

Findings University Council

This document serves as a short reflection of the HoKa Workgroup of the University Council (UC) regarding the developments of the HoKa investments in the past year. This reflection is given in the context of the Erasmus (EUR) Annual Report 2023, as part of the evaluation of the Quality Agreements at EUR. It is noteworthy to mention that this document was written by the current members of the HoKa Working Group of the UC, some of which have only been working on the HoKa-related themes in the Academic Year 2023-2024, therefore being absent during the drafting and establishment of the original HoKa related plans and during the first two quarters of 2023.

This reflection document is structured in several parts. Firstly, it provides a general summary of the HoKa related investments. Secondly, it describes the strengths and weaknesses of each of the HoKa Central Projects (Student Wellbeing, Impact at the Core, Erasmus X, and Centre for Learning and Innovation). Thirdly, it offers conclusions and recommendations regarding the HoKa project on behalf of the HoKa Workgroup.

1. Global overview of the HoKa Workgroup participation

The HoKa Workgroup outlined several advantages to the current functioning of the HoKa investments and has remarked on significant improvements in the current academic year compared to previous years.

Overall, there is good and proactive collaboration with the project managers of each of the central HoKa projects. Specifically, through consistent and regular meetings and/or dialogues, all members are considered contributors to the development and functioning of the HoKa projects. There is a mutual recognition of the benefits of this collaboration, both from the side of the council and the side of the projects themselves. Notably, however, a challenging moment occurred with one of the central projects which was amplified by miscommunication and inadequate expectation management, which temporarily impacted the working relationship negatively. Even in this case, we continued to see the value of proactive involvement, and through mutual reflective sessions and “overcommunicating” of expectations we managed to recalibrate our working relationship. Therefore, it was ensured that the opinions of the University Council were generally incorporated in the decision-making and creative processes in a timely manner.

We would like to draw attention to the added value of our co-creative rights. Next to providing regular advice regarding projects or consenting to main budget elements, we upheld our rights to co-creation to a large degree. In doing so, we ensured that highly involved EUR community representatives got to shape the projects they care strongly about and enrich them with new and creative ideas. The process of co-creation ensures that appointed members of the EUR community who are aware of the needs of the peers they represent, bring these needs across to the project leads and thus help embed the projects even more within our university.

Halfway through 2023, we noticed an improvement in the support system of the HoKa working group. Firstly, there was timely contact with the National Desk of HoKa, resulting in the delivery of a speedy and efficient onboarding of the newly appointed HoKa workgroup, which eventually allowed us to commence our participative activities very early in the Academic Year and thus maximize our input. Secondly, there was structurally regular contact with the HoKa policymaker, who gave us sufficient strategic information that supported our awareness and use of participatory rights. For both cases, the accumulated experience of the council support staff throughout the years was paramount. This was different from previous years when the lack of (timely) handover information weakened the support system.

2. Central EUR HoKa Projects

We see the benefits of the increase in personal development skills at a central level, with a focus on societal impact. In line with the Educational Vision, we support how these central projects provide a space for cross-faculty collaboration. We see the advantages of continuing these projects beyond the HoKa investment scheme when a more centrally funded scheme will eventually replace it.

We strongly believe that having participatory bodies involved at a high level (i.e., co-creation) is central to the good development of projects aimed at the improvement of educational quality, and we advise this to be continued when a centrally funded scheme is installed.

2.1 Student Wellbeing

The HoKa Workgroup representatives meet with the Student Wellbeing project team approximately twice a month and are satisfied with the project team, because of clear communication, sufficient updates regarding the projects, and adequate responses to our questions. The representatives feel that their input and feedback is very much appreciated.

Active involvement in the Student Wellbeing task force, as a representatives of the HoKa Workgroup, has been insightful. During regular meetings with the project team, their communication has been clear, updates timely, and questions promptly addressed. What's particularly impressive is their dedication—they tirelessly generate ideas, carefully assess them, and aren't afraid of failure, although it seldom occurs. Their commitment to enhancing student well-being is truly commendable.

