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LEAD2 Blended Young Leadership Training Program

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Dissemination Report

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Over the past two years, the pandemic has prevented the project from physically meetings in China-EU project collaboration, however, the project has made efforts to organise online meeting and blended training program. In the autumn of 2021, from 4 October 2021 to 18 December 2021, the project has successfully organised a blended (online and offline) academic leadership training program for young academic leaders among Chinese partners and other higher education institutions. This program was incredibly exciting and gratifying for all participants. It has allowed us to explore new methods and approaches for collaborate and facilitate academic leadership development programs in such a special time.

This blended academic leadership training program aimed at Young Academic Leaders in Chinese higher education institutions (YAL Autumn 2021 Class). There were 128 registered participants (young and potential academic leaders) from 11 Chinese higher education institutions joined this blended training program. This training program was co-organized by the 12 LEAD2 project partners. The training formats include online lecture knowledge sessions, discussion and practicing sessions, MOOC learning, and F2F exchange and peer learning sessions.

More specifically, the training program includes 9 sessions of online live lectures and interactive sessions, and 2 sessions of face-to-face (F2F) workshops and exchanges of experiences among Chinese young academic leaders and European experts with experiences in academic leadership. Moreover, the participants can join the LEAD2 MOOC course in a flexible way in the meantime. The first session was about the need for university governance and academic leadership, in which why young academic leaders need to improve leadership knowledge, competencies, and learning university governance was illustrated. In the second session, leadership theories and their applications were introduced. A series of leadership theories relevant for academic leadership and the application of these theories in practices were introduced and discussed with all participants. In the third session, leadership styles were introduced, and their application and development of communication and coordination skills were elucidated and discussed extensively with all participants. The fourth session was about university governance convergence and the development of university governance structural models and changes in higher education by Prof. Liu Baocun from Beijing Normal University. The participants shared views and challenges and solutions regarding university governance in the Chinese higher education settings. The fifth session focused on the qualities and competencies of Young Academic Leadership. Leadership styles, teamwork, and empowerment of others in the context of university leadership were introduced and discussed. In the sixth session, Dr. Jie Gao from Aarhus University presented case studies related to academic leadership in international cooperation. Through practical experience sharing, case studies about the roles of academic leaders and administrators in international cooperation were analyzed and shared. These cases were vivid and presented typical situations of cooperation between Chinese and European universities. Especially the roles of academic leaders and administrators in this cooperation

process were discussed. In the seventh session, challenges and strategies for young academic leadership in cross-cultural cooperation were uncovered by Prof. GAO Yue from Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Prof. Hu Rui from Huazhong University of Agriculture. Prof. Gao analyzed the difference and challenges among European and Chinese researchers and students in the area of teaching and research. Prof. Hu analyzed the main factors that are related to the mid-level leadership development of ‘famous’ academic leaders. Challenges and innovative strategies for young academic leadership, and personal growth path were stressed in this session. In the eighth session, Prof. Jiang Wu (former executive vice president) from Tongji University shared his experiences and reflections about academic leadership development. He also raised a few recommendations for young academic leaders regarding the focuses and priorities of their academic development careers. Very importantly, Prof. Wu also highlighted the importance of how to balance the academic roles and the management roles of academic leaders. This is an important challenge for academic leaders who take up an administrative or management role. Guidance with peer-to-peer coaching regarding the academic leadership growth paths, and exchange sessions have been organized. The peer-to-peer coaching session was especially appreciated by all participants. This offered all participants close opportunities to express their doubts, challenges, and problems, and other members who act as coaches could provide support and recommendations according to the situation of the peer member. This small-group peer-to-peer sharing and peer-coaching have become a very valuable approach during this blended training program. All participants highly appreciated the peer coaching and sharing experience. At the ninth session, the academic leadership in internationalization and virtual internationalization was analyzed and discussed. As virtual internationalization has become a necessary approach for all higher education institutions, this topic is very timely to inform and improve the knowledge and skills of all training participants.

The training program members were divided into 6 training discussion groups to facilitate group discussions during each session. Each group has a facilitator to help and support the group work smoothly. This format is of considerable importance to this training program. In each session there is an action and connection session where there are several discussion questions related to the content of each session for the group members to discuss. This format gave each participant the opportunity to share their insights or discuss the content in depth.

This blended training program went very well with great success. In addition, all participants could participate in the LEAD2 MOOC on Leadership Development for Young Academic Leaders at their own pace. In this way, the participants benefited from the online live sessions, and face-to-face sessions of the training program, as well as the MOOC course. The content of each lecture was updated on the canvas platform every week. The participants can further review the course content or participate in the discussions in the MOOC forums. Those who were not able to attend live online can learn the content on the Canvas platform and participate in the discussion forums. This gives many participants more approaches and opportunities to participate in the training. This blended training ensured that participants have a very flexible learning experience, and at the same time get maximum support and interaction from the instructors and their peers.

The first face-to-face exchange session of the LEAD2 Young Academic Leadership Blended Training Program took place in Guilin on 15 October 2021, organised by Guangxi Normal University. Over 70 training participants and experts from LEAD2 partners and other Chinese universities took part in the exchange session. The participants shared their personal experiences and views regarding academic leadership development and the knowledge, skills and competences on leadership in academic contexts. All participants highly appreciated the F2F exchange and peer learning experience.

On December 17, the second exchange session and networking meeting of the Young Academic Leadership Training program and the Graduation Ceremony took place in Kunming. This event marked the successful completion of the Blended Training Program 2021 Autumn Edition. At the Kunming Graduation Ceremony, 93 graduated participants were awarded the Graduation Certificates, 10 Excellent participants were awarded the Honour Certificates, 8 Excellent Group leaders were awarded Honor Certificates, seven Excellent Group spokespersons were awarded the Honour Certificates, and six Excellent Group rapporteurs were awarded the Honour Certificates. One Special Excellent Highest-scoring participant was awarded the Honor Certificate, and 6 Excellent Group facilitators were awarded the Honor Certificates.

Regarding the certificates of completion and the certificates of excellence, the project partner Tongji University has the largest number of recipients, respectively, 38 certificates of completion, five excellent participants, five excellent group leaders and three excellent spokespersons. The project partner NAEA comes in second place, respectively, 16 certificates of completion, two excellent participants, one excellent spokesperson and five excellent group rapporteurs. The project partner GXNU has 14 participants awarded with the certificates of completion, two excellent participants, one excellent spokesperson and one excellent group rapporteurs. There are 12 certificates of completion from YNNU and one excellent participant. Eleven Participants from CUG were awarded the certificates of completion, three excellent group leaders and one excellent spokesperson. Two participants from BNU were awarded the certificates of completion, one special award of the –highest-scoring and one excellent spokesperson.

The LEAD2 Young Academic Leadership Training program not only focused on the participants from partner universities but also other participants who are interested in the training including academic leaders and staff from non-partner universities. This blended Academic Leadership Training program has not only enhanced knowledge and skills on academic leadership for individuals but also advanced mutual understanding and cooperation among Chinese HEIs. Furthermore, the program results have been successfully disseminated to a variety of universities and will provide very useful insights for future training programs for academic leadership in the context of this project.

