

CUSU stance on the Open Campus

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Intro

As the Open Campus will play an important role in the development of Circle U, CUSU finds it prudent to have a clear initial vision of what we think it should include. Consequently, this paper addresses the purpose of the Open Campus, its implementation, possible features and priorities. As the Open Campus is developed and evolves, the perspectives and reasoning of course evolve with it. But, at the current stage, we consider the following points to be most important.

With international and institutional aspects clashing, now more than ever, we find it important to mention that while the universities can boost their reputation through a more internationalised profile, the main focus should be students. Our goal is to enhance their academic profile whilst creating a platform for international academic and social life and further innovation and creativity through cross-border collaboration.

General purpose of the Open Campus

The main purpose of the Open Campus is to be an integral part of the Circle U alliance and improve mobility and internationalisation. Therefore, those are, in our opinion, its 4 pillars :

Administrative backend: One of the biggest issues in the alliance stems from our great strength: Diversity. Each of our universities have different ways of handling various administrative tasks, and these bureaucratic frictions can take a lot of resources, for both staff and students. The Open Campus should act as a tool to bridge this gap, between each branch of the alliance and the member universities.

Informative platform: A key issue, regarding mobility and internationalisation, is the amount and availability of information. While each university hosting their own information platforms is a step in the right direction, it is necessary to combine and simplify the information on an alliance level.

Face and front of the alliance and the universities: Having a single front for the alliance would make it easier for us to mould the first experiences of people willing to interact with the alliance. Having multiple, different and independent access ways can become increasingly hard to maintain, update and monitor. As such, we believe having this as a single platform would make for the best experience and the clearest understanding of what the alliance is and offers.

Inclusion: The Open Campus should create an inclusive environment, where different barriers are taken into account. Barriers can be physical, but also linguistic and social and should be reduced as much as possible e.g. by translating the courses in different languages and/or in *Simple Language* and improving accessibility to the Open Campus courses. Circle U should be accessible to all social backgrounds.

How and why should students engage in the Open Campus?

It is important to keep in mind the use of the platform and how we envision and expect people to interact with it, as well as how to motivate students to do so:

A manageable and accessible source of information: The issue that many informational sites struggle with is the overwhelming amount of data and the convoluted paths to find it.

As such, the informational part of the platform has to meet the following criteria:

- **A proper search engine** - There are few things online that are more frustrating than looking for specific information and continuously being redirected to something less relevant. These occurrences can turn away potential applicants from Circle U activities and lead to a higher pressure on counsellors. As such do we consider it a worthwhile investment to build a proper search engine to help people find and filter the information they need
- **An understandable structure** - In order to efficiently use the site, it is of course important that it is intuitive. This means that there has to be logical structure and subtabs and drop down menus to facilitate filtering
- **University-specific information** - While many aspects of our universities seem trivial and familiar, it is important to remember that they can be quite foreign to outsiders; leading to confusion, anxiety and loss of resources while trying to learn it. It is therefore important that there be a series of guides for topics that students are expected to have adapted to. This includes for instance university maps, guidelines for university tools and other essential information
- **Necessary information outside university walls** - No matter how short physical mobility might be, it is important that there be sufficient information on everything from housing to local infrastructures

A course catalogue for classes beyond those on the Circle U website: The course catalogue on the Circle U website is a very good start, but we need to expand it beyond single Circle U courses.

Students should be able to find all relevant information for their course in the catalogue. Those include but are not limited to: ECTS recognition, application process, course modalities as well as exams and grading.

In order to incentivise exchange and prepare for the joint masters, it is important that a section is created for these kinds of courses and that all universities upload their courses.

This will make planning and coordinating exchanges easier.

A welcome introduction: As the face of the alliance, it is important that we consider how we present ourselves on the Open Campus. In order to engage, the alliance can't seem too

alienating and distant. We need it to be clear to students that we have offers for them and want them to get experiences through our structure. A major focus should therefore be on the design and structure of the first experience mainly through the welcome page.

How and why should staff engage in the Open Campus?

While we generally believe that staff are able to determine themselves how to best use the website, we have a few points that we consider important to the students and the staff.

Local Circle U offices: While a strong online platform is important, it is also important that there be local experts in using it to help guide both staff and students that might have issues and to coordinate between the universities.

