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ENLIGHT RISE- RESEARCH AND INNOVATION AGENDA WITH AND FOR SOCIETY: LEVERAGING DIGITAL INNOVATION FOR A GREENER AND HEALTHIER EUROPE

WP No	Del. Rel. No	Del No	Title	Lead beneficiary
8	D8.4	D39	Report on the different workshops, encounters, webinars, surveys, interviews, etc. collecting and analysing the barriers, challenges, and opportunities to implement impact-driven R&I agendas	UPV/EHU

Nature	Dissemination Level	Related to Del. No (if applicable)
Report	Public	D37

Description (short)
<p>This deliverable serves a double objective. First, it reports on the different public workshops, encounters, webinars, surveys, mapping exercises, interviews and meetings that served the collection and subsequent analysis of the barriers and opportunities for research impact-driven agendas. Secondly, it presents the results of the analysis of the different collected barriers, challenges, and opportunities to implement impact-driven research agendas.</p> <p>The identified barriers/challenges are grouped in 4 main areas: (1) low and different impact literacy levels; (2) lack of structures, capacities and resources; (3) low commitment levels: lack of strategy, leadership and recognition/appreciation; (4) different regional, national and institutional landscapes.</p> <p>The identified opportunities are grouped into 5 main areas: (1) momentum; (2) connectivity among university teams; (3) co-creation with societal stakeholders; (4) available capacities and resources; (5) ENLIGHT leadership and platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration</p> <p>The deliverable covers barriers and opportunities for both impact-driven research agendas at universities institutional level, and for common impact-driven research agendas among different institutions.</p>

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INTRODUCTION

ENLIGHT and ENLIGHT RISE

ENLIGHT is a European University Alliance to promote equitable quality of life, sustainability and global engagement through Higher Education Transformation. ENLIGHT brings together nine comprehensive research-intensive universities from nine European countries (University of the Basque Country, University of Bordeaux, Comenius University Bratislava, University of Galway (formerly National University of Ireland, Galway), Ghent University, University of Göttingen, University of Groningen, University of Tartu, Uppsala University).

ENLIGHT has obtained funding from the European Commission in the framework of the Horizon 2020 Programme and more specifically within the Science With and For Society (SWAFS) Work Programme. The **ENLIGHT RISE project** (Research and Innovation agenda with and for society) seeks to strengthen the research and innovation dimension of the ENLIGHT Alliance. In synergy with ENLIGHT's educational components and surrounding ecosystems, ENLIGHT RISE will deploy a comprehensive joint transformation agenda for our universities.

The ENLIGHT RISE project is structured around nine major Work Packages, of which Work Package (WP) 8 is focused on Impact. **The main objective of WP8 is to promote a mission and impact-driven research and innovation agenda.** WP8 explores the frontiers of a common impact-driven R&I agenda (task 8.1), by:

- Collecting and analyzing the opportunities and barriers encountered to implement this agenda (8.1.3);
- Developing actions to promote a culture of R&I impact within ENLIGHT universities (8.1.1); and
- By reviewing methods and good practices of impact assessment and measurement worldwide (8.1.2).

In addition, WP8 facilitates further impact knowledge sharing with other European University Alliances as part of the FOREU2 impact thematic group, to spread and share solutions, successful practices, identified barriers and challenges, as well as cooperation formats and models (Task 8.2).

WP8 is led by University of the Basque Country, with co-leads University of Galway and Ghent University. The primary focus of WP8 is the concept of "Research Impact", as distinct from R&I impact. As one of the first consensuses, WP8 leaders with the partner university representatives agreed on the following definition of research impact as ***the effects of research in the real world. Impact is the changes we can see (demonstrate, measure, capture), beyond academia (in society, economy, environment) which happen because of our research (caused by, contributed to, attributable to).***

The report on barriers and opportunities for impact-driven research agendas

In line with the overall objectives of the WP, and more specifically the **Task 8.1.3 Collect and analyse opportunities and barriers encountered to implement a common impact-driven R&I agenda**, this report presents:

1. **All sources that have been used to collect the barriers, challenges and opportunities to implement impact-driven research agendas**, in the form of surveys and mapping exercises; workshops, encounters, webinars and other public events; interviews; and FOREU2 impact thematic group meetings (first chapter);
2. **The results of the analysis on the collected barriers, challenges, and opportunities to implement impact-driven research agendas** (second chapter);
3. **The actions planned to be taken in the short and medium-term.**

This report considers barriers and opportunities for both *impact-driven research agendas at universities institutional level*, and for *common impact-driven research agendas among different institutions*.

1. Data Collection Sources

1.1. Mappings and Surveys

Impact Landscaping

One of the first tasks of WP8 was the launch of an Impact Landscaping exercise among representatives of all 9 ENLIGHT universities. The exercise was run in November-December 2021 and included 3 key questions:

Question 1 - What is your understanding of R&I Impact?

Question 2 – Does your university have a R&I Impact policy/ implementation plan? If so, could you please give more information about it?

Question 3 - Independently of the response to the previous question, could you please identify (a) good R&I Impact practice(s) in your university?

The results of the Impact Landscaping exercise were presented to the full WP8 team at a meeting in December 2021 (see figures 1 and 2).

General overview of the ENLIGHT Universities' R&I Impact landscape			
ENLIGHT University	1 Definition of Impact	2 Institutional Impact Policy	3 Good Practices
UGENT	YES. REF definition - Distinction between scientific, economic and societal impact - Impact vs. economic valorisation vs. societal value creation - Different types of impact (big, small, local, global, instrumental, conceptual)	YES. Policy Plan 2 focus areas: - framework for quality assurance and assessment via a description of the most common types of societal value creation - creating an academic environment conducive to societal value creation Comprehensive set of actions	YES. - Impact as a dimension in the evaluation approach and portfolio of research - Interdisciplinary research consortia aimed at realising societal impact - Societal Value Creation Fund - Director for Impact at Schools level - Impact Success Stories - Outreach activities
COMENIUS	NO. But agrees with proposed WP8 definition	NO.	YES. Impactful research projects vs. knowledge transfer projects
UPPSALA	NO. But agrees with proposed WP8 definition. Interested in "demonstrate, measure, capture" impact.	NO. But promotion of an Impact Implementation Logic (Impact Pathway). In-house Innovation office; Intersectoral collaboration is encouraged.	YES. Impactful research initiatives vs. Innovation projects.
UPV/EHU	NO. But agrees with proposed WP8 definition	YES. Impact is an embedded part of UPV/EHU 2030 agenda for sustainable development	YES. Analysis of the impact and contribution of UPV/EHU to the regional innovation ecosystem through a "narrative with numbers" case study (in the framework of a EC study)
NUIGalway	YES. - Similar (more elaborated) WP8 definition. - Distinction Academic vs Non-Academic Impact - Research Impact as benefit	YES. Impact is an embedded part of NUIGalway Strategic Plan 2020-2025 , which includes several impact-related flagship goals. And confirmed by NUI Galway Research and Innovation Strategy 2020-2025	YES. - Research Impact Officer - Guidance and access to resources on Research Impact (sharepoint) - Research Impact Case Studies
TARTU	YES. Tartu's Strategic Plan defines Impact in its economic dimension "increase the impact of research results on economic development through business agreements, consultation and creation, protection and rapid commercialisation of intellectual property"	YES. Impact is an embedded part of Tartu's Strategic Plan 2021-2025 . However, R&I impact indicators do not reflect societal impact , but publications, citations, external research funding, business contracts, spin-offs.	YES. - UniTartu Ventures to support research-based entrepreneurship
RUG	YES. 2013 definition - Distinction between economic and societal impact of both educational and research activities	YES. Impact is an embedded part and a pillar of RUG's Strategic Plan 2020-2026 , including a set of concrete actions to promote impact (professional support organisation, training students/ graduates, recognising/ rewarding commitment to societal impact, interdisciplinary/ inter-sectoral cooperation)	YES. - Repository of research and societal impact stories - NWO impact scout pilot (concepts to raise awareness, plan and enlarge research projects' impact).