2.2 Impact at the Core.

The HoKa Workgroup representatives meet with Impact at the Core project team approximately twice a month to discuss various aspects of the project. Discussions are always open with enough room for us to ask (critical) questions, express opinions, and suggest ideas. Moreover, these discussions often include links to other developments at the university, such as the Convergence (cooperation of EUR, Erasmus MC, and TU Delft), which is important because of reasons of efficiency and effectiveness.

2.3 Erasmus X

The HoKa Workgroup representatives meet with the ErasmusX project team approximately twice a month and are satisfied with the project team because of their willingness to provide us with the necessary information and openness towards our critical questions. Despite a recent challenging experience, we are currently working towards improving our working relationship through frequent contact and co-creative sessions.

ErasmusX has multiple innovative projects to improve engagement, soft skills, and preparation for the workforce. With their projects, they are supporting students and staff in dealing with AI. The project 'Redefining the Classroom' redefines the classroom by linking EUR students to real, societal problems in their HEF-house in the south of Rotterdam. Furthermore, ErasmusX can provide its expertise to other actors within EUR, which can be faculties, program committees, and more.

2.4 Center for Learning and Innovation (CLI)

This year, the HoKa Workgroup has been collaborating even more closely with the project team of CLI through a series of dialogues, at intervals of approximately one month. We especially commend the efforts of project managers to include us in regular conversations regarding their projects. This positive development also proved how timely and clear communication can ensure a smooth working relationship. Although we did not partake in co-creative sessions within CLI, the dialogues were critical moments where our input was appreciated, and our questions were clarified well.

Furthermore, we came to appreciate the CLI subprojects aimed at professional teaching development and online/ hybrid education. These topics, which had previously raised many questions from the side of the UC, were well explained to us during the dialogues.

3. De-central participation

While at the central level of participation in HoKa, there are clear positive aspects, at the de-central participation level several shortcomings became evident this year that we see urgency in addressing and resolving for the future.

The level of involvement with HoKa across the decentralized participatory bodies within our university varies significantly. While some faculties operate within structured frameworks, most others follow informal processes or overlook the topic outside of yearly budget approvals. In other words, in the majority of de-central councils and committees, there is a severe lack of co-creation on HoKa projects. Moreover, documentation delivery is often untimely, thus impeding the already limited resources of these councils and increasing the work pressure of participants.

The fact that these participatory rights are not fully upheld is exacerbated by the lack of knowledge for members of these councils regarding the extent of their rights as well as what HoKa entails. Also contributing to the issue is the limited resources that these councils have to allocate to participatory duties, in general, and on HoKa, in particular. Finally, there are no, to our knowledge, standardized guidelines for co-creation, making the process confusing and sometimes daunting for those members who do sometimes get to experience it.

This realization is problematic; given the positive aspects of co-creation identified at the central level, we find it disheartening that the de-central bodies do not benefit from them. The members of the de-central bodies operate closely within their communities and are even more aware of the needs and issues of their peers than us at the central level, and thus, we believe, better equipped to co-create for the benefit of their programs or faculties.

4. Recommendations

The right to co-creation within HoKa has multiple advantages and is highly appreciated both by participatory bodies and the project managers for the reasons mentioned above. With the termination of HoKa yet the centralization of some projects, we strongly advise that the co-creation element is retained. However, we also believe that it can be improved, in light of the experiences highlighted above.

- the University should provide a timely and systematic onboarding for the new members of the participatory bodies on HoKa. The handover information shared in the onboarding should be digestible, comprehensive, and holistic, ideally with a multi-annual overview of HoKa, to help the new council and committee members understand the context and the work of their predecessors and thus be better prepared for co-creation.
- there should be clear supportive guidelines regarding co-creation that can apply to the needs and resources of the different participatory levels: program committees, faculty councils, and the university council.
- each participatory body should have at least one member directly responsible for HoKa.
- the decentral participatory bodies should benefit from regular contact with each other.

In addition, we believe that the projects aimed at improving the quality of education should be extended to all schools within Erasmus University.