

# FOSTERING SOCIETAL IMPACT: THE ROLE OF VALORISATION IN EUROPEAN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

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In the pursuit of advancing towards a global knowledge society, it becomes imperative for academic institutions, funders and policymakers to reconsider the mechanisms through which research and innovation (R&I) can profoundly influence inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development in Europe and globally. Beyond narrow paradigms of strategic autonomy, re-industrialisation and market orientation lies a deeper exploration of the faults within these assumptions and a recognition of the complexities inherent in contemporary challenges. YERUN members believe that a widening understanding of the plural forms of value created for society and the common good relies on a more inclusive narrative around knowledge valorisation which better reflects the non-linear innovation processes 'from knowledge to action.'

At the core of this endeavour is *valorisation*, a concept that should transcend mere economic and technology evaluation, aiming instead at maximising the societal impact of R&I collaborations across Europe and beyond. And it is in these R&I collaborations between academic and non-academic communities that knowledge transforms itself and translates into impact. However, this is not an automatic process. It calls for a multifaceted approach, encompassing and enabling plural forms of knowledge transfer, strengthening the dynamic ecosystem of innovative (re)use and multi-directional flow of science, and redefining the impact evaluation metrics.

**KNOWLEDGE VALORISATION IS A KEY TOOL FOR UNIVERSITIES TO FULFIL THEIR UNIQUE POTENTIAL IN ENHANCING THE SOCIAL BENEFITS OF SCIENCE-BASED KNOWLEDGE CREATED BY SOCIETIES' BEST RESEARCH TALENTS.**

While advancing positively in increasing their knowledge valorisation activities and strengthening their institutional strategies, YERUN members identified three key areas where attention is needed: the general understanding of the value of knowledge valorisation; the role that research assessment mechanisms play; and, the need for further engaging systematically with citizens and other actors.

### Knowledge Valorisation – a paradigm shift in the making

Key to this paradigm shift is **strategic R&I leadership, which advocates for broader multi-actor engagement**. Higher education institutions (HEIs) play a pivotal role in this process. **National policies should support institutions to both contribute to but also retain more value from valorisation processes**, emphasising the importance of integrating knowledge valorisation activities across the whole R&I continuum. Societal readiness levels or similar tools should also be leveraged to ensure innovations are adapted and contextualized to societal needs to promote their uptake. Yet, for a truly inclusive approach, recognition must extend beyond private actors to encompass the public and civil society. This acknowledgment ensures that social innovations receive equal attention alongside market-driven ones.

Furthermore, **creating equal opportunities for valorisation across disciplines, territories and institutions is essential.** Variations in capacity and infrastructure among HEIs across Europe underscore the need for equitable support, particularly for the EU's transition to a digital and green knowledge society.

### Reassessing academic assessment

Central to this transformation is the **rethinking of academic assessment models, shifting from a narrow focus on research metrics to a more inclusive evaluation necessarily including societal impact.** This involves recognizing the importance of early and interdisciplinary partnerships, promoting knowledge transfer collaborative infrastructure, and fostering expertise within research teams. That means recognising and rewarding both individual and collective valorisation efforts. **Fostering teams as focal points for knowledge valorisation,** rather than relying solely on individual innovators, is key.

The valorisation process must be **supported by structural prerequisites and adequate funding mechanisms.** There is a pressing need to create attractive and sustainable career paths for R&I talent in the Union. Achieving this goal hinges on establishing enabling policy environments at both EU, national and subnational levels. A diverse set of instruments is needed. Research universities, with their potential for curating such collaborations, **require sustained support from European and national measures, including sustainable funding for dedicated valorisation and knowledge transfer support offices.**

### Universities closer to citizens

Ultimately, valorisation is emerging as a novel paradigm for inclusive sustainable development, **empowering universities to be closer to their communities and fostering functional research and innovation ecosystems.** The benefits go both ways, as citizens who engage in science are more likely to engage in democratic initiatives leading to better understanding and higher levels of trust in institutions, both academic and political. The EU and national governments should continue assisting universities in these endeavours—including by strengthening the science for policy and policy for science ecosystems—without narrowing down the meaning and potential of valorisation to mere economic terms. By sharing the benefits of science and enhancing democratic decision-making through accessible scientific results, the journey towards **a global knowledge society** becomes not just a vision but a tangible reality, **enriching both the academic communities and the wider society,** securing the future of Europe.