ENLIGHT RISE Definition: "Impact is the provable effects of research in the real world. Impact is the changes we can see (demonstrate, measure, capture), beyond academia (in society, economy, environment) which happen because of our research (caused by, contributed to, attributable to)".

Figure 1 Overview of Impact Landscaping Exercise ENLIGHT WP8 Full Team Meeting December 2021 1/2

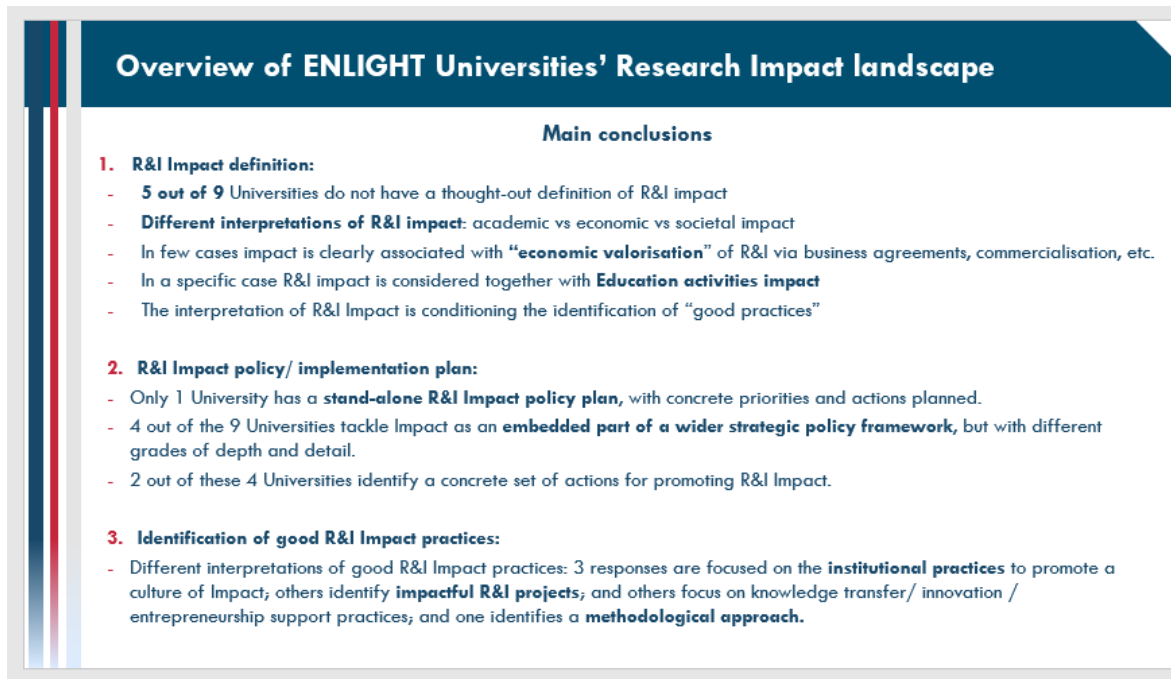


Figure 2 Overview of Impact Landscaping Exercise ENLIGHT WP8 Full Team Meeting December 2021 2/2

The results demonstrated that there was a **significant disparity** in a) the understanding of the research impact concept, and b) the institutional recognition of research impact among the ENLIGHT universities.

Impact Literacy Survey

Based on the results of the first landscaping exercise, WP8 progressed to a pilot phase of an Impact Literacy Survey, to be responded only by the WP8 leadership team universities: University of the Basque Country, University of Galway and Ghent University. The pilot survey ran from 13 January 2022 to 15 February 2022.

Taking into consideration the experience of the pilot survey, WP8 moved towards the development of a final Impact Literacy Survey, which was distributed to the remaining ENLIGHT partner universities (University of Bordeaux, Comenius University Bratislava, University of Göttingen, University of Groningen, University of Tartu, and Uppsala University) and addressed the limitations of the first pilot survey (e.g. survey platform, data protection considerations, and further simplification of survey questions). The ENLIGHT Impact Literacy Survey was launched on 1 April 2022 and closed on 6 June 2022.

The pilot and final surveys were developed in **2 different modes**:

- 1) *Institutional mode*, targeting 1 response per university from the senior management team (Vice-rectorate, Support Service, Specialised Committee); and
- 2) *Researchers / Research Staff Survey mode*, targeting multiple responses from Researchers at all different career levels and Research Support Staff (e.g., Research administration, advisors, research project managers, impact officers, etc.).

The Researcher/ Research Support Staff survey mode was considered important to investigate impact literacy in the research community as it may differ from that of the institution.

Both survey modes were structured around six main dimensions of:

1. **Clarity:** knowledge, understanding and valorisation of research impact.
2. **Context:** looking at the external research impact drivers. Regional/ national policy, frameworks, research quality assessment processes, funding criteria.
3. **Commitment:** institutional impact strategies, plans, policies and links to regional, European and global (UN SDGs) policy priorities. Institutional leadership of research impact.
4. **Capacities and resources:** dedicated support and advice services; funding and staff resources for impact delivery; recognition and investment in the development of impact-related skills (staff training & education).
5. **Connectivity:** how the organisational units work together and connect to the overall strategy
6. **Co-Creation:** engagement with non-academics to generate impactful research.

These thematic areas were derived and adapted from the [Institutional Healthcheck Workbook](#) (Bayley, J.E. and Phipps, D, 2019).

