REPORT

"Enhancing SME Access to European Research and Technology Infrastructures: A Pathway to Innovation & Growth" - Workshop 7 June 2024

Executive Summary

The workshop on "Enhancing SME Access to European Research and Technology Infrastructures: A Pathway to Innovation & Growth," held on June 7, 2024, was co-organised by Alba Synchrotron, ELIXIR, ESRF, Euro-Bioimaging, and INESC Brussels HUB. This event brought together over 40 participants, including SME associations, industry representatives, policymakers, funders, and major European RTIs. The objective was to address the barriers SMEs face in utilising RTIs and to develop strategies for enhancing collaboration between SMEs and RTIs.

Indispensable and interdependent role of SMEs and RTIs in high value-added economic output

- Critical Role of SMEs: SMEs are recognized as the primary vehicles for innovation, driving European competitiveness by developing technological solutions to pressing societal problems. They contribute approximately 50% of value added to the European economy, highlighting their significant impact on economic output.
- Essential Role of RTIs: RTIs provide indispensable research and innovation services that are crucial for de-risking investments, accelerating innovation, and facilitating technology deployment. Their role is integral to enabling SMEs to innovate effectively and enhance their economic contributions.

Challenges faced by SMEs

- Funding and Financial Barriers: SMEs face complex funding application processes and high costs that deter engagement with RTIs. Simplifying these processes and providing clear guidance are essential steps to mitigate these barriers.
- Regulatory Barriers: Outdated and stringent regulatory frameworks hinder SME innovation, particularly in high-tech sectors like biotechnology and advanced materials. Streamlined regulatory processes and robust intellectual property protection are necessary to foster innovation.
- Knowledge and Visibility Gaps: Many SMEs lack awareness and understanding of the RTI landscape and how to effectively utilise these services. Enhanced dissemination of information and success stories is crucial to increase SME engagement.

Policy and coordination

- Holistic Programs: European and national policymakers should develop comprehensive programs that bridge academia, industry, and research facilities. These programs must address specific regional and sectoral challenges to ensure equitable access to RTIs and support for innovation.
- Strategic Integration: Better integration of RTI services with existing European funding mechanisms (missions, partnerships, European Innovation Council) is essential to create synergies and seamless transitions between programs. Engaging with industry associations, regional innovation clusters, and chambers of commerce is crucial for streamlining outreach and developing robust services.

Collaboration and networking

- Role of Clusters and Industry Associations: Clusters and industry associations are vital in facilitating SME access to RTIs. They provide a collaborative environment that fosters innovation, knowledge exchange, and development of new technologies.
- Public-Private Partnerships: PPPs enhance knowledge transfer between academia, industry, and RTIs. These partnerships drive innovation and accelerate the development and commercialization of new technologies.

Building capacity and skills

- Continuous Investments: Investments in innovation and market intelligence, procurement, process management, and legal and contractual expertise are necessary to build and maintain industry-facing RTI capabilities.
- Dedicated Engagement Roles: Roles such as Industry Contact Officers (ICOs), Knowledge Transfer Officers (KTOs), and proactive business development professionals are essential for engaging SMEs and guiding them in utilising RTI services effectively.
- Training and Capacity-Building Programs: Programs focused on technology transfer, intellectual property management, and innovation management should be developed and integrated into existing institutional frameworks. These can be delivered through customised training modules, collaborative platforms, mentorship networks, workshops, seminars, and online learning resources.

Further guidelines for the future

Embedding RTIs Across Programs: To maximise the impact of RTIs on European innovation, it is essential to integrate them into all relevant European activities and funding mechanisms. A structured approach to engaging SMEs with RTIs will ensure these infrastructures are fully utilised to **drive innovation and economic growth.**

Combining Public and Private Funding: A combined funding strategy is crucial for mitigating the risks associated with technological development and attracting SMEs to engage with RTIs. Public and private investments should be aligned to support the entire innovation lifecycle, from research to commercialization.

