THE WORLD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
AFTER COVID-19

How COVID-19 has affected
young universities

Yerun
Young European Research Universities

Foreword

Authors: Silvia Gomez Recio (YERUN Secretary General), Chiara Colella (YERUN Strategic Communication and Policy Officer)

When we started the year 2020, we could have never imagined we would have lived a comparable crisis. For the YERUN network, 2020 was planned as the year for finalising our first strategic plan, evaluating the activities done in these 4 years of existence and making new plans for the future.

Networks have shown their importance and relevance in the last decade, when the number of associations of universities and collaborative initiatives has increased exponentially. Compared to 10 years ago, the number of stakeholders in Brussels representing higher education institution has tripled. That without mentioning the European Universities Initiatives launched in 2018, which is bringing 41 new alliances of universities to the Brussels environment. Some foresight rightly indicated the need for institutions to collaborate, to share information and resources, to cooperate across countries and to align strategies in order to address challenges and situations no institution can manage alone.

Since the physical closing of our institutions and of our YERUN Brussels office in March 2020, our communication with members has only increased. Our need for understanding how our universities were going through this situation, trying to help them in any way possible, made us deliver different information highlights showcasing the activities and actions our members were taking to overcome each phase of the crisis. Well-being of students and staff has been essential to all our institutions and we cannot feel prouder of it. But slowly, learning from the different actions each one was implementing, we started seeing a huge added value in bringing them together, to share challenges, their situation, their context (very different from country to country) and to design opportunities together.

These exchanges brought us to this process: how we can prepare for the months and years ahead, what changes we can anticipate that would allow us to plan better, what aspects will be most crucial to act upon. This process let our thoughts flow to imagine dreams and even have nightmares, allowing our minds to travel to the unknown.

Going through the description of the three horizons presented in this paper, one cannot tell exactly what will happen. No one can anticipate what the future will really look like or be truly certain about what lays ahead. But what if the future is not waiting for us but will depend on how will we design it?

In that case, don't you want to take part?

Then, let's imagine our future.

Silvia Gomez,
YERUN Secretary General

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Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has put the world of higher education, in Europe and worldwide, under great pressure. This crisis has forced Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to swiftly change their status quo, their ways of working and their environments, dramatically shaking up our communities[1]. At the same time, this situation has also brought to light the rigidity of our current higher education system, a rigidity we are now confronted with and which will inevitably have to change as a consequence of current or future lockdowns[2]. Corridors and lecture rooms are empty, and most students are following their courses by online and digital means. International mobility as we know it is under threat[3] due to travel restrictions and preventive measures that may be in place for a long period to come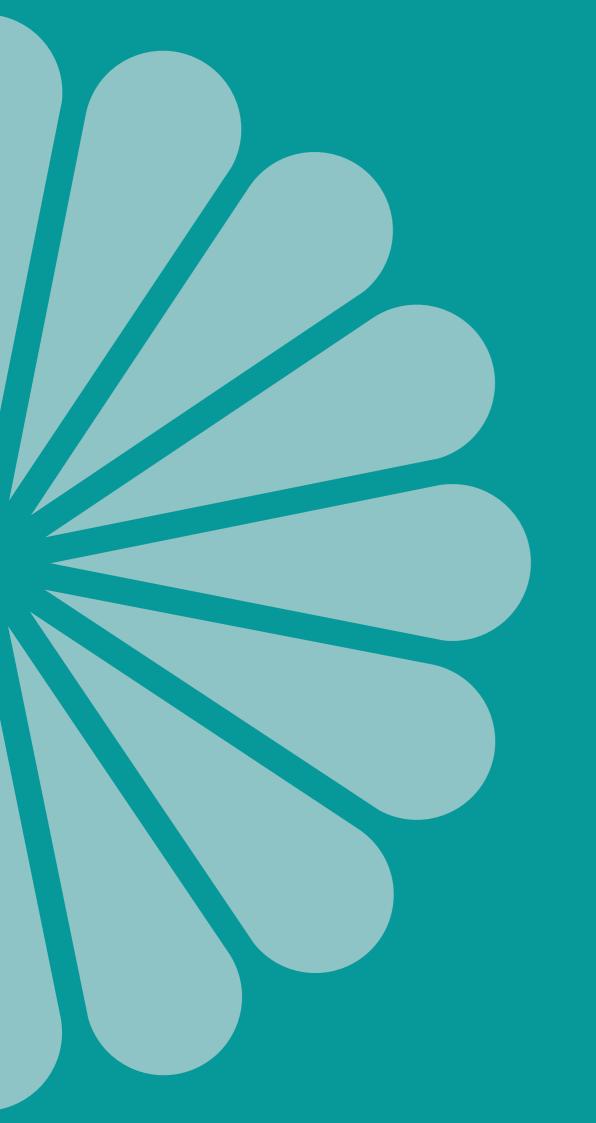. Many research labs whose activities are not strictly related to finding solutions to COVID-19, as well as other research infrastructures, have been obliged to close during lockdowns and may not be able to operate at full capacity for the duration of the crisis.

A lot has been written and said about how the lockdown has forced universities to swiftly change their way of teaching, and how students and staff have been adapting to the new situation imposed by the pandemic[4]. With this paper, YERUN aims to contribute to the discussion, bringing in the perspective of young European research universities.

During the months of May and June 2020, YERUN has organised various roundtables with its member universities to better understand the impact of the crisis on their organisations and the key challenges they are facing as well as to highlight and share current solutions that have been implemented so far. These meetings covered the following topics: i) education, ii) research, iii) internationalisation, iv) student wellbeing and societal engagement, and v) university governance. A detailed report with references to concrete examples is available on the YERUN website[5]. These five areas have been identified as the most pressing ones and those requiring immediate action.

After reflecting on the challenges faced by its members, YERUN embarked upon a reflection process aimed to: take stock of what we have observed in the past three months in the YERUN network and beyond, the challenges identified, and possible solutions found so far (part one); brainstorm about possible future horizons, reflecting on which possible changes might remain in the life of our universities in the coming months and years, depending on possible developments in the control of this pandemic (part two), and exploit possible opportunities in overcoming challenges (part three).

01 Education

During the lockdown, universities had to quickly adapt their educational offer into an online format. What are the new teaching methods, tools and formats that have been emerging so far? Which of these will remain after the pandemic?

02 Research

The impossibility to access research infrastructures has put a strain on non-COVID-19 related research. Many researchers are unable to collect data or carry out other activities which are crucial for their work. Also, this has often delayed projects that are dependent on external funding. How have researchers adapted so far, which tools and methods are they using and how will research collaboration be shaped in the future?

03 Internationalisation

It goes without saying that internationalisation as we know it has been massively affected by the pandemic. The current model, heavily based on physical mobility, has been both hindered and called into question. How are universities counterbalancing this "loss" and how will internationalisation be reshaped in the months and years to come? Can universities turn this into an opportunity?

04 Societal engagement

One aspect that the COVID-19 crisis has unveiled and reinforced is the human and social dimension of universities. Will this continue when we go back to 'normal'?

05 Governance

The crisis has equally brought many organisational challenges, forcing institutions to rethink their priorities and their governance model. How will this affect universities in the future?