In addition to the **9 responses from institutional representatives** from the ENLIGHT universities (institutional survey mode), **518** researchers and/or research support staff answered the survey (researchers/research staff survey mode). Most of the 518 responses were from researchers (88%; 457 responses). Among the 457 researchers responding to the survey, the majority (62%; 282) were Leading (R4) and Established (R3) researchers. 103 (23%) of researchers responding to the survey were First Stage Researchers (R1). The majority of researchers responding worked in the STEM field.

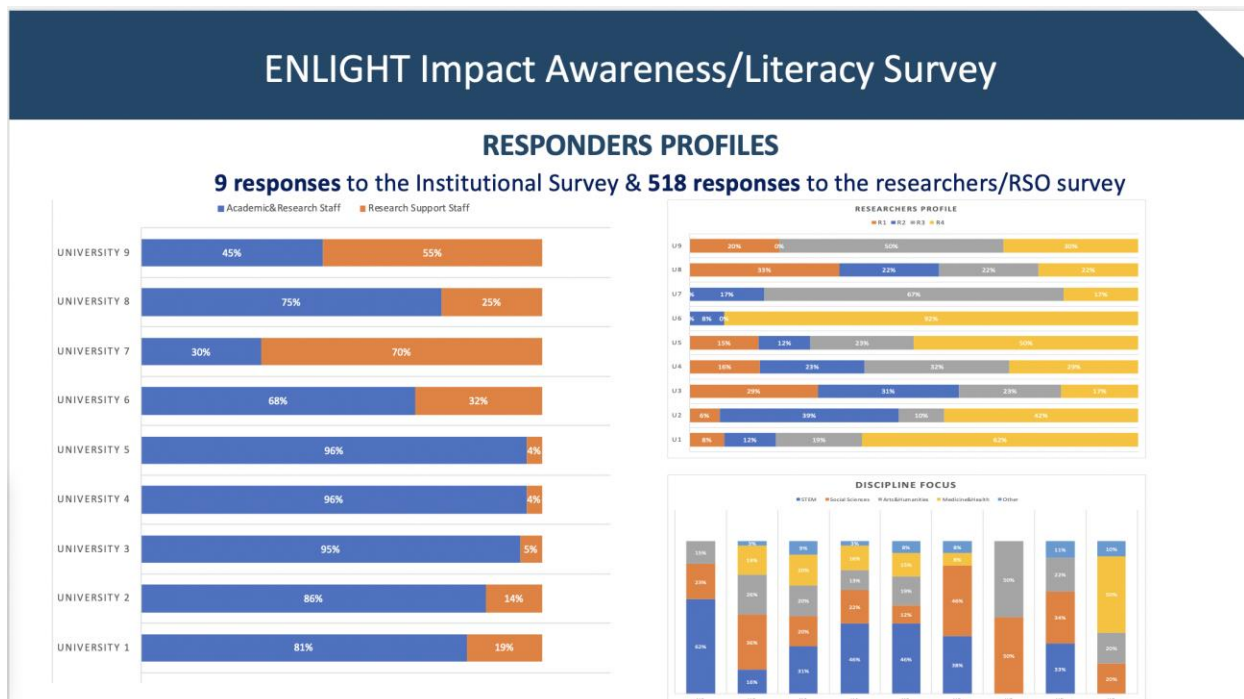


Figure 3 Overview of ENLIGHT Impact Literacy Survey responders' profiles.

The main conclusions of the results are summarized in the following figures, from the July 2022 meeting.

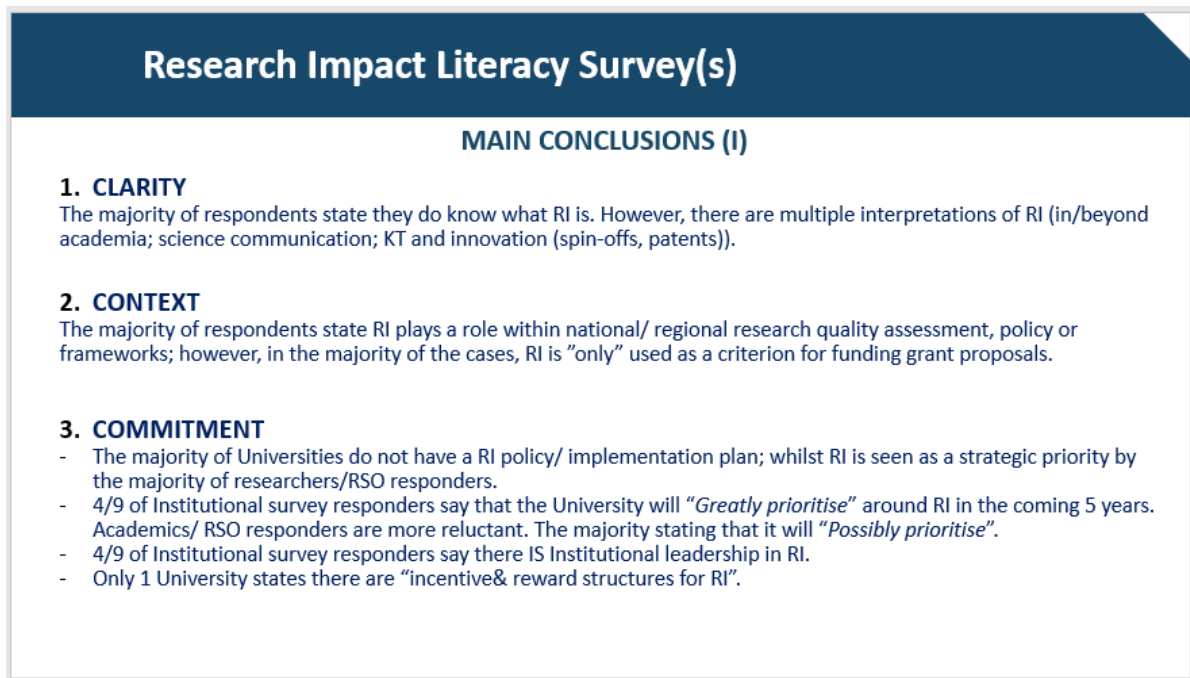


Figure 4 Summary of Impact Literacy Survey Results ENLIGHT WP8 Full Team Meeting July 2022 1/2

