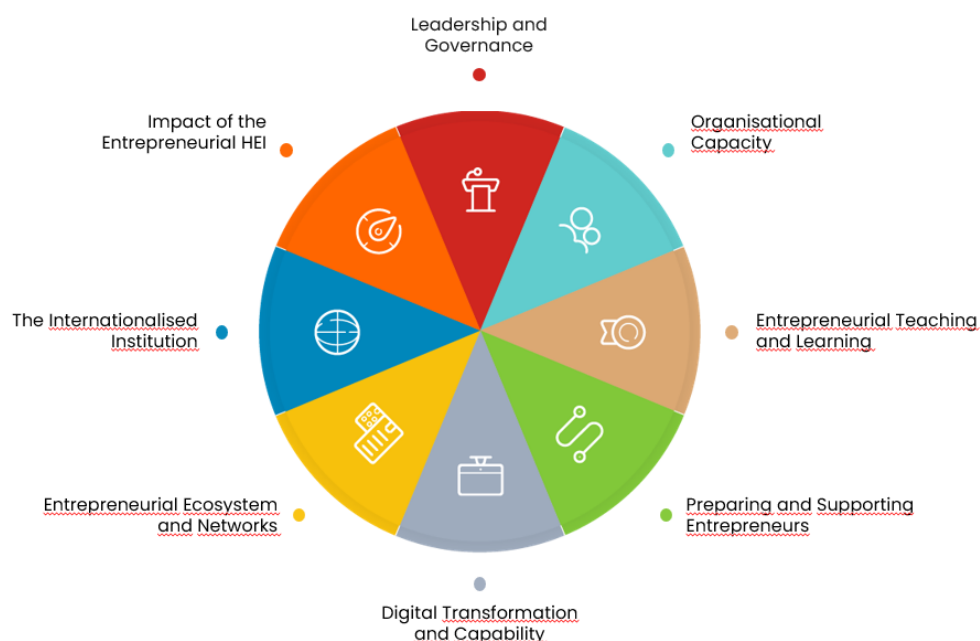
The webinar opened with introductory remarks from representatives of the European Commission and the OECD, who provided important political and strategic context for the HEInnovate initiative. Loredana Lombardi from the Commission’s Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture emphasised the growing importance of entrepreneurship, digital transformation, and innovation in the EU’s education agenda. She explained how HEInnovate fits within broader strategic priorities, such as the European Strategy for Universities and the EIT Higher Education Initiative, serving as both a development tool and a political instrument. Since its inception in 2013, the tool has been used by over 2,000 higher education institutions and more than 34,000 individuals.

Jonathan Potter of the OECD continued by discussing the tool’s purpose and theoretical foundation. HEInnovate, he said, is built upon years of joint OECD–EU research into good practice in higher education. It supports both institutional leaders and policymakers in making their universities more entrepreneurial by fostering cultures of innovation, student initiative, and knowledge transfer. Potter highlighted that the tool is most effective when used in conjunction with committed leadership, strong institutional incentives, and local champions capable of turning ideas into action.

Presentation from the HEInnovate Team

Flávia Colus from PPMI gave an in-depth introduction to HEInnovate’s structure and use. Designed as a free, self-assessment tool, HEInnovate enables higher education institutions (HEIs) to reflect on their entrepreneurial and innovative capacity across eight dimensions:

FIGURE 1. THE 8 DIMENSIONS OF HEINNOVATE



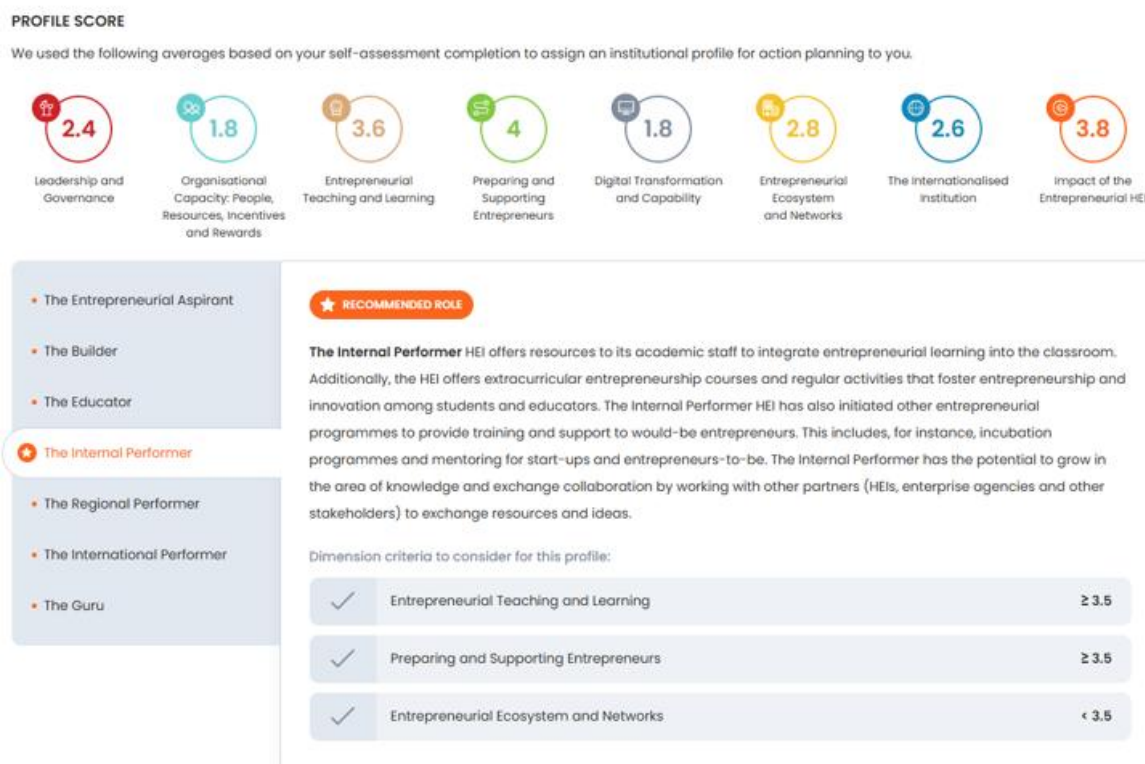
Institutions complete the assessment by scoring 38 statements based on these eight dimensions, rating each statement on a 1–5 scale. The process can be done individually, but group assessments are recommended to encourage dialogue and reveal hidden strengths or knowledge gaps across the institution. Flávia emphasised that the tool is not intended for benchmarking, but for internal reflection, discussion, and strategy building.

She then presented the **resources available** to support users through the assessment process and beyond. These include:

- [Guidance Notes](#) that clarify each statement with examples;
- [Country Reviews](#) analysing national contexts (from 2017–2021);
- [Training Materials](#) for facilitating internal workshops;
- [Case Studies](#) showing best practices across the eight dimensions;
- [Testimonials](#) of institutions that have used the tool;
- [Action Cards](#)—practical recommendations tailored to the institution's profile, ranging from "Aspirant" to "Guru."

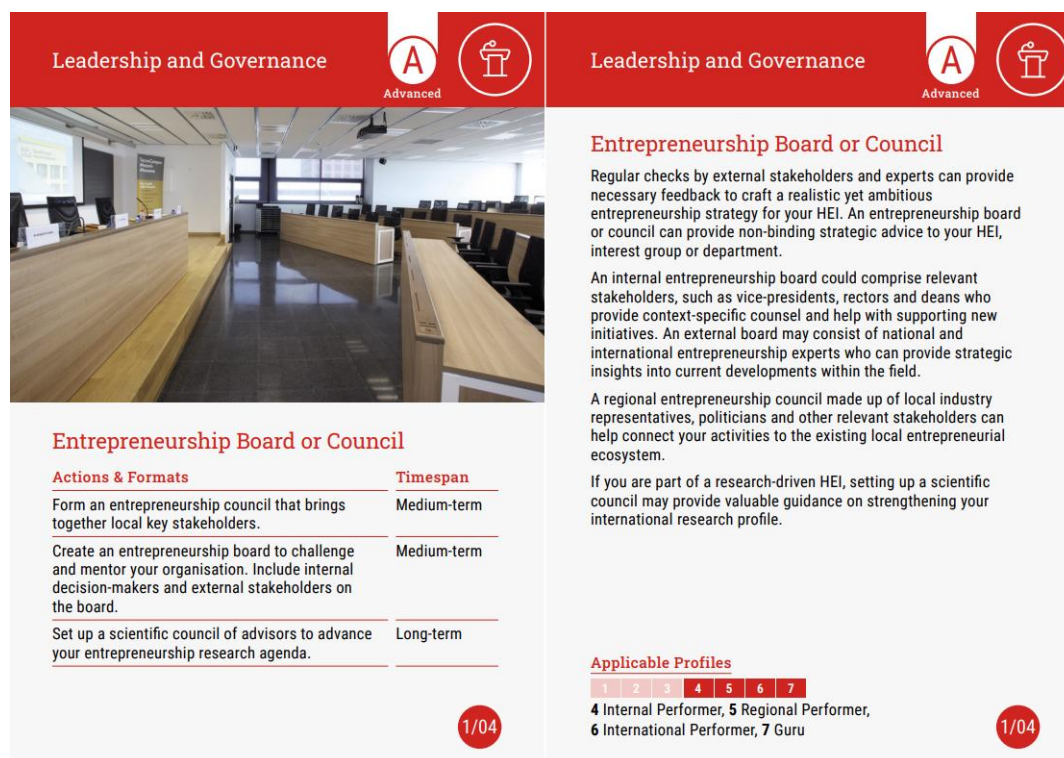
Once an institution completes the assessment, it is assigned a profile, which helps prioritise and customise its action plan using the cards:

FIGURE 2. SCREENSHOT OF THE ENTREPRENEURIAL PROFILES THAT HEIS RECEIVE AFTER THE SELF-ASSESSMENT



Flávia explained how these cards bridge the gap between insight and implementation by translating abstract reflection into suggestions for concrete institutional change.

FIGURE 3. EXAMPLE OF AN HEINNOVATE ACTION CARD



User Story: New Bulgarian University (NBU)

[Juliana Vassileva](#), HEInnovate expert and faculty member at **New Bulgarian University (NBU)**, delivered an inspiring presentation on how the tool had been used at her institution to align and elevate entrepreneurial practices.

Located in Sofia, [NBU](#) is the largest private university in Bulgaria and prides itself on a liberal and interdisciplinary model. According to Vassileva, entrepreneurship had long been present at the university—in the form of student initiatives, hackathons, business competitions, and project-based learning—but it remained fragmented and lacked formal institutional support such as a dedicated strategy and action plan, unit, and formal incubator or acceleration infrastructure. HEInnovate provided a way to structure those efforts, build internal dialogue, and envision a more connected and strategic model.

NBU used a mixed-method approach that combined the HEInnovate self-assessment with data from the GUESSS survey and student-written reflective essays. Participants included students from entrepreneurship programmes and faculty members across various departments. Interestingly, students scored the university's entrepreneurial activities higher than faculty did (4.1 vs. 3.2 out of 5), revealing important perception gaps. Students appreciated the mentoring and flexibility available to them, but many noted that opportunities were not equally accessible across disciplines.

This collective reflection prompted new ideas: proposals for an entrepreneurship centre, structured mentoring systems, shared co-working spaces, and improved visibility of resources and initiatives. Importantly, the tool also validated and elevated the work of individuals across the institution who had long contributed to innovation but lacked a coordinated platform.

Additionally, the exploration of HEInnovate by students turned the assessment into a powerful pedagogical tool — one that promoted critical thinking, student voice, and meaningful engagement with institutional development.

Vassileva noted that institutional culture mattered, and that a bottom-up culture, though vibrant, needs top-down support to scale. HEInnovate helped foster that alignment. During her talk, she shared a powerful insight that encapsulated the spirit of the session:

“Entrepreneurial transformation doesn’t happen overnight. But with tools like HEInnovate, we can measure, mobilise, and multiply change—one insight at a time.”

This reflection served as a turning point in her presentation, summarising the transformational potential of HEInnovate when embraced as a collaborative and iterative process.

Q&A and Closing Remarks

The session closed with an engaging Q&A, in which participants posed questions about practical implementation and strategic alignment. One attendee asked whether individual participants in a group assessment could focus only on areas they were familiar with. Flávia

explained that full participation in all dimensions is encouraged during the assessment, as it promotes discovery and richer discussion. However, for action planning, it can be useful to assign dimensions to different teams based on their expertise.

Another question touched on the subjectivity of self-assessment results, especially in international alliances. Flávia acknowledged this and reaffirmed that the value of HEInnovate lies less in benchmarking scores and more in the conversations, insights, and institutional actions that follow. Juliana echoed this sentiment, saying the process helped surface not only gaps in the university's activities but also gaps in awareness.

Conclusion

As the webinar came to a close, the HEInnovate Team invited participants to remain engaged with the HEInnovate community through:

- **Train the Trainer sessions,**
- Contributing to HEInnovate's case study and testimonial library,
- Subscribing to the [HEInnovate newsletter](#),
- Hosting internal workshops,
- And joining the [Community for Educational Innovation](#).