1.UNESCO, IESALC: COVID-19 and higher education: Today and tomorrow. Impact analysis, policy responses and recommendations (9 April 2020), p. 6. http://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-EN-090420-2.pdf
2.Marguerite Dennis, "Higher education opportunities after COVID-19", University World News (9 May 2020). https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200507152524762
3. Laura Rumbley, Coping with COVID-19: International higher education in Europe, EAIE, March 2020, p.10.
https://www.eaie.org/our-resources/library/publication/Research-and-trends/Coping-with-COVID-19--International-higher-education-in-Europe.html
4. YERUN March Newsletter, "Fighting against Covid-19: Young universities adapting to an unprecedented situation" (24 March 2020).
https://www.yerun.eu/2020/03/fighting-against-covid-19-young-universities-adapting-to-an-unprecedented-situation/
5. YERUN Report on Seminar on COVID-19 (15 June 2020). https://www.yerun.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Notes-from-covid-19-meeting_24-June.pdf

Part I

What has changed so far?

01
EDUCATION

The first mission of universities, education has inevitably been greatly affected by the lockdown, urging institutions to rapidly develop to online formats and methods. For some institutions, using virtual tools was already in their blood; for others, it was a rather unexplored territory. For all of them, it quickly became the daily way of running business. Despite the institutions' immediate adaptation to online teaching, so far universities have been operating in "Emergency Remote Teaching"[7] mode to minimise disruptions, rather than fully embracing online education. It is therefore important to explore how online teaching and blended learning will evolve in the months and years ahead to ensure that high quality is maintained.

"Online teaching requires more individual follow-up and a strengthened engagement of and communication"

Online teaching is not simply adding audio to a PowerPoint presentation: it requires thorough training, adaptation of the content to the tool used, and multi-faceted investment, among other things. Thanks to the reflections YERUN had with its members, other challenges that online teaching inevitably entails have been identified: first of all, **equity** is not always ensured, as not all students have their own computers or internet connection allowing them to follow the classes and complete their assignments properly (phenomenon known as 'digital poverty'); accessibility, making sure students with disabilities (e.g. hearing or visual impairments) have the same level of access to content is not at all mainstreamed; furthermore, the **work and balance** is greatly affected: due to the significant increase of online activities, working time has blurred for students and teachers and it has become more difficult to combine family duties with professional ones. This, adding to the isolation and/or the difficulty to follow classes online, has in some cases led to the development of **mental health issues** among students and teachers, and therefore to the need to set up or strengthen the support mechanisms. Online teaching has also challenged the **evaluation** of students and how to do exams: it is now more difficult for teachers to determine if students are following a course properly. Indeed, online teaching requires more individual follow-up and a strengthened **engagement** of and **communication** with students. However, this has become more difficult, as teaching staff needs to find a balance between keeping students engaged and having an overview of their questions and problems, without overloading them with online activities. On top of this, redesigning classes in digital formats requires thorough **staff training** in new methodologies, in communication tools, video tools, etc. and the lack of a systemic approach and coordination among all academics and staff is sometimes an issue. There is the need for a coherent online teaching strategy including a reflection about intended learning outcomes (are these the same as for offline tools and can they be achieved in the same way?). All this requires **more funding** for universities to get adequate equipment and to increase staff capacity as more time is devoted to transforming education methods, from training to infrastructure. Lastly, the problem of **physical attendance** remains for those some disciplines requiring physical meetings (e.g. medical students cannot always follow classes online).

"The strongest focus is on enhanced communication and mentoring."

Looking at the solutions being implemented by YERUN members, it is noticeable that the strongest focus is on **enhanced communication** and **mentoring** from teachers, by using new platforms and ensuring an adequate follow-up with students. Indeed, being close to the students and showing support is recognised as a crucial element for getting them through this period. The wellbeing activities for students have been redesigned into an online format and even increased. Another way to increase student engagement is to involve and consult student representatives, students from specific communities, to better understand specific needs and make sure that solutions offered are suitable for all and leave no one behind. Concerning **trainings for staff, virtual trainings** have been offered regularly to assist them in this new teaching context. **New interdepartmental collaborations** and practice sharing have emerged to address current challenges (e.g. upskilling staff, sharing competences among colleagues, drama teachers supporting teaching staff in delivering content online, etc.). Live-streamed online lectures were made available, with the possibility for students to watch the classes multiple times and at different timings (this being particularly important for students living in different time zones). As for improving the evaluation of students remotely: adding an **oral component** to check if the students have done the exam themselves can be a good solution, as well as using more **'take-home' exams** (making sure to give students detailed information on deadlines and plagiarism). **More personalised and individual evaluations** should be implemented in the future.

7. Charles Hodges et al. "The difference between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning", EDUCAUSE Review (27 March 2020). https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning

02
RESEARCH

COVID-19 has brought scientific research into the spotlight: scientists have been started receiving a great deal of attention from society and governments. On the one hand, researchers working on COVID-19-related issues have been regularly consulted ahead of important political decisions to tackle the spread of the pandemic and to manage its impact on society, and they are asked to deliver solutions to the crisis in the form of vaccines and other innovation actions. On the other hand, for non-COVID-19 related research the situation has been different: researchers have had difficulties in accessing labs, libraries, archives, museum collections, etc. and funding opportunities for other areas of research have not increased.

Several important considerations were made during the YERUN virtual roundtable on research collaboration, which also saw the participation of some early career researchers (ECRs) who have been awarded a YERUN Research Mobility Award for the year 2020 and who have put their mobility on hold because of the lockdown. Among the disruptive effects of the pandemic on research, the most evident one is the **impossibility to access laboratories and other research infrastructures** and to travel to continue collaborations, gather data or use other facilities (university libraries, data collections, museums, etc.).
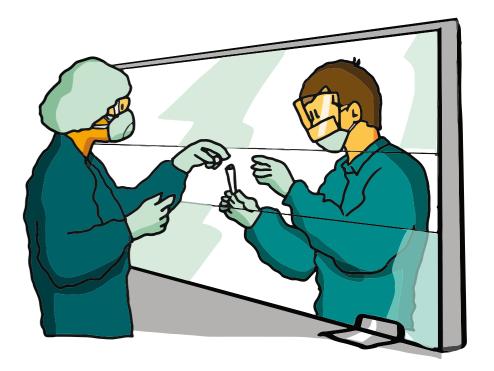
"Certain laboratories and research infrastructures cannot be accessed."

Furthermore, international conferences, meetings, collaborative research and staff visits have all been postponed, interrupting the usual networking methods from one day to another. This is hindering networking opportunities, which are particularly important for ECRs. Another important factor to consider is that researchers who found themselves unable to continue working on their research are subject to developing **anxiety issues,** due to the fear of not being able to perform well during the review of their research, but also due to time constraints in PhD students' contracts.

"The balance between work and personal life is blurred."

In some cases, research depended on specific tests to be done at a given time in the year, which could now be delayed. Parallel to this, researchers registered an **increase in their workload**: between online teaching and online webinars, their working time has dramatically increased, making it difficult for them to concentrate on their research. Strictly connected to this, is also an **unbalance between work and personal life**: especially researchers with children and caring responsibilities, have encountered a great deal of difficulties working from home.

On a different note, **international PhD students** who are located abroad cannot always receive support in real time. Finally, thinking about reopening the research infrastructure, **ensuring safety** remains a concern across institutions. In general, there is a worry that **political and funding support** currently given to COVID-19-related research might not be extended to other areas of study. ECRs working on areas outside of COVID-19 might see a decrease in their job possibilities in the future. The economic consequences of the crisis might have a negative impact on the investments in research overall.