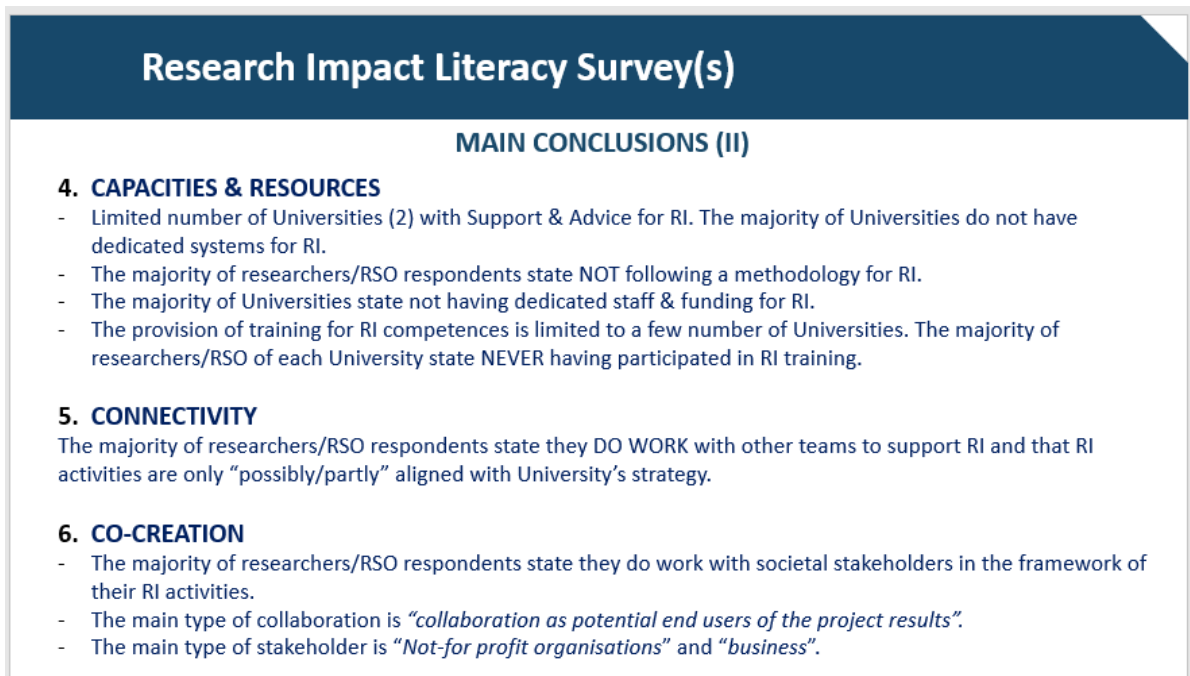


Figure 5 Summary of Impact Literacy Survey Results ENLIGHT WP8 Full Team Meeting July 2022 2/2

ENLIGHT Toolkit for the Self-Assessment of Universities Research Impact Awareness, Literacy and Readiness

Leveraging the work carried out on the refinement of the Impact Literacy Survey, it was agreed to use this exercise as the basis for the future ENLIGHT toolkit for the self-assessment of universities: research impact awareness, literacy and readiness. The ENLIGHT toolkit was published in February 2023 at the following webpage: <https://impact.enlight-eu.org/self-assessment> and it was officially launched during the [ENLIGHT Impact Conference](#) (29-30 March 2023).

The ENLIGHT Toolkit for the Self-Assessment of Institutional Research Impact is a self-reflection tool designed for universities to explore, at an institutional level, their research impact awareness, literacy and readiness. The toolkit guides users through focus areas considered as relevant for universities to be research impact-driven.



Figure 6. The 6 self-assessment dimensions of the ENLIGHT Toolkit. Available at : <https://impact.enlight-eu.org/self-assessment>

The toolkit is not a benchmarking tool but provides diagnostic assistance to institutions for identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses, and possible areas for improvement in their research impact environment.¹

Until 30 June (time of this report drafting), 13 responses were collected: 9 from the ENLIGHT universities, 3 from non-ENLIGHT universities (Tilburg University, Michigan State University, Grenoble Ecole de Management) and one from a EU-funded project.

The analysis of the aggregated responses received so far shows some disparities in the self-assessment depending on the profile/role of the responder. On the one hand, **members of the universities' management teams** responding to the toolkit questions identified as areas of strength the favourable (research impact) context and the co-creation of impact activities together with societal stakeholders. However, there still seem concerns regarding the clarity of concept of impact as this was the weakest area of confidence.

¹ For more information about the toolkit design, structure and content, please consult ENLIGHT RISE Deliverable D37.

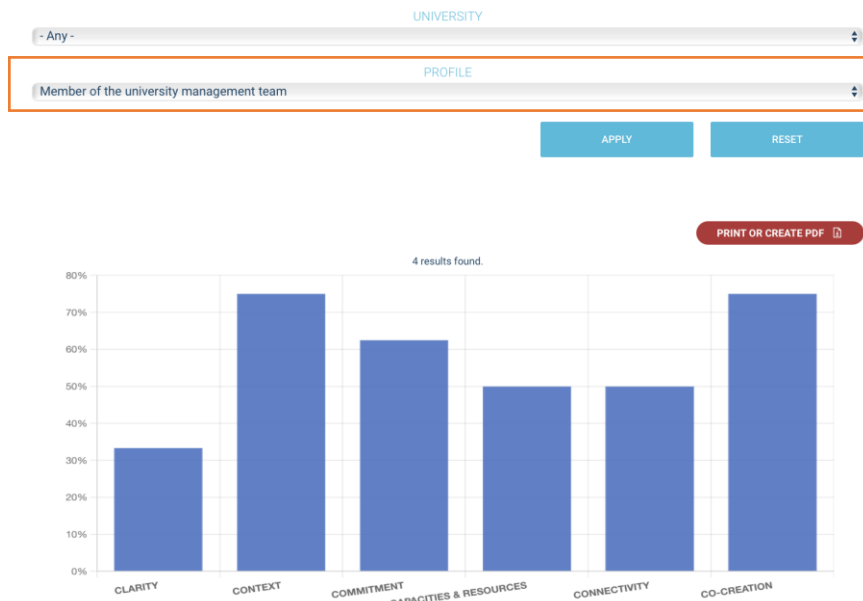


Figure 7. Overview of the “member of university management team” users’ responses by dimension.

On the other hand, **academics/researchers** identify the co-creation with external stakeholders and clarity around the concept of impact as the main areas of strength at their universities. The role of external contextual drivers for research impact appears to be a dimension with less influence.

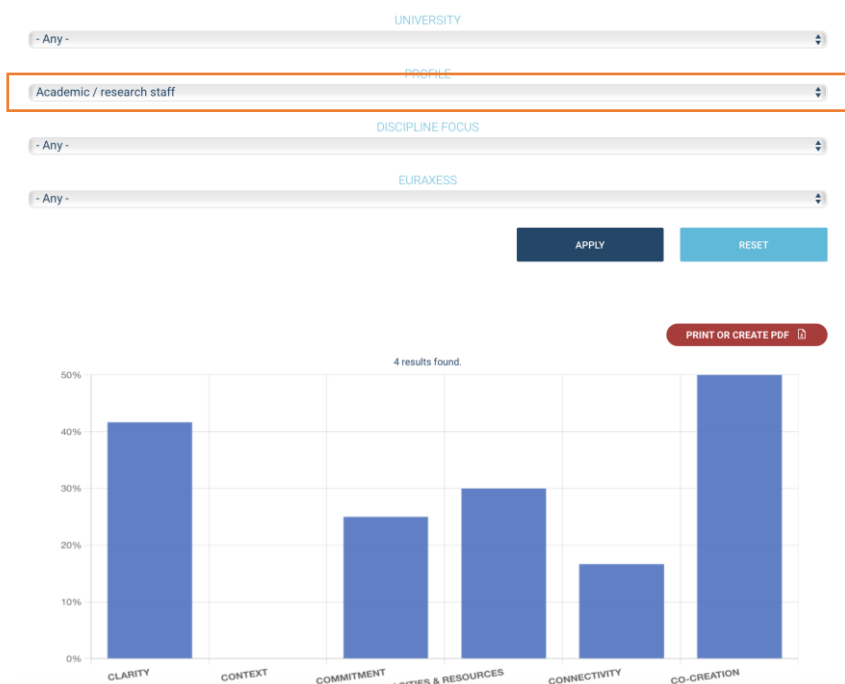


Figure 8. Overview of the researchers users’ responses by dimension.

