

TREE Incubator programme for interuniversity collaborations on transdisciplinary learning

Collaborate in the co-creation of innovative education for future generations

EWUU Education is committed to encouraging and supporting the development of transdisciplinary learning experiences beyond individual institutions. EWUU Transdisciplinary learning considers three key elements: transdisciplinary (knowledge) integration, pedagogy grounded in authentic and open-ended assignments, and co-learning by students, teachers, and professionals¹.

We offer a Transdisciplinary Education Experience (TREE) Incubator programme with organisational support, educational advice, and budget, to bring new collaborative transdisciplinary learning projects among EWUU institutions to life. We particularly invite proposals connected to topics addressed within the EWUU alliance (e.g., Circular Society, Preventive Health).

Why apply?

- **Grant:** Get the opportunity to experiment with and receive support for innovating education with Transdisciplinary Learning. Viable team proposals qualify for the innovation grant.
- **Community:** Engage and collaborate with colleagues for the EWUU institutions involved with Transdisciplinary Learning.
- **Learning:** Guided professional development in Transdisciplinary Learning and adding to the evidence-informed knowledge base of education innovation.

Who can apply?

Academic staff of EWUU institutions engaged in educating degree students and/or lifelong learners who would like to collaborate in Transdisciplinary Learning projects with colleagues from other EWUU institutions. Participants preferably have teaching responsibilities within their institution, for example, in existing and/or courses in development.

Programme outline

This programme comprises 6 steps and takes the participants from an initial idea to a funded grant proposal.

Step 1: Expression of interest

Interested colleagues with preliminary ideas for collaboration express their interest by completing the [online application](#) form before 1 April 2026.

Step 2: Intake

Applicants for the programme are invited for an intake interview shortly after their expression of interest. During the intake interview, the feasibility of the preliminary ideas will be discussed, along the following lines:

¹ See appendix 2

- The involvement of staff from at least 2 EWUU institutions to collaborate with.
- Alignment with the EWUU Transdisciplinary learning principles: transdisciplinary (knowledge integration), pedagogy grounded in authentic and open-ended assignments, and co-learning by students, teachers, and professionals.
- Potential for EWUU funding of the project and long-term feasibility.

N.B. If you are interested in transdisciplinary learning, but lack connections with colleagues from other institutions, stay tuned for TREE Sapling: a platform for connection and learning in transdisciplinary education. This training will take place in autumn 2026.

Step 3: Co-development of full proposals

During a two-day TREE Incubator programme on 1 and 2 June, participants will collaborate in the further development of their transdisciplinary learning projects. Participants will:

- Gain insights and hands-on experience in transdisciplinary education design: explore strategies and get inspired by examples of transdisciplinary co-learning in education.
- Discover surprising connections and synergies with educators from other universities.
- Transform the initial transdisciplinary ideas into joint education innovation projects ready to launch.

Step 4: Presentation of final proposals for the panel of experts

The Incubator programme will be concluded with a pitch for a panel of experts. Participants will receive feedback from the panel and will finalize their project proposal in order to receive funding.

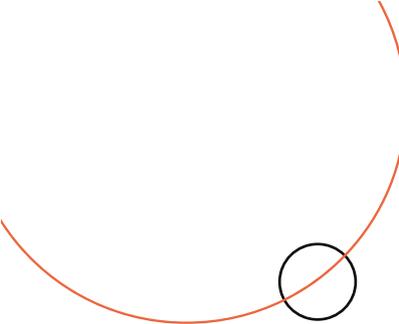
EWUU Education Innovation Grant

The EWUU Education Innovation Grant is an incentive grant to compensate costs related to the development of interinstitutional collaborations, including the involvement of external stakeholders/ co-learners. The grant is open to participants of the TREE incubator programme.

The maximum grant amount is around € 20.000,- and the total budget € 80.000,-. Grants are allocated in September 2026 and projects need to be completed before 31-12-2027.

Full proposals demonstrate the following:

- A. The project fills a need for students and lifelong learners.
- B. Integration of different perspectives from inside and outside academia in the educational activity.
- C. A pedagogy grounded in authentic and open-ended assignments.
- D. A co-learning approach (including the students, teacher and professionals).
- E. Coherent strategy for evaluation and dissemination, potentially as part of a separate EWUU Education Research Grant (see below).
- F. Feasibility regarding support and finances (of the educational activity itself).
- G. Contribution to one's own professional development in transdisciplinary education and learning.