"Researchers are more productive in meetings and benefit from an increased online collaboration."

It is also worth mentioning, however, that there are also researchers who have identified **positive aspects** that this new situation has brought, such as being more productive in meetings and benefitting from an increased online collaboration. There is no right or wrong, but everyone can live very different experiences according to their research field, their country, the facilities offered by their institutions, their age and their personal life circumstances. YERUN members have been **tackling the challenges** identified above in various ways. Where possible, they have been providing **online trainings** to PhD students, e.g. on wellbeing, research management skills, career advice, etc.; some universities have developed a **principled approach** for the reopening, namely by setting principles and being

coherent with them. For example, some universities have decided to give **priority to PhDs and Postdocs** as they are the ones who are pressed the most by time constraints. **Rotating booking systems** are being put in place to access the research infrastructure, along with clear **guidelines** to follow to ensure safety. In other cases, access to research infrastructures has to be justified by the need for the research to be performed in a given time (experiments, tests, PhD students, etc.). Concerning anxiety issues, one way to tackle this problem is to increase **flexibility,** for example by lifting some requirements in the submission of the PhD thesis (on a quantitative level, rather than qualitative, such as numbers of published articles). **Flexibility** should be also given in the provision of support to researchers who are located in different time zones. With a view to lifting the workload of researchers, some members have introduced a "**clear the day" policy** to allow researchers to fully dedicate themselves to their research. Depending strongly on the national context, some universities have also introduced schemes allowing an **extension of temporary contracts**. In some cases, this has been done upon proof that the researcher had no possibility to undertake his/her research during the COVID-19 pandemic (children to look after and/or working on an experimental subject that requires travelling for data collection, or others). In those cases where the researchers are not paid by the university, hospitality arrangements are offered to researchers, so that they can use the university facilities if they have to extend their research.

03
INTERNATIONALISATION

The outbreak of the pandemic has put a strain on internationalisation: international students have been among the first ones to be affected by the lockdown, especially those who were abroad when the crisis started. According to an ESN report published in April, at the aftermath of the pandemic outbreak 42% of the exchange students decided to stay in the destination country, 40% decided to go back home, 4% were stuck in the destination country, not being able to return home, 8% were unable to start their exchange and 5% were undecided on what to do[8].

International offices were overwhelmed organising the emergency travel of international students to their home countries and the return of their own students being abroad. University governance had to prepare dispositions for those deciding to stay and to guarantee safety measures on campus. Many of our universities had international students at the time of the lockdown, others were about to receive them a couple of weeks later. Although they had to cancel physical connections, a full range of other online activities, in addition to the educational content, were proposed to international students.

"How can universities add value for international students who cannot foot on campus?"

The main challenge that comes up when talking about internationalisation in a virtual format is: how can universities ensure the **added value** for international students who start their mobility/higher education without setting foot in the campus? How to expose them to the intercultural skills that would have emerged from the human interactions? How to compensate the **loss of physical interaction** with the hosting community? Moreover, it is crucial in this moment to provide **support to international students** who struggle with understanding the functioning of the university in this new format. These challenges add to the already existing **fierce competition** for universities, for whom it will be more difficult to prove added value to international students when the advantages of being physically in the institution or campus itself are removed, compared to universities that have incorporated online teaching and blended learning for years.

There are also **organisational issues** to consider while working at the same time with students based in different countries and **time zones.** Furthermore, as already mentioned for education overall, **equity** plays a role when **ensuring all students have the IT infrastructure** to follow classes virtually. Differences between countries and societal groups

will emerge and might be reinforced. Last, but not least, there is the issue of **differences in the degree of recognition** of online credits taken at a different university. The pandemic has made it clear that advancements in the recognition of online credits is needed.

"Buddy mentoring programmes and virtual cafes connect local and international students."

YERUN members so far have been tackling these challenges in various ways, such as: introducing **"buddy mentoring programmes"** involving local students to support international students in the transition; organising **"virtual cafes"** for the international students to keep in contact with them, also leveraging on the involvement of the student representatives; organising other online **engagement activities**: Students services have proposed "challenges" to keep students engaged and motivated and share their experiences on social media. On the same note, **virtual intercultural trainings and special online welcome** sessions have been launched to bring people together and facilitate introductions. In general, **closer engagement** with representatives of international students from different countries has proven to be a very good help. Universities have also put in place **dedicated website sections** with key information for international students.

8 Gabriels, W., Benke-Aberg, R., (2020). "Student Exchanges in Times of Crisis - Research report on the impact of COVID-19 on student exchanges in Europe". Erasmus Student Network AISBL, p. 9 https://esn.org/covidimpact-report

04

SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT

Societal engagement is part and parcel of the life of our universities, enhancing the participation of the university communities into other sectors of society and contributing to the creation of a knowledge environment based on mutual trust. The third mission of universities (service to society) has become paramount during the pandemic and institutions have done their utmost best to provide value to the communities where they are based.

"During lockdown we have seen initiatives of societal engagement flourishing."

During the months in which our institutions have been physically closed, we have continued to see initiatives of societal engagement flourishing[9]. University teachers started holding **public webinars** in which they analysed the most varied aspects of the pandemic (scientific facts, economic repercussions, social implications, fake news and much more); the **Sport offices** have converted their activities related to sport and wellbeing into an online format, and made them very often open to all[10] ; **volunteering schemes** have been put in place to help the elderly and the most vulnerable (e.g. students providing childcare services for health professionals, food distribution, researchers working on delivering masks and sanitisers, teachers sharing information in blogs against fake news, etc.). We have seen **researchers joining forces** to develop pulmonary ventilators and new tests to quickly detect COVID-19, in a moment in which these tools were dramatically scarce. In many cases, the university campuses have been made available to host new temporary units for hospitals, in order to lift the pressure that the health infrastructures were going through. The crisis has, in a way, reinforced the universities' **essential role** of public service being a point of reference for their communities

"The crisis has reinforced the universities' essential role of public service for their communities."

On the other hand, previous initiatives on societal engagement by local businesses have seen interruptions during the lockdown (e.g. UK universities and the impact case studies). Despite this being one of the positive developments brought by the pandemic, even when it comes to societal engagement there are some challenges to consider: the devotion to societal engagement from the institution, in fact, requires a deal of effort from those involved. After the lockdown, it might be difficult to continue in the same way or structures and strategies to make it consistent will be needed. More challenges will come up and will require further analysis.

9. YERUN April Newsletter, "A month later: a follow-up snapshot on how young universities are fighting against COVID-19" (29 April 2020). https://www.yerun.eu/2020/04/4-yerun-news-whats-up-at-young-universities/
10. YERUN May Newsletter, "Life of Sport Offices during lockdown: wellbeing at 360°" (29 May 2020) https://mailchi.mp/488aefe721c6/5-yerun-news-whats-up-at-young-universities

05
UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

University leaders are confronted with tough decisions to take, especially in countries where they decided to close their buildings for security measures even against their government's opinion (e.g. UK universities). The quick reshuffle of resources and staff to the management of the COVID-19 crisis has been unprecedented. University executives are organising and addressing the aforementioned topics. Communication and leadership are a key element of tackling this multi-faceted crisis.