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On Friday, 7 June 2024, Alba Synchrotron, ELIXIR, ESRF, Euro-Bioimaging and INESC Brussels HUB co-organised a workshop to discuss the barriers and limitations SMEs face in using research and technology infrastructures (RTIs) following the Conference on Research Infrastructures under the Belgian EU Presidency. Over 40 participants from SME associations and industry sectors, European policymakers and funders and major European RTIs came together to discuss how to address these challenges and to develop collaboration tracks for SMEs and RTIs to explore how better to work together.

Background

At a point when enhancing competitiveness and innovation is becoming a major strategic issue for the European Union, this workshop on *"Enhancing SME Access to European Research and Technology Infrastructures: A Pathway to Innovation and Growth"* could not be more timely. Scientific and technological advances are key drivers of economic security, sustainable development and strategic autonomy. In the innovation landscape, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are recognised as "the primary vehicle for innovation"[1], driving European competitiveness by developing technological solutions to society's most pressing problems and providing about 50% of value added to the European economy[2]. RTIs are essential providers of research and innovation services which need to be integrated fully into European policies on critical technologies such as biotechnologies and advanced materials. RTI operations need to be oriented towards a thorough analysis and support of both academic and private sector research and innovation needs, implemented through the forthcoming FP10.

Workshop Overview

During the workshop, expert panels explored the pivotal role of Research and Technology Infrastructures (RTIs) in the European innovation ecosystem. Discussions centred on how the integration and utilisation of RTIs can significantly enhance Europe's competitiveness and strategic autonomy, particularly across the ten critical technologies identified in the European Industrial Strategy. The panels emphasised the crucial role of SME collaboration with RTIs in driving industrial transformation.

Participants provided valuable insights into the complexities of the European innovation ecosystem, which is characterised by regional disparities and diverse needs across various technology sectors. In this context, RTIs are seen as vital for de-risking investments, accelerating innovation, and facilitating technology deployment. However, significant gaps in policy, coordination, knowledge, and funding were highlighted as barriers to the optimal utilisation of RTI services by the private sector.

To address these challenges, a closely integrated and holistic approach is required. This approach must remain flexible to adapt to the rapid pace of change in high-technology sectors such as advanced materials and biotechnology. By fostering stronger connections between SMEs and RTIs, and by aligning policies and funding mechanisms, Europe can better leverage its research and technology capacities for broader economic and societal benefits.

Policy and Regulatory Landscape

Current policy developments: European and national policymakers should develop holistic programs to bridge academia, industry, and research facilities. These programs must address specific regional and sectoral challenges to ensure equitable access to RTIs and support for innovation. In addition to RTI policy, participants emphasised the need for streamlined regulatory processes, particularly in pharmaceutical legislation and GMO

[1] Updating the 2020 New Industrial Strategy: Building a stronger Single Market for Europe's recovery SWD(2021) 353 final; https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/9ab0244c-6ca3-4b11-bef9-422c7eb34f39_en?filename=communication-industrial-strategy-update-2020_en.pdf

[2] Annual Report on European SMEs 2022/2023; doi:10.2760/028705

frameworks, and robust intellectual property protection to attract private investments and ensure investor confidence.

Strategic directions for RTIs: RTI services must be better integrated with existing European funding mechanisms (missions, partnerships, European Innovation Council) to create synergies and seamless transitions between programs along the development lifecycle. This integration allows for efficient collaboration between academia, start-ups, and industries. Engaging with industry associations, regional innovation clusters, and chambers of commerce is crucial. Expanding business relations from existing industry contacts to companies with similar R&D activities can streamline outreach activities and develop robust services. Complementary RTIs should collaborate to provide mission-based and solution-oriented services.

Regulatory challenges: Complex and outdated regulatory frameworks pose significant challenges to SME innovation. Streamlined regulatory processes, particularly in pharmaceutical legislation and GMO frameworks, are necessary to facilitate easier access and compliance. Ensuring robust intellectual property protection to attract private investment and build investor confidence is a critical regulatory challenge.