Step 5: Budget allocation and organisational support

The EWUU Transdisciplinary Education team will support the granted projects in the organisational embedding efforts (and if needed educational advice).

Step 6: Evaluation of the project results

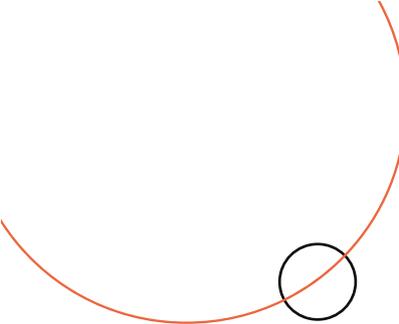
The project results will be evaluated and shared with the academic community in the EWUU institutions, in December 2027 at the latest.

Relation to the EWUU Education Research Fund

The above mentioned programme focuses on the development of interinstitutional transdisciplinary learning experiences beyond institutions for degree students and lifelong learners. In parallel, the EWUU alliance offers the EWUU Education Research Fund, which is aimed at “Adaptive expertise development through transdisciplinary education and lifelong learning”. With this funding EWUU stimulates innovative education research and strengthens sustainable collaboration across the four EWUU institutions.

While the two calls have distinct primary purposes, they are complementary in nature. Innovative educational ideas developed within the TREE Incubator may provide an interesting opportunity for education research, for example by enabling educators and researchers to study the design, implementation, or impact of new forms of transdisciplinary education together. Interested colleagues are therefore encouraged to consider applying to both calls, where relevant.

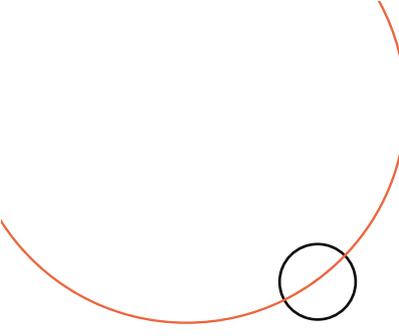
For more information about the [EWUU Education Research Fund](#) follow the hyperlink.



Appendix 1: TREE programme

TREE Incubator is the final element and most engaging part of the TREE (Transdisciplinary Education Experience) programme. The different components of TREE are not sequential and focused on different target groups:

- TREE inspiration activities, focused on encouraging colleagues of EWUU universities to get involved with TD learning (and action research?)
- TREE Sapling programme: for colleagues with limited or no experience with TD learning, who would like to feel what TD learning could bring them. This might be a first step towards interinstitutional collaborations or participation in teacher professionalisation programmes offered by TLC's in the EWUU institutes.
- TREE Incubator (advanced lab): a trajectory to support colleagues who would like to collaborate in interinstitutional collaborations on transdisciplinary learning and apply for EWUU funding. TREE incubator is exclusively meant for colleagues involved in interinstitutional collaborations, but they do not necessarily need to apply for funding (EWUU education grant).



Appendix 2:

Transdisciplinary (knowledge) integration

Transdisciplinary integration capacity within transdisciplinary learning context refers to students' ability to synthesize knowledge, methods, and perspectives not only across disciplinary boundaries but also between academic and non-academic knowledge systems to address complex, real-world problems. Unlike interdisciplinary approaches that integrate across academic disciplines, transdisciplinarity emphasizes the equal integration of knowledge from extra-academic actors, including practitioners with professional expertise, individuals with lived experience of challenges, indigenous knowledge holders, and community stakeholders.

O'Sullivan (2025) proposes a "U-shaped learning" model that conceptualizes transdisciplinary practice as requiring two core capacities: knowledge integration and actionable knowledge (closing the knowledge-action gap), both supported by the development of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competencies. Integration in this context means *creating spaces where diverse, sometimes contradictory epistemologies* (e.g. Western scientific knowledge, indigenous wisdom, tacit professional knowledge, and lived experience among others) can interact to produce knowledge that is "solution-oriented, socially robust and transferable to both scientific and societal practice." Developing such integration capacity presupposes *adaptive learners* who can recognise novel insights emerging from diverse and sometimes contradictory knowledge systems and adjust their understanding and action accordingly (Schwartz, 2024) and is positioned as essential for addressing "wicked problems" and complex societal challenges of today and tomorrow that require perspectives beyond the academy.