University leaders have to provide teaching staff with adequate tools, establish new working methods, increase the communication and provide direction; at the same time, they have to keep in mind the wellbeing of their staff and student communities. In this regard, hardship funding schemes to support students in financial need have been set up at different institutions.

After holding a special session on campus management within YERUN, which involved rectos, presidents and experts, some common trends and possible future actions have been identified.

"Universities realised the importance of governance structures to assess, inform and advice the rectorates."

In some cases, **special Taskforces** were set up together with existing Crisis departments to assess the situation, inform and advice the rectorates or presidents on the measures to take. This leads us to realise the importance of such structures in place at universities, no matter what the crisis might be. Concerning reopening plans, these are very varied across the network, depending on the country and on the structure of the university itself (how the campuses are distributed). Depending on these factors, universities can rely on between 30% and 50% of their capacity applying security distancing measures. Universities are putting in place special **provisions on security** (depending on how the campuses are distributed, e.g. one single campus vs. multiple campuses): indicators for access and exit via dedicated points (at campus, building and room levels), physical distancing measures, hand hygiene and mouth protection (when distancing cannot be guaranteed), floor marking tapes, access regulation, time slots.

The crisis has a dramatic economic impact that has not yet reached its end. So far, the immediate increase in the expenses of security, safety provisions and **logistics** required has been somewhat compensated with other budget provisions not spent at the moment (e.g. events, travels). However, time is still needed to determine the aspects of the institutions that have been most affected financially. Irrespective of the country and national/regional difficulties in which the university is located, there are other economic impacts resulting from the campus closure, lack of international students and overall mobility. In terms of staff, colleagues are juggling remote work with family and caring responsibilities which requires new organisational models and stronger flexibility. In the coming months, we might see a decrease or freeze in the hiring of new staff at universities, unless state support is increased to compensate economic losses.

"Universities are increasingly investing in support structures to guarantee student well-being."

Last but not least, universities are increasingly investing in student **support structures**: not only the pandemic, but every change affecting our fast-paced world has a repercussion on students' wellbeing and students are more and more conscious of their values and their needs: universities are therefore strengthening their support offers and this element is expected to be there to stay.

Part II

What is coming next?

The aim of this section is to frame three possible horizons against which HEIs could be developing their activities in the near future, in the medium-term, and in the long-term, in view of triggering new perspectives, identifying challenges, future needs and new ways of working and collaborating.

The objective of the horizons is not to provide a clear picture of the future (being a fortune teller is not among our skills – yet!), but rather to enable us to be better prepared for the possibilities that the future might reserve, and even to 'mould' certain changes into a specific direction shaping the future by thinking about it. There is room for opti- mism: changes are already showing effects that we may want to embed as new ways of working[11]. Moreover, some changes had already been planned or at least wished for, and the pan- demic has simply pushed them to happen faster.

YERUN has built a story around each of the hori- zons, probing into their possible implications and changes. Although none can say with certainty what will happen in the upcoming months and years, also due to a lack of reference to similar situations in the past[12] , drawing some different horizons will help our members reflect on possible implications and better prepare for the future. It is important to reflect on this crisis' potential impact on our current working methods concerning education, research, internationalisation and service to society.

Each horizon describes possible short-term (until end of 2020), medium-term (whole academic year 2020-2021) and long-term (beyond 2021) implica- tions of COVID-19, and, respectively, to a deeper degree of change in the five areas previously dis- cussed.

It is important to note the following aspects: none of the horizons and their respective implications are applicable to all institutions; most probably, only some aspects under each horizon can be applied to a given institution. Furthermore, the degree of change does not necessarily have to be depend- ent on the timeline: many are, in fact, the opportu- nities that HEIs can decide to seize from this situ- ation, regardless of the duration of this pandemic. Many of the challenges and opportunities will also be context-specific and will depend on the national systems of higher education, the funding models of universities and on the differences in the impact of the COVID-19 crisis among countries. The bot- tom line is to identify emerging patterns and their related opportunities, and eventually formulate recommendations for HEIs to improve the univer- sity sector in the future.

At European level, the reflection on the future role of universities started well before COVID-19. The changes that this crisis will bring about will inevi- tably be embedded in the wider discussion on the evolution of the higher education sector in Europe. The question is which of these changes we want to hold on to and feed into the wider discussion on the future of universities in Europe.

11. Dawn Lerman and Falguni Sen, "Could the coronavirus force positive change in higher education?", Times Higher Education (9 April 2020) https://www.timeshighereducation.com/opinion/could-coronavirus-force-positive-change-higher-education

12. Ibid.

Horizon 1

"Business as usual, with important twists"

With the next academic year (2020-2021) starting in about two months, some control over the COVID-19 crisis has been re-established, and universities will "more or less" go back to business as usual. We will return to some face-to-face activities, although maintaining the physical distancing for some months, while **selected virtual elements initiated during confinement will co-exist with face-to-face education.**

In the future, this crisis will be remembered as a moment of emergency that, under many perspectives, acted as a wake-up call. This call proved that many (but not all) of the activities that were done physically could also be held in a virtual format with similar success when appropriate digital infrastructure, methods and skills were adequately embedded at our institutions. The crisis showed us positive environmental implications that result from slowing down our travelling habits and our overall way of working, as well as contributed to strengthening the spirit of community in the universities and their links with society. It also showed us the socio-economic effects that a pandemic such as COVID-19 can bring to the world (possible increase in unemployment, decrease in the career prospections of recent graduates, changes in the perception of the value of education, etc.). Universities will have recruited recruiting students for the next cohort 2020-2021 online. However, a general feeling among our population will be to undertake most activities as we used to do before the pandemic outbreak.

01 HOW WILL EDUCATION BE AFFECTED?

» Hybrid teaching (online for some students and face-to-face for others) and blended education (online content plus rotation system for on-site activities) will be in place at least until the end of 2020 and possibly mid 2021: this means that classes will go back to a (reduced) physical format, with some protective measures in place for yet some time (e.g. distancing, protective equipment), but they will also be streamed online for students who cannot attend physically (e.g. because of insufficient room capacity, local travel restrictions due to new small outbreaks, or students pertaining to high risk groups), or in those cases where the classroom capacity does not allow to accommodate all students safely;

» There will be differences among the education provided by teachers with high digital skills and others that lack training or adaptability.

» A variety of new teaching methods will continue to appear; however, the focus will remain on face-to-face education. The experiences gathered through the lockdown will influence towards the adoption of new teaching methods and technological tools.

» Alternative online assessments will be developed in some cases, but examinations will be done physically with a possibility to be done online (only for exceptional cases).

» The wider student experience, including engagement in clubs, societies and extra-curricular activities will continue in an adapted form involving a mix of on-campus and off-campus activities.

02 HOW WILL RESEARCH BE AFFECTED?

» Activities for which physical presence is necessary (e.g. laboratories, data collection, archives collections), will continue to be done as before the pandemic, but with the introduction of physical distancing measures (rotation system, protective measures and safety protocols and guidelines).

» Activities for which physical presence is not strictly necessary (e.g. desk research, conferences) will continue to be performed online for some time, but then they will mostly continue as they did before the pandemic.

» Some research mobility exchanges will be postponed to later in 2021.

» Inequalities in research outputs will become apparent as a result of the lockdown: researchers with family-care responsibilities will continue with their research with more difficulties.