Posting available PhD positions: Every education has an end, for some the next step after their masters degree is research and a PhD. As such, we should, as an alliance, encourage potential PhD students to look across the alliance for opportunities. This does however require that the positions be public and readily available. The Open Campus is a perfect platform to present these, both for internationalisation and for engaging ambitious students in the Open Campus

Communication: All of our universities are far apart, both on a geographical and communications level. This means that it can be hard to find who to contact and to disincentive collaboration across the campuses. The Open Campus should bridge this gap. As such, it should be possible for staff to find other staff members in the alliance through the Open Campus, and contact each other. The simple solution would be to have a shared Staff Directory in the alliance with contact information, with a possibility of filtering through the directory to find specific people you need. The Open campus could also have a backend for staff only.

Features of the Open Campus

In order to underline our multilingual approach, all features should be accessible in multiple languages. In addition, there should be a *Simple Language* version to ensure inclusiveness.

Informational site: One of the core aspects of a well made decision is the necessary information to make it. As such, it is important that we take into account the accessibility to basic and/or detailed information of the structure, the courses and other, non course-specific information. An ideal version of this universal access would be through a “Wiki U”, a platform designed as a Circle U archive and register with easy access to staff and students. It would be necessary that this wiki include CUSU information as well as a contact box to simplify student-CUSU contacts.

Application site or direct link thereto: In order to improve and encourage participation in Circle U activities, it is necessary to have a simplified gateway to their enrollment. A direct

access to registration should be found directly from the course catalogue, to prevent students from being overwhelmed by the amount of navigation steps.

Bulletin board for PhD positions:

The alliance initiatives are often created top down. In order to also develop bottom up initiatives, it is necessary to facilitate inter-university communication. The possibility to communicate across all 9 universities is one of the strengths of the alliance, and something we should use to its fullest potential. This includes facilitating professors to look for PhD students across the Open Campus.

Blackboard for both academic and student initiatives:

The Open Campus should include 2 types of blackboards to post on: academic and non-academic. The idea for the academic one is to facilitate connections and communication between students from multiple universities.

It is also not uncommon for a topic to be niche enough that it is not feasible to have courses on a single university. The alliance is an opportunity to further specialisation and academic curiosity among the students. The students themselves have the best understanding of what they crave, and as such, we should create a space for them to exchange on those topics and use this space and build upon those ideas, both by creating courses they recommend and facilitate academic student initiatives

The other blackboard should be available for students to connect and make initiatives outside the academic fields, such as for instance social initiatives and seed funding. This is not meant to be a social media, but a space where students can connect with a specific purpose.

Introduction to Circle U: As the Circle U image is still being developed across our 9 universities and new students are coming in our campuses every year, it is not uncommon for students to not only know of its detailed structure and system, but in some cases, of its simple existence. This makes a page dedicated to presenting Circle U, its dynamics and its possibilities, essential to its development.

Alliance-wide Library access: Through the Open Campus, all students and staff of Circle U should have access to the literature of other universities. This opens a wider resource-database for both students and staff, thus improving the quality of both studying as well as research.

Calendar: In order to make sure each Circle U student has the best awareness of all current student events and opportunities, we think it necessary to have a public Open Campus calendar mapping those events and opportunities. This should be conjoined with the Circle U course catalogue.

Features to avoid as of now

While considering what the Open Campus should be, it is relevant at the same time to consider what it shouldn't be, as we must know both our limits as institutions and as a cross-border entity. While many features are interesting we think that the following features

should not be prioritised due to being resource intensive to develop and with limited predicted benefits

Social features:

While social interactions are very important, the last couple of years showed us that students generally aren't interested in connections on new online platforms. It is a market that is very well covered by the tech industry and even they are struggling to create platforms that people are engaged in.

While it is a beautiful idea to connect people online, we consider it to be a huge potential drain of resources, with a very limited potential outcome.

Online courses:

While online courses are an important part of the Circle U vision, we consider it to be suboptimal to host directly on the Open Campus. They should still be at least partially relegated to other platforms that are built with that in mind. This relegation should also include links to the other university course-related resources like Zoom, Panopticon etc. The links and directions should however be included in the Open Campus.