

EERIC: European Ethics and Research Integrity Culture

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H2020-SwafS-27-2017

TOPIC : Implementing a European Train-the-trainers initiative with regard to Ethics and Research Integrity

List of participants

Participant N°	Participant organization name	Short name	Country
1 (Coordinator)	University of Geneva	UniGe	Switzerland
2	Ghent University	UniGhent	Belgium
3	French Network of Doctoral Schools	RNCD	France
4	University of Sapienza	UniRoma	Italia
5	The Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra	CES-UC	Portugal
6	University of Bucharest	UB	Romania
7	CRG	CRG	Spain
8	International Institute for Research and Action on Academic Fraud and Plagiarism	IRAFPA	Switzerland
9	Nestlé Group	Nestlé	Switzerland
10	University of Quebec in Outaouais	UQO	Canada

The majority of the team leaders have worked together on ERI for many years (UniGe, RNCD, CES-UC, UB, IRAFPA, Nestlé and UQO). The other teams have had episodic contact with the topic. For this reason the consortium can assess with confidence what is possible to accomplish and what would be unrealistic for this project.

Executive Summary

The EERIC (European Ethics and Research Integrity Culture) project seeks to answer the SwafS-27-2017 call, Implementing a European Train-the-trainers initiative with regard to Ethics and Research Integrity (ERI). The project aims at achieving a high degree of excellence that is based on the following clear and relevant objectives. First, through research, it will strive to develop a rooted understanding of why it is so difficult to embed a “virtue ethics” approach to ERI. This will help put in place a program that is grounded in reality but also takes into account disciplinary specificities as well as European cultural differences in order to implement a programme that is common to all trainers and researchers. Second, it will make a strong and relevant “train-the-trainer” course proposal. It will collect and sort the best-in-class existing trainings (maximum 100), identify the pedagogical gaps and develop the eventual missing courses. Third, this program will be delivered in an innovative way by introducing new digital practices, innovative pedagogical formats (e.g. serious games) and the “integrity champion” certification program. Finally, this program will be disseminated throughout Europe by building and enlarging (increasing the number of followers of) the EERIC e-community/culture. It will be further developed into a self-sustainable organization that will take the form of a scientific association (or learned society) at the end of the 3 years. The project will convert its hard-core followers into the founders of this association, which will have a financially sustainable business model. EERIC was not created to always be dependent upon European funds, but to be able to adapt and ensure its sustainability through the integration of new data that will emerge, new members and active actors, and through the strong involvement of its supporting stakeholders.

EERIC’s DNA lies in how it envisions the project. The EERIC consortium considers that addressing students, on the one hand, and researchers, on the other hand, requires two different approaches in terms of processes and institutional answers. Firstly, EERIC deems that trainers are not only professors, but also dissertation supervisors, research lab heads, Ph.D. students... Secondly, the interdisciplinary character and the cross-fertilization stemming from the different disciplines (medicine, social sciences...) also bring about varying as well as complementary concerns. The diversity of the EERIC consortium makes it possible to tackle these challenges. EERIC was built not to depend in the medium and long term on the structure established ex-ante during the project’s preparation. Instead, it will be able to adapt to the new data that is bound to emerge during the project. Its sustainability is guaranteed by the integration of supporting stakeholders and its network from the start. Hence, EERIC’s communication is not only a means to bring forward and to coordinate but lies at the heart of the elaboration and the production process of the project. This on-going mobilization will, in the medium and long term, ensure the sustainability of the promotion of the “virtue ethics”. Hence, EERIC is going to develop the pedagogical, academic and technological environments.