» The boost to an Open Science research behaviour in COVID-19 related data and publications will continue until the pandemic will be eradicated. Other areas of research will continue being communicated and published according to the national progress towards Open Science.

03 HOW WILL INTERNATIONALISATION BE AFFECTED?

» Blended mobility: mobilities will start virtually and will end physically. Depending on the pandemic's situation, some students may decide to move abroad while still following the classes virtually, at least at the beginning.

» On-campus study abroad programmes will be heavily affected. There will be a stronger focus on online solutions and special attention to the programmes developed (including social aspects) for those students who wish to embark on an international experience without necessarily moving from their countries.

» For some universities, there will be a double effort on international recruitment as well as on local/national recruitment. For others, the focus will be on maximising the intake of local and national students.

» The recognition of ECTS gained through "online" mobilities will be promoted and accelerated.

» Partnerships of institutions and/or alliances of universities will facilitate the process of recognition.

» The use of peer-to-peer mechanisms to involve international students will increase.

» Welcome days and induction weeks will be held in online format, involving local students.

04 HOW WILL OUR UNIVERSITIES WORK WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITIES?

» As the strengthened involvement with society has highlighted the role of universities, contributing and working within their community will continue and will be one key aspect in the life of students and institutions.

» However, as other community services will return to their activities, many of the community activities done by HEIs will be re-directed.

» Due to the economic impact, many of the local businesses that offered opportunities for student engagement before the crisis, might no longer be in a position to continue doing so, resulting in a decline of community engagement activities in areas not necessarily related to the COVID-19 management crisis.

05 HOW WILL UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE BE AFFECTED?

» University leaders will be focused on preparing the next academic year with a possibility of hybrid and blended learning, with a preference for online teaching for the full first semester but with a great focus on trying to engage students as much as possible with their respective universities. Important attention will be given to the organization of the university infrastructure and possibilities for hosting students physically while respecting protective and safety measures against pandemics.

» This process will require engagement with all members of the academic community. The challenge for leadership will be bringing in all different perspectives together and find consensus.

» Strengthened focus on communication: more follow-up with current and prospective students to make them feel welcome, involved and reassured that the university has the situation under control.

» There will be uncertainties regarding funding of universities as the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are still to be fully determined.

» There will be important aspects within the organization of human resources, as staff will still need to cope with increased family/caring obligations. Care leaves and working schedules will need to be flexible to take these aspects into account. Furthermore, teaching staff at risk or from vulnerable groups might be prevented from giving face-to-face lectures and the actual availability of teaching staff might be reduced.

» Flexibility to work remotely, even when physical interactions are allowed, will increase due to positive experiences to effectiveness and well-being of employees.

» A detailed plan will be developed to gradually decrease the intensity of the safety measures according to the developments in the pandemic.

Horizon 2

A 'new normal' for longer

Now, let us imagine that we will have to live with the spectrum of COVID-19 for many months to come (well beyond 2020). A second wave of infection might appear in autumn, and even when eventually a vaccine will be found, the risk of new outbreaks will regularly be around the corner. Therefore, the temporary structures set up to face the emergency are there to stay for longer than originally expected. This means that universities will recruit students who will likely have to study in a hybrid or blended way for the next academic year and that all academic activities will be adapted accordingly. The infrastructures for online learning and teaching, which were initially set up in an emergency mode, will be refined and perfected and overall, the virtual way of working will be strengthened.

01 HOW WILL EDUCATION BE AFFECTED?

» New methods of teaching, evaluation and assessment by virtual means will increase and improve. Educational programmes will be adapted to include suitable digital content, with greater use of Open Educational Resources. Training and professional development for teaching staff on digital education will be provided following a more strategic approach to ensure the quality of the programmes.

» The educational content will reflect on having additional features, further to the content of the subject itself. It will be crucial to add distinctive features to the educational experience in the way we teach at our universities in order to compensate the loss or decrease of the campus experience.

» Assessment mechanisms and tools will reflect this new normal. Assessments will be done regularly throughout the semester harnessing the affordances of new digital technologies and will not solely depend on final examinations.

» Greater emphasis will be placed on collaborative projects and more authentic assessment in this respect to exchange practices and implement new solutions much quicker.

» Some disciplines might see an increase in demand, especially related to biology, genetics, epidemiology, etc. while others, linked to lower employment prospects, might see a decrease.

» Students will have more options to choose from. The distinctive features in educational programmes of universities (including digital social aspects and available on-site activities), student support and mentoring activities will largely influence the choice of international students.

02 HOW WILL RESEARCH BE AFFECTED?

» For the whole upcoming academic year, activities that necessarily require a physical presence (e.g. laboratories, data collection, archives collections) will be allowed, though with restrictions (e.g. respecting physical distancing measures);

» Flexibility provisions and special dispositions will need to be introduced for researchers who may not be able to carry out these activities due to specific restrictions but that are fundamental for the continuation of their research (e.g. high-risk and vulnerable groups).

» Research time will be influenced by higher demands in teaching. Academics will see an increased pressure in performing in both aspects at the same pace.

» Due to the economic implications of recurring lockdowns, funding for research outside COVID-19 related disciplines might be reduced.

» Open Access to COVID-19 related research and data will continue. As the pandemic will stay for a longer period, the interconnections with other disciplines and areas of research will increase. There will be a need to harmonise the access to research generally, and not to favour some disciplines over others.

» The challenges of the pandemic will require more researchers to work in teams and to increase their collaborations. Research performance will no longer be able to be assessed only by the number of publications, but by the real contribution that researchers make in each stage of the research progress. This will increase the discussions on the assessment of researchers and their careers.

» Aspects affecting the productivity in research (researchers with caring obligations or limited access to research infrastructures) will require new measures and dispositions when assessing and evaluating academics.

03 HOW WILL INTERNATIONALISATION BE AFFECTED?

» Blended mobility: International students will start their mobility online and finish it physically, or only a small period will be spent physically abroad (if the conditions will allow for this);

» Recognition of ECTS gained through "online" mobilities will become a normality through collaborations among institutions.

» Institutions able to offer a larger quality offer, possibly giving the opportunity to combine experiences at different institutions might be more attractive to international students.

» Providing peer-to-peer support to international students will be part and parcel of the students' study cycle, a smart way to keep them engaged while developing new transversal skills.

04 HOW WILL OUR UNIVERSITIES WORK WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITIES?

» New institutional platforms and channels will be established to better connect societal needs and non-academic partners with our university communities. Partnerships will be encouraged to share resources and work towards common objectives (e.g. academic-industry job roles, public-sector-university collaborations, NGOs- universities agreements, etc.)

» A key component of education and professionalisation will be the contribution our students and university staff make in their communities. This will be reflected in the recognition and assessment of students, staff and institutions.

05 HOW WILL UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE BE AFFECTED?

» University leaders will partner with other groups of universities to facilitate the mobility of students, the sharing of infrastructure and services, and to increase the attractiveness of the institution for students and staff. This will facilitate the recognition of studies abroad or online and will increase the offer that students can have.

» Methods of decision making will need to be streamlined and directed towards efficient digital engagement with teaching staff. Leaders of universities will require strong trust in their staff.

» Timely and accurate communication with the university community will become more important. Support units to develop adequate communication structures will be needed.