In contrast with academics/ researchers, **research support staff** highlight the external favourable (research impact) context as the strongest area and connectivity (extent to which the different university teams (e.g., research groups, support units, etc.) work together, how they connect to an overall strategy and how cohesive these relationships are) as the weakest one.

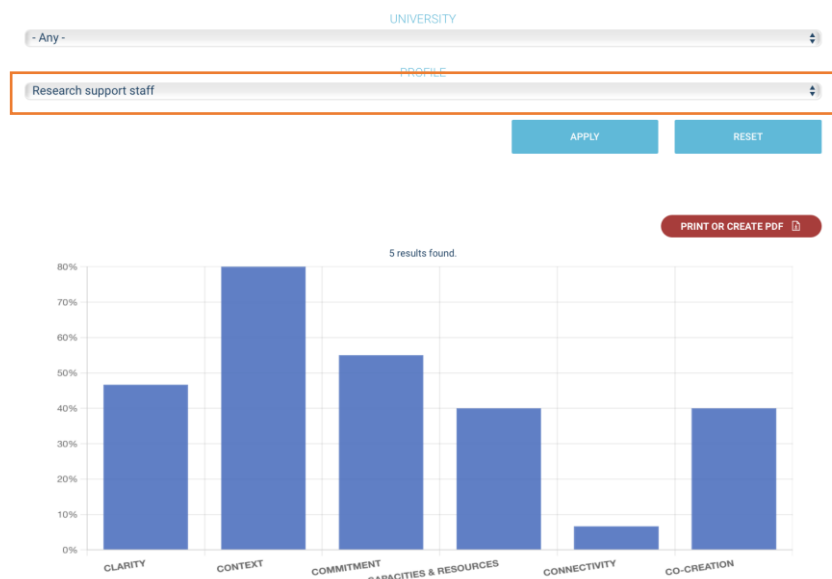


Figure 9. Overview of the research support staff users' responses by dimension.

1.2. Workshops, Encounters, Webinars and Other Public Events

External Events

WP8 members have established a permanent dialogue with both academics and non-academic staff, policy-makers, industry and relevant societal actors around the topic of research-impact driven universities. In that context they have participated in several conferences, workshops, encounters and webinars to not only present the ENLIGHT impact approach to impact but to also discuss with the different stakeholders, the barriers/challenges and opportunities for research-impact driven agendas. More specifically, WP8 was represented at the:

- [AESIS Impact of Science Conference](#) (Leiden, The Netherlands, 24-24 June 2022), where Igor Campillo (UPV/EHU) and Esther de Smet (UGENT) participated as speakers in the parallel session: *Institutional Strategy and Leadership*. Target group: world-wide research impact experts.
- [AESIS Webinar Societal Impact in Research Management and Governance](#) (14 March, 2023), where Igor Campillo (UPV/EHU) made a presentation around the subject of "Moving towards an impact-driven university". Target group: world-wide research impact experts.
- [EARMA Conference 2023](#) (Prague, 24-26 April 2023), where Glória Nunes Rodrigues (UPV/EHU) participated as speaker in a "15 minutes discussion tables session" on the specific topic of barriers and opportunities for research-impact driven universities. Target group: European research managers and administrators.
- [UIIN Annual Conference](#) (Budapest, 9-11 May 2023), where Igor Campillo and Glória Nunes Rodrigues (UPV/EHU) presented "ENLIGHT: moving towards and impact-driven university" in which also counted with the participation of representatives of other European University

Alliances (EUTOPIA and E³UDRES²). Target group: world-wide experts on university-industry interaction, entrepreneurial and engaged universities and the future of higher education.

- [INORMS](#) (Durban, 1-2 June 2023), where Esther De Smet (UGENT) delivered a collaborative learning session on Leadership in Impact. Target group: international research managers and administrators, world-wide research impact experts.
- [AESIS 11th Annual Conference on Societal Impact of Science](#) (Halifax, 19-21 June 2023) where Áine Mhic Thaidhg (University of Galway) presented on “Integrating Societal Impact in an Institutional Strategy”, sharing the work of ENLIGHT WP8 and discussing barriers to embedding a culture of research impact. Target group: world-wide research impact experts, research managers and administrators, research community).

It is also worth mentioning the participation of Ghent University (WP8 co-leaders) as member of the [Impact Group of EARMA](#) (European Association of Research Managers and administrators). In that context, ENLIGHT was represented in the several meetings organised by the group. More specifically during the EARMA Conference (Prague, 24-26 April 2023) and during the “[Impact training and culture – impact training program in the planning](#)” online event (22 June 2023).

ENLIGHT Impact Conference

Besides the representation of ENLIGHT WP8 members in external events, WP8 has actively been part of the organisation of the first [ENLIGHT Impact Conference](#) on 30-31 March 2023 at the University of the Basque Country, Bilbao, Spain. The ENLIGHT Impact Conference brought 150 international leading impact experts together, from inside and outside the academic ecosystem, to exchange and discuss approaches for impact assessment and for embedding impact within universities’ full spectrum of activities, being in education, research, innovation or societal engagement-related activities².

More specifically, and of relevance for this report, it is worthwhile mentioning the organisation of the following sessions:

- **Roundtable discussion 1: Embedding impact at our higher education institutions: raising impact awareness, literacy and readiness.** The main objective of the session was to share different views on “*how to embed impact at our universities?*” In connection to this question, what efforts have been/ are being/ are expected to be deployed by the different ENLIGHT universities to raise impact awareness, literacy and readiness. The video session recording is available [here](#).
- **Workshop Barriers and Opportunities for Promoting a Common-Impact Driven Research Agenda.** The main objective of the workshop was to share different views on “*what are the main barriers and opportunities for promoting a common impact-driven research agenda across our European universities?*”. Facilitated by University of Galway WP8 members (Louise Hannon and Áine Mhic Thaidhg), the workshop included the intervention of two external experts: Ramon Flecha (Emeritus Professor. University of Barcelona. Spain) and Marta

² The full report of the ENLIGHT Impact Conference is available in the form of deliverable D80, which was elaborated in the context of the ENLIGHT Erasmus+ funded programme.

