

A funding instrument for excellence in service of European scientific sovereignty

The dialogue on the multiannual financial framework emphasizes the importance of the **European Union equipping itself with the necessary tools, infrastructure, and research and innovation capabilities to sustainably develop its scientific and technological excellence and sovereignty**. This aspiration hinges on long-term structural reinforcement to cultivate pan-European research hubs of international prominence, thus mitigating fragmentation.

Udice supports the creation, at the European level, **of institutionalised programmes of excellence based on sustainable networks of academic partners**, organised around strategic themes for the European Union. This mechanism should not be confused with existing alliances of European universities, but could reinforce their research dynamics, without exclusivity, where appropriate.

In addition to existing instruments focused on individuals or small groups of researchers, **this instrument could fund institutions and laboratories** – to create genuine ‘laboratories without walls’ organised into **stable consortia at the European level**. This would then structure scientific communities of excellence around shared priorities, strengthen collective research capacities (teams, infrastructure, scientific governance) and reduce the fragmentation of national ecosystems in favour of sustainable transnational ecosystems capable of driving innovation.

Within the future framework programme, the Udice universities emphasise the need for this scheme to be designed **as a complementary instrument, rather than a duplication of existing mechanisms**. As part of **Pillar II of FP10 and linked to the European Competitiveness Fund**, it occupies an intermediate position between projects funded by the ERC and the major instruments heavily driven by European Union public policy. Thus, the selection of beneficiaries will be based on a **balance between thematic focus** – through alignment with the four strategic competitiveness windows (health/biotechnology, green energy/decarbonisation, digital, security/defence) or with major societal challenges – **and a bottom-up approach based on initiatives proposed by academic institutions and their researchers**.

In order to safeguard academic independence and the capacity for both exploration and innovation, it is essential that the scheme:

- **provides long-term funding for consortia**, in the form of multi-year grants of around seven years that are renewable, to ensure the sustainable development of scientific excellence
- **allows for a degree of internal flexibility** to support the evolution of projects and partners, with the capacity for periodic evaluation and renewal;
- **supports programmes starting at low TRLs (2–3)**, with a gradual progression towards intermediate TRLs (up to 5–6), which requires funding commensurate with this challenge of TRL progression;
- **maintains scientific leadership** rooted in universities.

The transition to innovation and applications is also a strategic objective. The instrument should facilitate collaboration with industry, with a distinct allocation of roles, including during the early stages of research.

Established in October 2020, Udice is an alliance of 13 French research-intensive universities committed to excellence in research and higher education, and to the development of attractive innovation ecosystems.

Members: Aix-Marseille University, Sorbonne University, University Claude Bernard Lyon 1, Université Côte d’Azur, University of Bordeaux, Université Paris Cité, University of Strasbourg, Grenoble Alpes University, Paris-Saclay University, Paris Sciences et Lettres University, University of Montpellier, Institut Polytechnique de Paris, Université de Lorraine.

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