» Universities will continue pursuing the achievement of excellence in teaching and research within a very competitive environment, although questions about the role and position of universities in the following years will be discussed and increased beyond teaching and research.

» Given the increased volume of online content and communication, universities will have put in place strategies and cyber security and emergency management teams to assess risks and vulnerabilities for cyberattacks.

» Teaching staff will be trained and plans on education and safety use of online tools will have to be put in place.

» More activities and strategies for professional development will be organised in order to improve the quality of the learning experience and educational content facilitated by academic staff and universities will look to invest in central support units with expertise in the design of online and blended delivery. Staff with these specialised skills will be highly demanded..

Horizon 3

"A renewed outlook for universities"

Let us envision that the transformations resulting from COVID-19 will go well beyond this crisis itself, irrespective of short and medium-term disruptions. Driving away from simply 'surviving' or 'winning' over the pandemic, universities will have reflected on how to build a sustainable system of teaching, doing research and engaging with society. They will need a new and robust system in which online and physical presence is well balanced, efficiently articulated and scientifically backed up.

Going back to face-to-face activities will go hand in hand with re-thinking and re-designing our education model. We will keep the technological tools that meanwhile we will have learnt to use to ensure more equity and inclusion, especially among groups of students who otherwise would not have been able to follow a full-time physical programme[14]. The necessary requirements on IT tools and equipment will be available at universities and governmental actions will ensure access to equipment and digital skills among the population. HEIs will radically transform the way in which they offer teaching, learning, international mobilities and collaborations, hence leading a fundamental cultural shift. This will happen for various reasons, but mostly because the COVID-19 crisis questioned the status quo and showed the potential for change of higher institutions in particular and the society in general. Moreover, the economic implications that will follow the pandemic (it is already happening), will generate massive gaps in the labour market, urging for new ideas and methods to ensure the (re-)entrance in the labour market for graduates. A more flexible approach to education will allow students to work while studying and to build a tailor-made learning experience.

01 HOW WILL EDUCATION BE AFFECTED?

» HEIs will have harmonised permanent and reliable infrastructures and strategies for blended learning across the institution; a majority of the education activity will continue to take place online through face-to-face interaction on campus between students and educator, but an online component offering flexibility to learners will be the new normal to actively implement the knowledge learnt.

» In this sense, blended and hybrid teaching has become a norm: Educational programmes will all be adapted to harness the potential of physical and virtual learning environments with new methods of interactions between students and teachers based on a renewed emphasis on scientific evidence and learning analytics.

» The new flexibility will facilitate the acceptance and introduction of micro-credentials: students will be able to design their own learning pathway and build their own curricula.

» More opportunities will be offered for upskilling and reskilling and earning whilst learning through flexible delivery models (lifelong learning).

» Given the facility of students to access educational programmes digitally at other institutions, students will be able to choose from a wider range of content. These options will also increase the possibilities of students to build their own curricula from different institutions.

» The offer of elective credits will not only be based on the institutional choice but also on the available networks the institution is connected too.

» Teaching staff and administrative staff will have strengthened their skills and become confident users of the new tools, platforms and methods used in blended teaching.

» Far from an approach to digital education in which synchronised teaching in online delivery tends to replicate face-to-face delivery, more emphasis is placed on asynchronized teaching.

» The student experience will be the starting point: great attention will be given to the role of emotions and to the affective dimension of teaching and learning, bringing the human experience at the centre.

» The overall educational offer will be a perfect blend of formal, informal, physical and virtual elements.

02 HOW WILL RESEARCH BE AFFECTED?

» The need for Open Science, team science, cooperation and urgent data sharing will no longer be questioned: all researchers will have skills to operate in an open science context. Infrastructure will be ready to host FAIR data and institutions will incentivise and promote the creation of open access knowledge.

» International cooperation among researchers will be strengthened by way of online tools: geographical distances will be less of a barrier and new technologies will allow for a much higher degree of cooperation enabling mapping of research capacities, ongoing creation of knowledge and automatic connection of researchers through artificial intelligence (AI).

» Connectivity and AI solutions will allow the use of shared digital infrastructure worldwide. Agreements on the use of common shared infrastructure for research will be the norm.

» Research capabilities of each institution will be connected to worldwide or European research databases.

» Interdisciplinarity will gain ground: the complex problems of our world require complex solutions and different, interdisciplinary sets of knowledge and skills.

» Research success will no longer be based only on publications, but also new indicators will be in use.

» With a view to solving the complex societal challenges of the future, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and contributing to the building of a strong European Research Area, universities will work towards the development of common research agendas and joint research projects, in all cycles of research, on a cross-border and transnational basis.
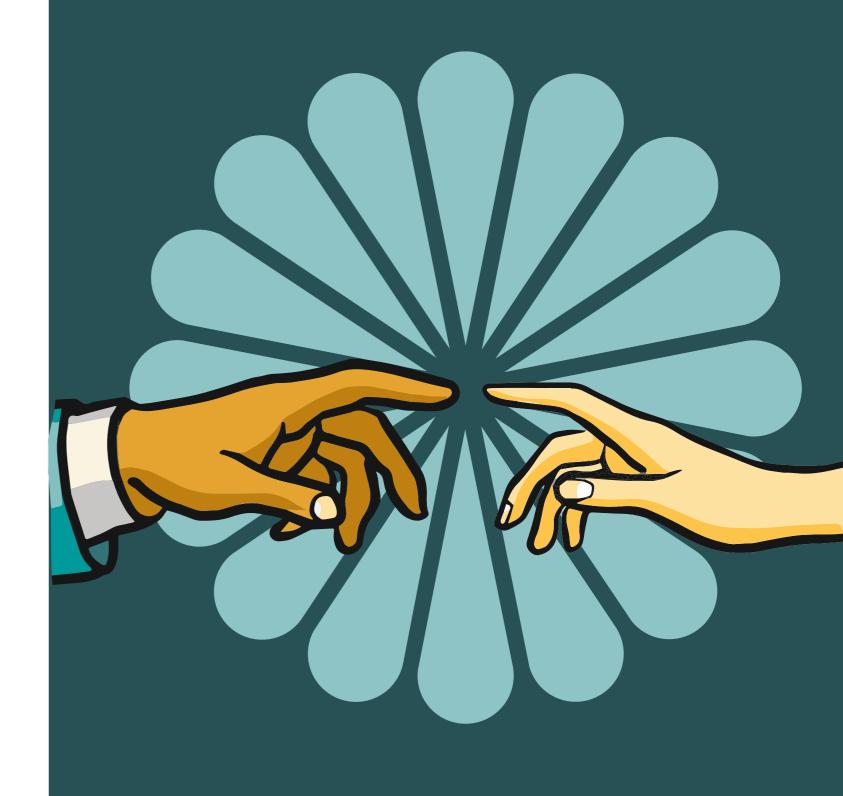
03 HOW WILL INTERNATIONALISATION BE AFFECTED?

» Students and staff will be able to freely choose whether to go on a physical, virtual or blended mobility, having the same outcome in terms of credit recognition.

» Recognition of ECTS gained through "online" modules across different Universities will become the norm.

» In the case of students doing a virtual mobility programme, a compensation mechanism will be put in place to make sure they have access to the IT infrastructure necessary to follow the online education (in order to be *really* inclusive, Erasmus+ should therefore adapt to this new reality).