Wroblewska (Assistant Professor. Department of Humanities. SWPS University. Poland). The workshop was structured in two major parts, where participants reflected both individually and in groups:

1. Barriers and opportunities for impact-driven research agendas at participants' organisations
2. Barriers and opportunities for common impact-driven research agendas.

The restitution of the workshop conclusions was done by the workshop facilitators at the Impact Conference closing session. The closing session video recording is available [here](#).

- **Roundtable discussion 3: How University Alliances Are Bringing Impact and Transforming the European Education Areas and European Research Area.** The main objective of the session was to discuss *"HOW University Alliances are bringing about impact and transforming the European Education Area and the European Research Area"*. The 4 university alliances represented in the panel (ENLIGHT, UNITA, EC2U, and E³UDRES²) introduced both the expected impact and the achieved impact so far, as well as the different approaches employed to capture this impact, including successful good practices and identified barriers and challenges. The video session recording is available [here](#).



Figure 10. Picture of the ENLIGHT Impact Conference participants during the workshop barriers and opportunities for common impact-driven research agendas.

1.3. Interviews

Taking advantage of the participation of international experts from different types of organisations (both academic and non-academic) during the [ENLIGHT Impact Conference](#), WP8 leaders arranged a series of interviews with key participants. In their responses, using their respective mother tongue languages, they each presented their views around major barriers and opportunities for research-impact driven universities in the context of ENLIGHT.

The table below identifies the 7 interviewees, their affiliation, main quotes, and the weblink to their full interview. The compilation of all interviews is available in this [video](#).

Interviewee	Organisation	Position	Quote	Link to the video interview
Adolfo Morais Ezquerro	Basque Government	Deputy Minister for Universities and Research	[opportunity] <i>“Nowadays, universities are placed at the top of the opinion of the society, [which] identifies universities to be the best stakeholders for the society.</i> [challenge] <i>How much does the society know about the work the universities do for their societies?”</i>	Link
Steven Hill	Research England	Director of Research	[opportunity] <i>“(…) increasing sophistication of the ways in which people are thinking about how they measure impact.”</i>	Link
Cynthia Dahomé Mørk	Université Paris 8 Vincennes Saint-Denis. ERUA University Alliance. FOREU2 Impact Thematic Group	Research Manager	[challenge] <i>“To what extent our model of impact defined through caring research our engaged research could be translated into existing impact driven research agenda. The challenge is around the translation of existing models or emerging models into maybe a common research or impact driven research agenda. (…) go beyond the quality assurance system and introduce impact as a novel criteria for measuring excellence.”</i>	Link
Fernando Tapia	UPV/EHU (ENLIGHT)	ENLIGHT UPV/EHU Chairman. Vice Rector for Student Affairs and Employability	[opportunity] <i>“[The ENLIGHT Impact Conference] allows to share approaches on impact, to learn about international experiences and good practices at the international level.”</i>	Link
Esther de Smet	Ghent University (ENLIGHT)	Senior Research Policy Advisor. ENLIGHT WP8 co-leader.	[opportunity] <i>“ENLIGHT has this great opportunity to learn from other universities that are working in the same context, because research impact is a process that is equal and common for everyone. But the context in which we do it is very different. So learning from others, sharing that knowledge, sharing resources even, I think is the main opportunity in ENLIGHT.</i> [challenge] <i>“(…) You have to invest in people. (..) You have to invest in structures and in policies. You have to make sure that there is also money (..)”</i>	Link

Sarah-Anne Buckley	University of Galway (ENLIGHT)	Associate Professor. ENLIGHT Impact Ambassador.	[opportunity] “ENLIGHT Impact Awards offer us the opportunity to share our learnings (...) and encourage more meaningful collaboration between societal stakeholders and academia. (...)to encourage, inspire and reach a wider audience to show that even a small project like ours can have a global reach.”	Link
Miriam Meyer	University of Groningen (ENLIGHT)	Research Master Student	[opportunity] “(...) impact is such as big issue within Europe and also subsidized by the EU” [challenge] “it sometimes comes across as if it’s all about competing for good grades and the impact factor is not that important”	Link

1.4. FOREU2 Impact Thematic Group Meetings

Led by ENLIGHT University Alliance, and WP8 leader (UPV/EHU) in particular, the FOREU2 impact thematic group was constituted in September 2022 with the following objectives:

- *Spread and share* approaches, solutions, successful practices, identified barriers and challenges, as well as cooperation formats and models;
- *Join efforts* in the way University Alliances address, measure and capture the impact and transformative effect on HEIs, on their local/regional ecosystem and on the European Higher Education and Research Areas;
- *Promote common approaches* for impact assessment and measurement;
- *Help University Alliances, and their individual HEIs, to embed impact* as an integral part of their strategic and operational actions; and
- Offer decision-makers at EU, national and regional levels, a sound, robust and joint *University Alliances’ proposal for assessing and capturing their transformational effects on EHEA and ERA.*

Up to date, the FOREU2 impact thematic group gathers **37 representatives of 14 FOREU2 University Alliances**. Since its launch, **6 working meetings** have been organised in the context of the FOREU2 impact thematic group. Besides the discussion on topics of common interest (e.g. understanding of the concept of impact, monitoring framework for the European Universities Initiative) 8 University Alliances have presented their approach to impact, as well as the challenges, barriers and opportunities in relation to embedding impact (CIRCLE U.; ENLIGHT, UNITA; ERUA; E³UDRES²; EC2U; ENHANCE; ULYSSEUS).

Meeting Date	Agenda topics
21/09/2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcome & Introduction - FOREU2 impact thematic group expectations & objectives - Overview of University Alliances perspectives and experiences - Governance & Next Meetings
09/11/2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcome & Approval of the Agenda - FOREU2 Alliances' experiences and approaches to impact (CIRCLE U., ENLIGHT) - What do we understand by impact? - Impact Conference and FOREU2 Roundtable - Conclusions & Nex Steps
11/01/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcome & Approval of the Agenda - Last Meeting Conclusions - FOREU2 Alliances' experiences and approaches to impact (UNITA, ERUA) - Impact Conference and FOREU2 Roundtable - Conclusions & Next Meetings
08/03/2023	<p>Organisation of the ENLIGHT Impact Conference and the FOREU2 roundtable discussion with the participation of: E³UDRES²; EC2U; ENLIGHT; and UNITA</p>
10/05/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcome & Approval of the Agenda - ENLIGHT Impact Conference Debriefing - FOREU2 Alliances' experiences and approaches to impact (ENHANCE) - Monitoring framework for the European Universities Initiative - Next Meetings
12/07/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcome & Approval of the Agenda - Tour de table: updates from the Alliances - FOREU2 Alliances' experiences and approaches to impact: focus on Ulysseus University Alliance - Discussion on Monitoring framework for the European Universities initiative (please consult documents in attachment as supporting information) - Next meetings

2. Barriers and Opportunities for Research Impact-Driven Agendas

In this section we present the results of the analysis on the collected barriers, challenges, and opportunities to implement impact-driven research agendas. We consider barriers and opportunities for both impact-driven research agendas at universities institutional level, and for common impact-driven research agendas among different institutions.