The implementation of EERIC is based on a sustainable online collaborative platform that will constitute the tangible foundation for building and embedding a “virtue ethics” approach within the European research community, mainly at the level of trainers and researchers. It will also focus on building a train-the-trainer programme and a virtue ethics culture that will instil the principles of the “European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity” within the researcher and training community across Europe. In terms of the expected impact, EERIC will promote a higher degree of consistency in research integrity practices in Europe by making its e-community the main dissemination tool and establishing it as the main European reference in terms of ERI. It will strengthen the research communities’ capacity to respect the highest ethical standards by creating a strong online community through a permanent space for learning and sharing information, experiences and questions in relation with ERI. This on-going interaction will not only build a collective intelligence around ERI but also enable researchers to adopt a “virtue ethics” approach using the tools provided by the e-community. Also “certified integrity champions” will act as onsite ambassadors for ensuring the respect and the implementation of the highest ethical standards. At the institutional level this innovation will implement new mechanisms that will drive institutional change.

EERIC aims at achieving high quality and efficiency in terms of its implementation based on 8 interconnected work packages. These are structured in a focused way around the main building blocks of the SwafS-27-2017 call: building sustainability, implementing train-the-trainer and communication and dissemination of EERIC.

1. An integrated vision of the situation

The SwafS-27-2017 call, “Implementing a European Train-the-trainers initiative with regard to Ethics and Research Integrity”, contains the word “initiative”. Giving courses about Ethics and Research Integrity (ERI) to influence individual behaviour is necessary, but clearly not enough.¹ According to Eurostat,² more than 725,000 people are involved in doctoral studies in Europe with more than 187,000 enrolling each year. Teaching ERI in a traditional classroom format, with a one-day class of 15 students maximum, would require more than 12,000 training interventions. With such a “one shot” class, one could realistically only aim to give an overview of what ethics and integrity are. It would be quite impossible to establish the roots of the “virtue ethics”.

At the same time, our academic and scientific system is mostly based on publications, and an increasing importance is given to the famous “H-Index”. In the race for productivity, unethical behaviour and plagiarism seem an attractive solution to boosting the citation index like EPO boosts sporting performance. Journal editors are increasingly receiving demands for the withdrawal of publications. The number of retracted articles is estimated at 500 to 600 per year.³ Besides talking about the economic and social costs of such misconduct and fraud, Marcus and Oransky estimate an average expense (for the US) of \$400,000 for each withdrawn article, but in some cases this can go up to millions of dollars⁴.

Fraudsters and plagiarists impact the academic system because they obtain positions and undeserved rewards to the detriment of honest researchers. They impact the readers of the articles and also all the editors of books and academic reviewers through the retractions of publications they induce. Finally, acts of fraud and plagiarism disturb society in general in that they lower the trust that society has in research and researchers.

2. Concepts

- **EERIC conceptualisation of the Virtue Ethics approach:** The first condition for developing the concept of Virtue Ethics in a broad sense is an understanding of what it means in our century, in different disciplines and in different countries. How can we communicate if we do not use the same words and the same values? This condition implies, from the beginning, an interdisciplinary approach, because the research is problem-focused and it addresses relevant social issues.
- **EERIC conceptualisation of train-the-trainer pedagogical approach:** Who is a trainer? Is he/she a professor? A young researcher explaining rules of ERI to other colleagues? Is he/she a director of a private laboratory? A reviewer? A trainer potentially being all of these, the method will consist in a bottom-up approach, with an inductive mode of both research and training.
- **EERIC conceptualisation of sustainability:** Scientists are responsible for the effects that their actions have on the environment, on social organization, on health, in short, on the human condition. All those issues are involved in a complex, globalized and uncertain world. Jonas⁵ considers that, in the context of the current transformations, we can no longer rely on our desires or our fears. The philosopher declares that the notion of responsibility should take precedence over individual morality based on personal convictions. To be sustainable, the EERIC model will introduce and develop a culture of responsibility, that is, a clear understanding of the potential risks. This responsible attitude has to be shared among all the people involved at different institutional levels (administrations, offices of university presidents, the government, public laboratories, private firms, etc.).