» Recruitment of international students will depend not only on academic quality, which will be more easily accessible due to online education, but also on other factors that make physical mobility a worthwhile investment (e.g. networking, links to industry).

» Researchers, teachers, professional and administrative staff will have the possibility to collaborate with and be affiliated to different institutions at the same time, without necessarily living where the institutions are based.

» Local students will be key in engaging with international students who do their mobility online: they can both gain from a virtual exchange (linguistic competences, tutoring, IT skills, etc).

» HEIs will be evaluated in international rankings by new indicators, such as their capacity to offer the above-mentioned services and their attention to the wellbeing of students and staff.

» The meaning of 'partnership' will be redefined: partnerships will no longer be based mostly on mobility, but on all types of agreement that HEIs will make, fostering also virtual types of exchanges.
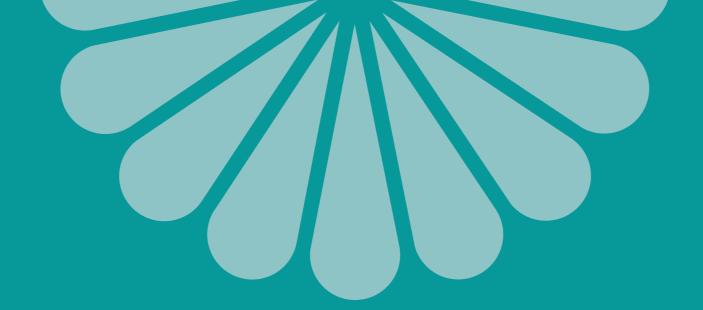
04 HOW WILL OUR UNIVERSITIES WORK WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITIES?

» Engaging with society, sharing knowledge with citizens, having volunteering schemes will become key activities for universities. Societal engagement will no longer be limited to a university's own local sphere: international societal engagement will be common place.

» The way in which universities engage with the society around them will be seen as one of the criteria by which universities are ranked; their choices in the organization of the institution towards the overall sustainability will be a crucial component.

» New institutional platforms and channels will be established to better connect societal needs with our university community.

» A key component of education and professionalisation will be the contribution our students and staff make in their communities.

» Researchers will work within their communities, involving citizens and non-academic partners regularly. The latter will also have a regular dialogue with the governance of universities to discuss their role within the community they are in.

» University leaders will partner strategically within their local communities to create added value beyond their education and research activities.

05 HOW WILL UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE BE AFFECTED?

» Partnerships and mergers with other groups of universities will be the norm in order to create higher added value and be more competitive towards global powers.

» The mission of universities will not necessarily focus on traditional education, research and service to society. Each university will have their own particular mission, adapted to their local communities and reflecting on their global partnerships. This particularity will be the key added value that will bring attractiveness to students, staff and partners.

» Universities will have embedded structures of professional development of their staff, running throughout the whole life of the academic development (researchers, teachers, staff, and leaders). These trainings will address possible gaps related to IT literacy, online communication skills, advanced skills on students' engagement and special attention to students' needs.

» Universities will have developed a strong cyber-resilience and teaching staff will be familiar with the safety rules to follow when handling online tools.

» The focus of university leaders will go well beyond the delivery of the curriculum, also concentrating on student support from a staff perspective. Structures for students' wellbeing will be strengthened and be always available, both in person and online.

Part III

What can we gain?

Despite acknowledging that nobody ever desired to witness a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, this emergency is bringing about very positive aspects in our institutions and our society. Resilience to adapt and change in order to survive is encrypted in our DNA as humans and is reflected in the management of our institutions: young European research universities.

To conclude this document, YERUN wants to put the focus on the positive aspects and opportunities this crisis has opened. Opportunities to re-think how we worked, how we cooperated, how we collaborated, what we value as quality, what our missions are, in the hope of making our decisions more thorough, better informed, and more sustainable.

Below and following the structure of the report, we want to highlight opportunities that our institutions, funders and policy makers can be inspired by in order to transform the higher education landscape for the better.

01 OPPORTUNITIES IN EDUCATION

» Institutions have witnessed the possibilities that incorporating digital education might bring to their educational offer. There are opportunities to **improve the quality of teaching**, incorporating an active use of digital methods and tools. In this transition, the **human aspect** and the emotional side of the educational interaction cannot be disregarded, and it shall become an important component in the digital education strategy. A good quality education and teaching strategy will require adequate investments in tools, accessibility, content development, and skills and training for teaching and administrative staff.

» Students have found a new way of interacting with their content and become **active players** in their learning process. Students have seen that, with the right support, they can improve their ability to organise their time, be more autonomous, and thus gather additional transversal skills just by changing their learning methods. Adequate **mentoring** from staff and teachers becomes a fundamental part in this process. This requires methodologies and time to implement them that institutions will need to reflect on

» Educational programmes can be adapted to a blended methodology, making the best of both, digital and physical presence and interactions. **Investments** in making this transformation in the current educational programmes and the creation of new ones are needed. Developing common programmes by several groups of universities would enrich the process while pooling resources. Groups of institutions can agree on developing joint content available to all their students.

» The creation of digital content will bring more opportunities to create repositories of reusable **educational content** that can be revisited by students and/or **be shared** with other groups of students or institutions. Partnering with **networks** or **alliances of universities** in the offer provided to international students can help universities increase attractiveness by giving students a larger range of choices.

» **Accessibility** to educational programmes can increase if universities offer their programmes fully online: distance will no longer represent an obstacle and students will be able to enrol in universities anywhere in the world, following classes, sitting exams and engaging with fellow students online. Students will have the opportunity to follow educational programmes at different countries during the same period of time. This requires a generation with **digital skills** (learners, teachers and managers) and rightly equipped to make the best out of this flexible opportunities. .

» Social and cultural activities can be available in online formats for students to be able to connect to other fellows in non-educational activities. These **social connections** will no longer be location specific and cross-country collaborations can be enhanced. This aspect which, by collaborating with other countries, can be enriched, may have a positive impact in the students' experience beyond their study programme.

» There are opportunities for **major flexibility** in the building of the academic curricula. The new agile teaching and learning structures will open new horizons in the definition of the students' learning pathways, as they will be allowed to build their **own learning experience** and adapt it to their personal circumstances. A wider recognition of activities done at different institutions will need to be enhanced.

02 OPPORTUNITIES IN RESEARCH

» **Research strengths** are currently scattered among countries and institutions. Centralising all efforts and research capacity is not an easy task, but it becomes crucial for increasing and speeding up research collaborations. That is the case with COVID-19 research that has witnessed the creation of specific platforms in which all available research outputs are put together. That should be extended to other research disciplines and areas.

» **Sharing resources** not only on COVID-19 related research can increase enormously the capacities of institutions and the benefits that society receives from research. **Mapping** available research infrastructures, facilitating collaboration and enabling **online access** whenever possible will strengthen each **university's research capabilities** while contributing to their sustainability.

» Working on the development of common research agendas, sharing objectives, and joint research projects, in all cycles of research, on a cross-border and transnational basis, will contribute to solve the complex societal challenges of the future, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and contributing to the building of a strong European Research Area that universities will work towards.

» Collaborative activities and visits can be streamlined and better prepared in advance by online communication. **Engaging researchers to connect online** with their peers will ease previous travel burdens and economic implications while making the physical exchanges more effective once they happen. With international conferences and main collaborative environments being moved online, one immediate risk was the loss of networking opportunities; however, this has also increased the availability of platforms and fora for research communities to identify peers and facilitate the communication with colleagues.