2.1. Barriers and Challenges

Low and Different Impact Literacy Levels

One of the biggest barriers/challenges for research-impact driven universities is related to the **low literacy levels and multiple understandings of the concept of research impact.**

The ENLIGHT Impact Literacy Survey has shown that the majority of ENLIGHT universities do not have a tailored definition of research impact. Those survey responders (researchers and research support staff) who say they do know what research impact is provide very different definitions. In many cases, the research impact concept is exclusively associated with scientific excellence, measured in terms of scientific publications in high-impact journals and citations, for example. In other cases, research impact is directly associated with “economic valorization” of research, through business agreements, commercialization of research results, patents and/or spin-offs. And in others, research impact is confused with science communication and societal engagement. FOREU2 impact thematic group meetings have further highlighted the fact that impact is often confused with performance and quality assurance, which has been the approach taken by several University Alliances on impact-related matters.

These varying levels of understanding around research impact are leading to misaligned research-impact driven agendas at and among our universities.

The low impact literacy levels are also reflected in the **absence of the know-how, competencies, and skills, as well as practical resources and tools** for the assessment and management of the impact triggered by research (cf. next section).

Lack of Structures, Capacities and Resources

The organisational capacities and resources of a university drive its ability and readiness to deliver on its research impact strategy and commitment. Impact-related support and advice, systems, tools, funding, time, people, competencies, expertise and knowledge are all important conditions within a university for promoting and managing research impact.

The ENLIGHT Impact Literacy Survey has shown that only 2 out of the 9 ENLIGHT universities have dedicated **support and advice services** for research impact. Similarly, the majority of ENLIGHT universities do not have **dedicated systems** (repositories, tools, platforms) for research impact. The majority of responders also state their universities do not have **dedicated staff resources** nor **funding** for research impact. The lack of time of researchers

(“who have so much to take into consideration already”³), funding, structures and support staff was identified as one of the biggest barriers/ challenges during the ENLIGHT Impact Conference workshop.

The ENLIGHT Impact Literacy Survey has also shown that the majority of researchers and research support staff respondents do not follow a methodology for impact assessment and state never having participated in research-impact related training. In fact, the survey results show that the *provision of **training for the development of research impact-related competences and skills** is currently limited* to a few ENLIGHT universities.

The conclusions of the ENLIGHT Impact Conference workshop confirm that the lack of structures and mechanisms around the implementation of research impact agendas is one of the biggest challenges, including a lack of funding and professional support, overall creating a barrier in promoting common research-impact driven agendas.

Low Commitment Levels: Lack of strategy, Leadership and Recognition for Research Impact

The lack of capacities and resources for research impact at universities may be an indication of the absence of commitment with research impact, through the **lack of strategy, leadership and recognition**.

A research impact-driven university assumes there is commitment across the institution and at all levels of action. Commitment may take many forms. The most comprehensive approach would be the adoption of a research impact policy that underpins a strategic plan and is affected by an implementation plan that is adequately and appropriately resourced. However, this comprehensive approach is not a prerequisite for a committed research-impact driven university, but the support of institutional structures, policies and processes certainly is.

The ENLIGHT Impact Literacy Survey has shown that whilst research impact is considered as a strategic priority by the majority of researchers and research support staff, the large majority of ENLIGHT universities **do not have a research impact strategy, policy and/or implementation plan**.

With or without a research impact strategy, policy and/or implementation plan, it was made evident in the multiple events where ENLIGHT was represented (e.g., AESIS events, EARMA Conference, ENLIGHT Impact Conference) that in many universities there is **no leadership for research impact**. A leadership that encompasses not only institutional leadership, but that is also present both at the group and at the individual levels. “*Research impact is a group effort; it is about bringing together pathways; it is about finding symbiosis between different levels of researchers, (...) different talents (...)*”⁴. Similarly, individual researchers should be committed to use the opportunities that universities are giving to them, showing leadership towards their peers and towards external stakeholders.

³ Quote from a participant of the ENLIGHT Impact Conference Workshop.

⁴ Words of Esther de Smet at the ENLIGHT Impact Conference. Roundtable 1. Video available [here](#).

In this context, another major barrier that has been highlighted repeatedly in the various sources of information is the **lack of reward systems, recognition and appreciation of research impact**. The ENLIGHT Impact Literacy Survey has shown that only one ENLIGHT university has incentives and rewards structures for research impact. In fact, and linked to external contextual factors, there are very few systems allowing and valorizing impact-driven research, in contrast to the focus on academic excellence (scientific impact). Similarly, traditional research career progression models do not explicitly recognise research impact work. The recognition and appreciation of impactful research is low in many cases. This lack of appreciation and recognition is also hindering the opportunities in developing common agendas, as the success stories are not being made visible and/or shared.

Context: Different Regional, National and Institutional Landscapes

A large cohort of the ENLIGHT Impact Conference workshop participants identified **differing regional, national and institutional research policies, funding, regulations, and legislation** as a major barrier, especially hindering the development of common research-impact driven agendas. It was also noted that universities are embedded in local and cultural contexts where there is a need to honour commitments to local stakeholders, limiting the drive for a common research-impact driven agendas.

Similarly, the **diversity across European universities in the context of culture and language**, where there may be conflicting interpretations of impact and impact assessment approaches was pointed out.

In the same perspective, **the competitive nature of research and competition between universities** was recognised as a barrier in creating meaningful collaboration and a common impact-driven research agenda.

This results in **differing research impact cultures among European universities**, further accentuated by the distinct approaches to impact from the different fields of knowledge and disciplines (social sciences, natural sciences, formal sciences or applied sciences), as highlighted during the workshops of the ENLIGHT Impact Conference and EARMA.

2.2 Opportunities

Momentum

All the sources taken into consideration for this analysis have highlighted the increased attention and support for research impact in the last number of years.

Impact assessment is a practice that is growing in relevance worldwide. More and more organisations, including universities, are analysing their impacts with the objective of capturing evidence, understanding and demonstrating the value of their contributions, in particular, contributions to society. In the Higher Education and Research contexts, impact is also becoming a higher priority both at the EU and global levels. As Adolfo Morais (Deputy Minister for Universities and Research, Basque Government) stated in his interview: *“Nowadays, Universities are placed at the top of the opinion of the society, [which] identifies universities to be the best stakeholders for the society”*.