¹ See e.g. the recent editorial in Science <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/357/6351/531.full>

² http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Tertiary_education_statistics

³ <http://retractionwatch.com/the-retraction-watch-leaderboard/top-10-most-highly-cited-retracted-papers/>

⁴ On their website “Retraction Watch”, Marcus and Oransky indicate that for approximately 2,000 retractions, fraud is the main cause in 43.4% of cases, plagiarism in 9.8% of cases and duplication of one’s own work in 14.2% of cases.

⁵ Jonas, H. (1984) *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*: In Search of an Ethic for the Technological Age, University of Chicago Press Books.

3. Sustainability

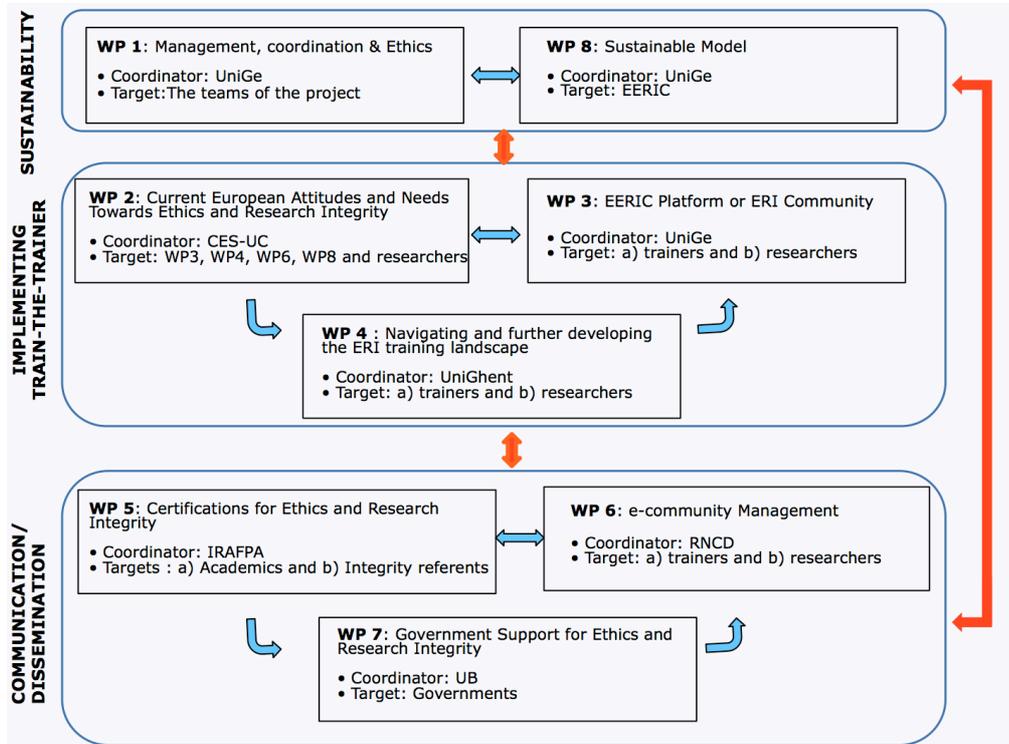
The challenge of the SwafS-27-2017 is not only “Implementing a European Train-the-trainers initiative” but is also to “establish a self-sustainable organization”. The challenge of sustainability is both financial and academic. On the one hand, it is a question of ensuring the long-term lasting quality of the EERIC project by making it possible to set up an autonomous system based on the contributions of academic institutions and the financing of ad hoc research projects. But on the other hand, sustainability must also be understood from an academic perspective. Support letters from strategic stakeholders (such as deans and presidents) confirm this positive sign of interest in a sustainable action.

The 10 teams of the EERIC consortium accepted the challenge set by the SwafS-27-2017 call because a significant sample of relevant stakeholders representing both public and private structures shares its holistic vision and agreed to form a genuine partnership to promote ethics standards in higher education and research. As part of their involvement in the EERIC project, they will select institutional documents framing the ethical issues to be analysed and assessed by member universities within the framework of the EERIC research project; they will collaborate in the dissemination of research tasks and initiatives involving the consultation of teachers and researchers via their Working Groups devoted to Research Support, Doctoral Studies, Life Science, STEM and Social Sciences and Humanities.

