

European Bioeconomy University (EBU) feedback to EU consultation: “Higher education: European strategy for universities”

Cooperation for a common future: collaboration becomes the new excellence

Bioeconomy provides sustainable solutions for tackling various societal challenges. In the European Commission’s understanding of the concept, the bioeconomy must play a central role in strategies to mitigate climate change, secure food supplies for a growing population, and to sustainably manage and conserve natural resources. Likewise, the bioeconomy is expected to contribute to achieving the targets of the “Green Deal”, that is designed to ensure Europe’s recovery and future resilience. However, this contribution cannot be taken for granted. If the bioeconomy goes unnoticed and is kept in disciplinary silos, it may well develop in unsustainable directions.

The European Bioeconomy University (EBU; <https://european-bioeconomy-university.eu/>) was founded as an alliance of six European Universities with the aim to strengthen the capacity, competitiveness, and attractiveness of bioeconomy research,

education, and innovation. This is fostered through co-operation of the involved universities and their collaborators, which enables the build-up of a creative hub for the development, promotion, and implementation of the bioeconomy across Europe.

Its mission is to take university collaboration to a higher level, where a joint strategy is developed in the context of a new governance model. With an integrated strategy for education, research, knowledge transfer, and innovation, the EBU can serve as a role model for a deeper transnational cooperation between higher education institutions across Europe addressing the related needs of a strategic sector for the EU. The European values that are fundamental to a transition to a sustainable bioeconomy will be promoted by EBU researchers and further spread by a new generation of truly European graduates. Deeply enrooted in various European regions and sustained by the most excellent bioeconomy research institutions, developed as a truly European

Contact:

ebu@uni-hohenheim.de

initiative, the EBU safeguards the generation and proliferation of the knowledge, competences, and skills relevant to manage the unfolding transformations towards a sustainable economy and society in Europe.

The EBU fosters multi-actor engagement and the deployment of impact-oriented education and skills development for the bioeconomy industrial sectors (agriculture, forestry, blue economy, food, biobased industries, among others), thus ensuring to invest in professionals capable to drive the change for a more resilient and equitable society. EBU has thus a significant role to play in order to support the achievement of the European Union policy goals, both in terms of climate change mitigation and adaptation and higher education excellence.

To consolidate the efforts of the EBU alliance to enforce the Commission's stance on the bioeconomy, structural support of the EU is required. Operational frameworks and funding mechanisms for the implementation of thematic multi-actor initiatives that leverage on the nexus among inter-disciplinary education, trans-disciplinary research, and transformative innovation must be put in place.

Collaboration between formerly separated disciplines, nations, sectors, and institutions must become the new excellence. Flexibility should be given in order to operate with the best actors and tools, to develop thematic multi-level cooperation, fostering skills deployment both, at student level and in the already active workforce, and to enhance innovation potential in a given sector. Cooperation models developed for comprehensive universities such as European Universities could be adapted to address those needs. To avoid a dissipation of efforts while at the same time enabling local impact, a balance between EU-wide coordination and territorial deployment will distinguish the most effective programs.