The conclusions of the ENLIGHT Impact Conference workshop clearly highlighted the current momentum related to and focus on impact brought by the international attention on research, and especially that of the EU, and the increased commitment exemplified by the Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme.

Looking at the national and regional context, the ENLIGHT Impact Literacy Survey and the Digital Toolkit also demonstrate that research impact plays a role within national and regional policies and frameworks; despite that, in the majority of cases, research impact being “only” used as a criterion for funding grant proposals.

The greater prioritisation of research impact at international, national and regional levels, is also reflected within universities strategies, who increasingly focus their efforts in addressing the societal, environmental and digital transitions. In fact, ENLIGHT Impact Literacy Survey institutional responders consider that their universities will “greatly” and/ or “possibly” prioritise research impact in the next 5 years.

Socially engaged academics and learners, challenge-driven research, and the prioritisation of multidisciplinary teaching, learning and research, have been equally pointed out by workshop participants as important elements, favouring the momentum for research-impact driven agendas.

Connectivity among University Teams

As previously highlighted, impact is a joint team effort. The way university teams (e.g., different research groups, support units, etc.) work together, how they connect to an overall strategy and how cohesive these relationships are, represent key drivers for research impact. The ENLIGHT Impact Literacy Survey has shown that most of researchers/research support staff respondents state they do work with other teams to support research impact, which represents a good opportunity to take advantage of.

Co-creation with Societal Stakeholders⁵

Impact happens if research is used and brings about a change beyond academia, thus it is essential to engage with societal stakeholders throughout the research life-cycle phases: from the early moments of project design, to the dissemination, uptake, adoption and use of project results.

Our universities, including ENLIGHT partner universities, are strongly anchored in a local and regional ecosystem, with solid experience of collaboration, engagement and even co-creation with external societal stakeholders. In fact, according to the results of the ENLIGHT Impact Literacy Survey (institutional mode), most universities do have expertise to support research co-creation for research impact. Likewise, most of researchers and research support staff respondents state they do work with societal stakeholders in the framework of their research impact activities. The main type of stakeholder being not-for-profit organisations and businesses. And the main type of collaboration with societal stakeholders being “collaboration as potential users of the project results”.

Available Capacities and Resources

Even though the lack of capacities and resources represent a major barrier and challenge (cfr. section 2.1 Lack of Structures, Capacities and Resources), there are several universities, including within the ENLIGHT university alliance, that have key resources driving an impact-driven research agenda.

Participants of the workshops of the ENLIGHT Impact Conference and EARMA Conference have identified as key (available) resources in some universities:

- *Provision of dedicated impact literature* (see for example, [ENLIGHT repository of good practices on research impact](#)).
- *Support Staff, Impact Officers and Knowledge brokers at universities.*
- *The availability of training resources and guidance* for the research community.
- *Financial support* to enable impactful research;
- *The alignment of recognition and rewards in context of career progression with executing impactful research.*

ENLIGHT Leadership and Platform for Knowledge Exchange and Collaboration

Impact is one of the distinctive features of the ENLIGHT university alliance. ENLIGHT's transformative mission and objective to move towards an impact-driven university have been recognised by the ENLIGHT Impact Conference participants as a major opportunity to capitalise on.

More specifically, ENLIGHT Impact Conference workshop participants have highlighted the strong **leadership** with common goals provided by the ENLIGHT governance as a great opportunity to define a common impact-driven research agenda.

⁵ By societal stakeholders we understand business organisations, policy makers and public administration, civil society organisations, citizens, etc.

According to these, the ENLIGHT alliance, bringing together 9 different research-intensive universities from 9 different regional contexts, also offers a **platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration on and for research impact**. ENLIGHT's **diversity** and the power of engaging with diverse groups provided by the alliance each bringing varied perspectives and potential for new innovative ideas developed in this environment was recognised by conference participants as an important opportunity.

The **sharing of experience and expertise** amongst ENLIGHT academics, administrative and support staff contribute to raise standards, improve knowledge and ambition in impact. Likewise, the positive benefits and increased output of **collaboration between ENLIGHT partners** invested in achieving impact and participating in impactful research was a recurring theme identified as opportunity for common research-impact driven agendas. As Esther de Smet (Senior Research Policy Advisor at Ghent University. ENLIGHT WP8 co-leader) stated: *“ENLIGHT has this great opportunity to learn from other universities that are working in the same context, because research impact is a process that is equal and common for everyone. But the context in which we do it is very different. So, learning from others, sharing that knowledge, sharing resources even, I think is the main opportunity in ENLIGHT.”*

Led by the ENLIGHT alliance, the **FOREU2 impact thematic group** has also been identified by its member alliances' representatives as a great opportunity to spread and share approaches, solutions, successful practices as well as cooperation formats and models for research-impact driven agendas, creating thus a community of University Alliances around impact and increasing the potential for common impact-driven research agendas.

3. Looking ahead

Building upon on the efforts deployed so far, ENLIGHT and its WP8 team will **keep on capturing and analysing barriers, challenges and opportunities for research impact-driven agendas** notably by:

- *Further disseminating, exploring, and adjusting the ENLIGHT toolkit for the self-assessment of Universities Research Impact Awareness, Literacy and Readiness*, in order to obtain up to date and a larger number of responses and perspectives from both the ENLIGHT and non-ENLIGHT research communities.
- *Keeping on participating in external workshops, encounters, webinars and other public events* to further strengthen the dialogue with the academic and non-academic communities and raise awareness about the ENLIGHT experiences and approaches with other networks.
- *Organising the second and third ENLIGHT Impact Conferences*, planned for March 2025 and 2027.
- *Keeping the leadership and dynamisation of the FOREU2 impact thematic group* to identify common barriers and challenges, share good practices and setup new cooperation formats and models.

The results of this exercise will be presented in a second edition of the present report in Deliverable D8.5 (*D40 - Report on the different workshops, encounters, webinars, surveys, interviews, etc. collecting and analysing the barriers, challenges and opportunities to implement impact-driven R&I agendas*) due in August 2024.

In parallel, ENLIGHT WP8 team **will keep on its efforts to foster a culture of research impact within and beyond the alliance**, helping addressing the identified barriers and challenges and capitalising on the identified opportunities. For that purpose, it will:

- *Keep on updating the ENLIGHT repository for good practices on research impact* with relevant sources and good practices in order to help raising impact awareness, literacy and readiness.
- *Launch new calls for the ENLIGHT Research Impact Awards and nominate the ENLIGHT Impact Ambassadors* with the purpose of recognising and giving visibility to research endeavors at ENLIGHT universities that are exemplars in planning for and achieving impact.
- *Launch a training programme* to improve impact literacy and readiness of ENLIGHT research communities.
- As previously mentioned, *organise ENLIGHT Impact Conferences* and keep on promoting a culture of impact-direct management through the *FOREU2 impact thematic group and other international networks*.