» The abundance of open access publications and pre-prints of COVID-19 related research has shown the opportunities that **mainstreaming Open Science** will lead to. This has been unprecedented and should not only affect research on COVID-19 but research more generally. A major impulse towards Open Science behaviours and practices is on the way and institutions and policy makers need to embrace this momentum by investing in the resources, training and common practice to fully implement it.

03 OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONALISATION

» Internationalisation has always gone hand in hand with the economic possibilities of students and families. Despite programmes such as Erasmus+ attempting to foster inclusive internationalisation, studying in another country has depended on the students' possibilities related to economic, work, health or family situations. **Recognising digital mobility** at European, national and institutional levels has the potential to increase accessibility for real. There must be an increased dialogue on experiences implementing virtual mobility, its added value and how it can incorporate cultural and social aspects.

» The reduction of our travel habits has brought us immediate effects in climate and is moving us towards **green mobility,** making our actions more sustainable. Institutions have the opportunity to reflect on the implementation of their internationalisation strategies, reflect on their travel policies and sharing practice on efficient solutions that will bring quality without forgetting the human dimension of personal interactions.

» Current examples are showing how governance at our institutions are **increasing** the **mechanisms of exchange and dialogue** with various representatives of students from different communities which is improving the choice and offer given to them.

» Joint staff trainings across the network are seen as a valuable opportunity, as it would contribute to share knowledge, expertise but also costs related to best **preparing staff to a future** where more virtual element will be part of the daily lives of our universities.
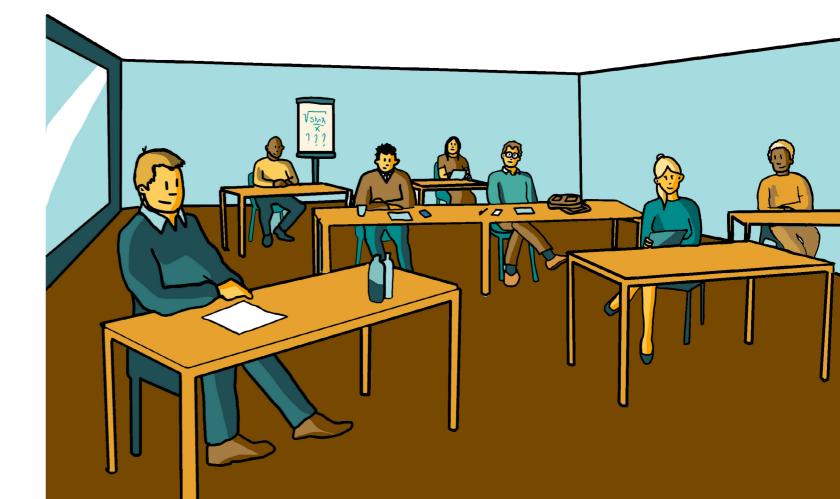
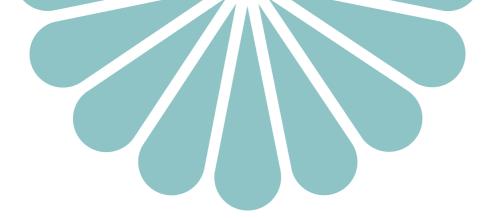# 04 OPPORTUNITIES IN SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT

» If **societal engagement** is to be continued and enhanced, there will be possibilities to acknowledge it in the assessment and reward systems of institutions and academic careers, making institutions more **accountable** towards their third mission.

» Universities leaders will face in some cases (country specific) economic impediments that might not allow them to grow in staff by their own means. Seeking **partnerships** with other institutions and **with the non-academic sectors,** such as industry, SMEs, public sector and NGOs might bring possibilities to share investments in staff while combining roles and activities that would have been previously exclusively dedicated to one sector or another. The crisis can bring new forms of values and partnerships with other sectors to create opportunities for intersectoral collaborations.

» The fact that universities had to communicate online with their communities has opened their communication to new external players which significantly increases the **visibility** of what they do, how they do it and why they are doing it. This process allows universities to share their vision with internal and external partners increasing the opportunities of bringing both together for collaborative activities and strengthening trust in universities.

» Embedding a **true culture of societal engagement** throughout the whole university community will contribute to building a better society overall. The students' learning experience will go hand in hand with their engagement in voluntary schemes and other kinds of participatory activities, which will also contribute to the development of transversal and professionalising skills**.**

05 OPPORTUNITIES IN UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

» Leadership will remain a key driver in the culture of our institutions, of their staff and students and on how all together they respond to crises such as the one we are living now with COVID-19. **What makes a good leader** in young institutions has been described often as being inclusive, accessible and collaborative. Leaders will need to acknowledge the investments their institutions and staff require and be forward-looking in the support of adequate structures for online teaching, learning, research and collaborations with other sectors.

» The crisis management has forced the different sectors of university leadership to focus on crucial matters and **enable a cooperative approach** to move forward and activate emergency measures. This collaborative approach could be further achieved in other situations if appropriate consultation structures are put in place to gather input from the various representative sectors of institutions.

» This period brings the **opportunity for new professional roles to emerge:** e.g. coaches for online studies for students, educational technologists, blended teaching experts, etc. The crisis also spotted the need to care for **student** and staff **wellbeing**. There is an opportunity to exchange practice on meth- ods, surveys, structures that are working.

"**Examples of increased communication internally during this crisis have shown how it enables colleagues to empathise at what is at stake and shares responsibilities among different governance levels at institutions. This situation will lay the foundations for our institutions to engage in long-term planning and to be better prepared for unforeseen horizons with their community.**"

Concluding remarks

With this paper, YERUN wishes to contribute to the ongoing reflections on the impact of COVID-19 on higher education and participate in the discussions on the future of higher education and research by bringing in the input of young European research universities. With two European Commission's Communications on the European Research Area and on the European Education Area on their way and the new Multiannual Financial Framework currently under negotiations, there is a unique momentum to catch in order to be able to truly transform and keep pace with our fast transforming world.

Far from being a point of arrival, this paper should rather be seen a starting point for an even deeper reflection that we will continue with our members and with other networks on how the revolutions introduced by COVID-19 in the world of higher education in Europe and beyond will shape the future of universities.

In the first part of this paper, we have seen what our institutions have been able to do in an emergency mode; in the second part, we have tried to imagine how far changes could go; in the third, we have explored the opportunities for positive change that we should not miss. Many of these opportunities will benefit from the sharing of experiences, common dialogue, and joint recommendations that can arise from working within and across networks. While being aware of the many differences that characterise our universities and different national contexts, and that what we will most probably see will be a mix of different elements identified in each horizon, we are convinced that we should not miss the chance to keep the positive implications of the changes institutions have gone through in the blink of an eye and that we shall live a useful legacy of this situation.

This crisis has also showed us, once again, the strategic importance of networks in joining forces, sharing knowledge and expertise and overcoming crisis such as this one. Therefore, as a network, we will do our best to catch the opportunities that the past months have offered us to trigger a positive transformation in the world of higher education to make it more inclusive, flexible and resilient. We will do this by continuing to bring together our members around the table and encouraging the knowledge sharing and work towards commonly identified goals, within our members and beyond, in the wider world of universities.