EERIC Supporting Stakeholders (letters are joined to this file)	
Scientific National Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COMETS, the CNRS Ethics Committee (France) • Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (Italy)
Editors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), an international association of editors
Society related academic organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences (Switzerland) works specifically towards an equitable dialogue between science and society, and they advise politics and society on science-based issues that are relevant to society
Learned societies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FNEGE (France), a consortium of all the national scientific associations (25) in the management field.
Industrial partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • URKUND (Sweden), a well-known practical tool for checking for plagiarism and for certifying the authenticity of professional texts • Nestlé Group (Switzerland), one of the EERIC teams
Research centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU-LIFE, an alliance of 13 top research centers whose mission is to promote and strengthen research excellence throughout Europe • Barcelona Biomedical Research Park (Spain), an agglomeration of six public research centers located alongside the Hospital del Mar de Barcelona
International academic consortium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coimbra Group, a consortium of 39 European universities
National academic consortia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conférence des Présidents d'Universités - CPU (France), which accounts for more than 100 French institutions • National Council of Rectors (Romania)
University partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ghent University (Belgium); Université du Québec en Outaouais (Canada); University of Lyon (France); Université Sorbonne Paris Cité (France), a consortium of 15 universities and research centers ; Sapienza, Università di Roma (Italy); Universitaria Consortium (Romania), which brings together the country's 5 main universities; Coimbra University (Portugal); University of Geneva (Switzerland).

4. The overall model of EERIC

The Work Packages are organized in 3 main areas: “Sustainability”, “Implementing train-the-trainer” and “Communication / Dissemination”. All Work Packages are interconnected as shown in the figure below. This holistic approach addresses the targets mentioned in the SwafS-27-2017 call.



WP1 is dedicated to the management, coordination and ethics of the project. The EERIC project involves 10 partners, and it will aim for its sustainability from the beginning. Hence, it is clearly necessary to drive it with the support of all the teams and the international know-how of a research project coordinator. **WP2 concerns the Current European Attitudes and Needs towards Integrity and Virtue Ethics.** EERIC will assess the current knowledge of researchers and trainers regarding the principles of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ECCRI): Reliability, Honesty, Respect, and Accountability. Using the partners’ network in the scientific community, researchers at all career levels will be targeted, in different research sectors and institution types across Europe and Canada. **WP3’s purpose is to build the EERIC platform for the trainers’ community.** It is the main technical support of the EERIC project. The e-community platform will be used to disseminate the Virtue Ethics approach. Hence, this WP is dedicated to developing and supporting innovative digital tools to train the trainers and, as such, to achieve a higher level of consistency of research integrity practices in Europe. **WP4 is about navigating and further developing the ERI training landscape.** Because the challenge of creating an efficient train-the-trainers proposal is to be understood on a large scale, across European countries, research fields and institution types, the EERIC consortium decided to give a strong pedagogical rooting to training the trainers. This pedagogical framework will be used to classify the collected training documents according to the requirements of ECCRI, and then to develop new training formats. **WP5 describes new certifications for ERI.** This WP provides certifications for “Integrity champions” and “Putting institutional action plans in place” to ensure the onsite dissemination of ECCRI. **WP6 is dedicated to Social Network and Community Management.** In order to reach EERIC’s objectives, this WP aims to implement a social-media strategy with a plan that will be updated yearly based on new findings from other WPs. It will encourage commitment to the principles of ECCRI. **The aim of WP7 is to develop a framework for government support for ERI training** at the European and national levels to fit the goals of SwafS-27-2017. Finally, **WP8 aims to develop a sustainable model for the EERIC community.** During the preparation of EERIC, various researchers and institutions already expressed their enthusiasm for joining the movement.