**THE SOCIETAL POTENTIAL OF  
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## Recommendations for strengthening the role of universities in the valorisation of knowledge

YERUN welcomes that the **Council of the European Union** has placed valorisation of research results as one of its key priorities within the current Presidency chaired by Belgium. In this context, YERUN is putting forward recommendations targeted at European institutions, national governments, funders, and universities, to boost the role of valorisation of European research and innovation for fostering societal impact, and to contribute to the preparation of the related council conclusions.

### Recommendations for the EU and national governments

- **Universities need to be supported in developing and sustaining the structures** needed to become strong knowledge valorisation actors. **The knowledge transfer-related infrastructure is not equal across Europe:** resources are not the same in all universities, with different numbers and skill level of staff dedicated to knowledge transfer/valorisation, and with cases in which a knowledge transfer office is not present at all. This is not necessarily due to a lack of awareness of the importance of having these types of offices, but rather with **budgetary reasons**. There is a need for **sustainable funding** for knowledge and technology transfer and valorisation offices in universities. **Dedicated and stable** (i.e., not exclusively project based) funding for HEI staff dedicated to knowledge valorisation is paramount.
- For a successful uptake from institutions, **valorisation strategies should not come across as a burden and focus should be on building the collective (and hybrid) valorisation intelligence of research teams**. Development of **valorisation guidance and strategies** (such as codes of practice) with the research community at the EU/national level should be continued to facilitate translation at the level of institutions.
- **Enhancing synergies** and reducing tensions or disparities between policies advancing open science and open innovation, on the one side, and valorisation activities through intellectual assets protection on the other, should be a key concern of these strategies. Nowadays, much is asked from individual researchers, in terms of their specific expertise in research and teaching, but also in transversal activities such as open science and innovation behaviours, societal engagement, science communication, etc. This issue raises the **need to define valorisation competencies and requirements for researchers across teams and not only at individual level**. **Complementarities of expertise in teams should be promoted and facilitated**.

### Recommendations for funding organisations

- **Incentivise** researchers to find pathways for plural forms of valorisation (including commercialisation) and collaboration should be in place. The national funding model and international funding rules for collaborative research should be conducive to that.
- Complement technology readiness with **societal readiness approaches** with the aim of offering a more comprehensive evaluation framework, emphasising the importance of considering whether society desires and is prepared for a particular technological advancement.
- Provide HEIs with adequate **research infrastructures** and state of the art **digital** services (including Artificial Intelligence) and equipment fit for the challenges of the fair twin transition.

- Promote **trust building** between academic and non-academic actors (private, public and civic), and promoting open access and sharing of each other's assets is crucial (funding calls echoing common language, common goals, synergies, co-creation, and sharing of good practices).
- Consider offering **small grants** for rapidly setting up local/regional R&I cross-sectoral collaboration (in addition to industry, collaborations must be sought with national government and cities, regions, as well as with NGOs, public sector, etc). For example, **Proof of Concept (POC)** grants are important instruments to foster valorisation by helping a certain solution meet milestones that will increase its potential to be translated into the market or provide other forms of social value.

### Recommendations for institutions

- Institutional strategies should be developed to provide guidance on **how researchers can better collaborate with the knowledge and technology transfer offices at their institutions**, continually revised with the view of how this collaboration can be better fostered. **Trainings** for knowledge and technology transfer offices should form key elements of these strategies.
- The implementation of the institutional strategy should go in parallel with a **cultural shift** that takes into account the benefits that researchers can get from being involved in knowledge valorisation, especially in terms of **assessment and career development**. This can act as a major motivation for researchers, as opposed to seeing it as an extra activity they need to fulfil.
- Continually building competencies for knowledge valorisation across university teams, leveraging the collective intelligence of complementary human skillsets and Artificial Intelligence systems.
- Fostering **embeddedness in the local/regional innovation ecosystem** promotes opportunities to build longer term relationships. Common initiatives here are key (engagement of industry, public and civic experts in academia and vice-versa, networking events, etc).
- Institutions should actively promote the expectations of **meaningful participatory engagement with the public**—especially citizens and policymakers, to responsively engage with the most pressing needs of society and to co-create the most suitable measures to address those societal needs.

YERUN universities remain committed to harnessing the full potential of knowledge valorisation as a key tool for fulfilling their institutional missions in the service of society, for which we will continue to work closely with European policymakers.

## - YERUN Members -



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