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# Prospective Report on the Future of Transnational Collaboration in European Higher Education

*Executive summary*

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# Prospective Report on the Future of Transnational Collaboration in European Higher Education

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Report prepared by CHEGG and CHEPS



Center for  
Higher Education  
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## Executive summary

The overall objective of the project the Future of Transnational Collaboration in European Higher Education (FUTURETRAC) – commissioned by the Directorate General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture and carried out by the Centre for Higher Education Governance Ghent (CHEGG), Ghent University, Belgium and the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), University of Twente, the Netherlands – was to gain insight in the nature and scope of European transnational collaboration in higher education and research in the near future (2030), as well as the drivers and barriers that affect the nature and scope of collaboration. Transnational collaboration was defined as a lasting relationship between two or more higher education institutions (HEIs) from different countries to achieve a shared goal or set of goals, where the HEIs remain legally independent, share benefits and management control over the performance of assigned tasks and make contributions in the education, research and third mission domain. To gain insight into the nature and scope of transnational collaboration, a literature review was carried out, key trends and developments were distinguished and a Delphi study was carried out to build a scenario on transnational collaboration in Europe 2030.

The review of the literature on transnational collaboration shows a multitude of drivers and motivations. They include: to cater for needs of students and staff, to build or sustain reputations, to improve the quality of education and research, to reach economies of scale and to reap economic benefits. Studies stress that collaboration is often driven by a combination of various drivers and that motivations or rationales may significantly differ across the domains of teaching, learning and curriculum; research and innovation; and strategic partnerships. The review also led to insights on barriers, as well as factors that enable and sustain collaboration. Complementarities and differences between HEIs are preconditions for cooperation, but at the same time constitute barriers. These barriers play out at the level of coping with different national regulations, institutional missions and strategies and organisational cultures. The literature points out that much effort and capacity (administrative, financial, etc.) is needed to make collaboration actually work. The studies analysed offer limited insights in the actual impact of international collaboration, beyond impressions and perceptions of staff, managers or students.

Key trends in the social, economic and technological domain were explored, including their potential impact on higher education in general and transnational collaboration in particular. A cross-impact analysis and futures wheel approach were used to arrive at a shortlist of the seven most important trends and developments: 1) The digital transformation of economic life; 2) Immigration 3) Ageing societies; 4) Attention for Sustainable Development Goals and interdisciplinarity; 5) Scientific collaboration and Open Science; 6) Austerity and pressures on public services; and 7) Socio-economic inequality.

The trends and outcomes of the Delphi survey were used to build a scenario for transnational collaboration in Europe in the year 2030. The scenario highlights that higher education institutions feel they can and must cooperate. The key findings regarding the scope and nature of transnational collaboration in 2030 are that cooperation will primarily take place between HEIs of similar type, status and reputation. Transnational consortia will differ significantly in size, but most networks focus on teaching and research. There will also be increased cooperation with the private sector.

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