This requires active engagement of various societal stakeholders, from within and outside academia, a variety of social partners of all walks of life as the sources of this knowledge but also requires valuing the different sources of knowledge without hierarchy.

Pedagogy grounded in authentic and open-ended assignments

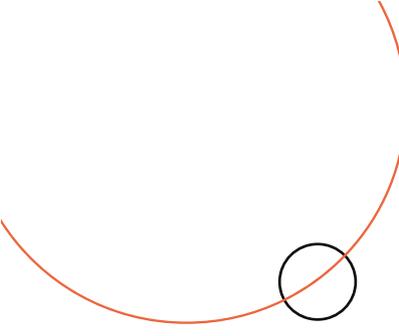
Authentic contexts create a "Community of Inquiry where individuals engage in critical debate to construct personal meaning and shared understanding," representing a constructivist approach that facilitates collaboration by offering an authentic method of inquiry for addressing real problems with knowledge embedded in social contexts (Garrison et al., as cited in transdisciplinary education research). Problems that are relevant to people's lives and communities often cross disciplinary boundaries, making them inherently engaging and conducive to transdisciplinary work (Federal STEM Strategic Plan, 2018). O'Sullivan (2025) demonstrates that transdisciplinary curricula fundamentally begin with problem identification and definition, working from real-world challenges rather than disciplinary frameworks.

Educational concepts embracing such pedagogy are referenced differently across schools of thought, institutions, and contexts. Gulikers et al. (2025) note that transdisciplinary learning itself is "an umbrella term, sometimes used as such by higher education institutions, but sometimes also going under labels such as *challenge-based learning, service learning, community-engaged learning, living labs, or entrepreneurial learning*,". Despite varied terminology, these approaches prioritize student *self-directed learning and autonomy*, employing fluid rather than fixed pedagogical structures that can adapt to the emergent, unpredictable nature of real-world problems.

Transdisciplinary learning allows students to make authentic connections enabling them to construct their own meaning and transfer learning to real-world applications, particularly when working alongside extra-academic actors who bring professional expertise, lived experience, and diverse epistemologies to knowledge co-creation.

Co-creation and co-learning

Impactful transdisciplinary work goes beyond simply integrating knowledge; it requires active co-creation across the boundaries of academic and non-academic practices through participatory approaches. Bringing together



diverse participants or perspectives alone does not guarantee co-creation or cross-boundary learning. Instead, transdisciplinary processes benefit from deliberate facilitation, ensuring that collaboration between students and external stakeholders is supported throughout (Andrews et al., 2024).

While co-creation often aims at generating new knowledge or solutions, according to Gullikers et al. the deeper goal of transdisciplinary learning is co-learning, where participants learn with and from each other while engaging with differing perspectives. This involves reflecting on one's own assumptions and crossing disciplinary, cultural, and societal boundaries, fostering both individual and collective transformation. According to Gulikers et al (2025), who synthesizes findings from various authors, participatory transdisciplinary learning environments position co-learning as a *reciprocal (and less hierarchical) process* encompassing students, external stakeholders, and potentially teachers.

Read more:

Andrews et al. (2024): [Conceptualising boundary work activities to enhance credible, salient and legitimate knowledge in sustainability transdisciplinary research projects](#)

Baggen et al. (2024): [Examining the potential of in- and extra-curricular challenge-based learning in higher education: A delphi study](#)

Gulikers et al. (2025) [Transdisciplinary learning environments that stimulate co-creation and co-learning between students and external partners: an empirical exploration](#)

Knickel et al. (2019): [Towards a Reflexive Framework for Fostering Co-Learning and Improvement of Transdisciplinary Collaboration](#)

O'Sullivan et al.: [“The role of academic and extra-academic actors in transdisciplinary challenge-based learning”](#)

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Scheartz (2024): [Achieving an adaptive learner](#)