Challenges Faced by SMEs

Access to funding: Simplifying funding application processes and providing clear guidance can help SMEs navigate the complexities and secure necessary funding. High costs and financial risks deter SMEs from engaging in RTI projects. Combining public and private funding can mitigate these risks.

Regulatory barriers: Stringent regulations can hinder innovation, particularly in high-tech sectors like biotechnology and advanced materials. Streamlined regulatory processes are needed to support SME innovation. Simplified and updated regulatory processes are crucial for enabling SMEs to leverage RTI services effectively.

Knowledge and visibility gaps: SMEs often lack awareness and understanding of the RTI landscape and how to utilise these services to de-risk investments and facilitate technology deployment. RTIs are insufficiently incentivized to engage in industry partnerships due to the lack of funding for necessary investments in business intelligence, process adjustments, and service tailoring. The importance was stressed for active dissemination of up-to-date information on RTI services and opportunities for industry, including the use of case studies and tailored information for industry sectors. This could exploit appropriately curated sector-specific databases where useful. Improved visibility of existing facilities and services to funders can also help to better direct strategic investments into new infrastructure services and build on existing assets.

Collaboration and Networking

Role of Clusters and Industry Associations

Importance of Clusters: Clusters play a crucial role in bringing together SMEs, large enterprises, research institutions, and other stakeholders within specific industries or technology sectors. They provide a collaborative environment that fosters innovation, knowledge exchange, and the development of new technologies. Clusters help create a critical mass of resources, expertise, and infrastructure, making it easier for SMEs to access the support they need to innovate and grow.

Facilitation of SME Access: Industry associations and clusters act as intermediaries, helping SMEs navigate the complex landscape of research and technology infrastructures (RTIs). They provide essential support services, including information dissemination, networking opportunities, and access to funding. By leveraging their deep knowledge of specific technology sectors, clusters and industry associations can translate the needs of SMEs into research service offers and collaboration projects. This helps SMEs connect with the right RTIs and facilitates the development of tailored solutions to meet their needs.

Public-Private Partnerships

Enhancing Knowledge Transfer: Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are vital for enhancing knowledge transfer between academia, industry, and RTIs. These partnerships enable the sharing of expertise, resources, and

infrastructure, driving innovation and accelerating the development and commercialization of new technologies. PPPs facilitate the co-creation of knowledge and technologies, allowing SMEs to benefit from the research capabilities of universities and RTIs while providing practical insights and real-world applications.

Building Capacity and Skills

Continuous investments in industry-facing capabilities

Innovation and market intelligence: Investing in innovation and market intelligence is crucial to keep up with the latest technological trends and market demands. This helps RTIs and SMEs identify new opportunities for collaboration and development.

Procurement and process management: Effective procurement and process management ensure that RTIs can efficiently handle projects and collaborations with SMEs. This includes acquiring necessary resources and managing workflows to meet project timelines and objectives.

Legal and contractual expertise: Having robust legal and contractual expertise is essential for navigating the complexities of intellectual property, regulatory compliance, and partnership agreements. This helps protect the interests of both RTIs and SMEs while fostering a collaborative environment.

Dedicated roles for engagement

Industry Contact Officers (ICOs): ICOs serve as the primary liaison between RTIs and industry partners. They help identify collaboration opportunities, facilitate communication, and ensure that the needs of SMEs are met.

Knowledge Transfer Officers (KTOs): KTOs are responsible for translating research outcomes into practical applications. They help bridge the gap between academic research and industrial implementation, ensuring that SMEs can benefit from the latest scientific advancements.

Proactive Business Development Roles: These roles focus on shaping the unique value proposition of RTIs and providing guidance to the private sector. They actively seek out new collaboration opportunities and work to expand the RTI's network of industry partners.

Training and Capacity-Building Programs

Technology Transfer: Programs aimed at enhancing SMEs' capabilities in technology transfer help them effectively utilise RTI services to innovate and develop new products. These programs cover the processes and strategies involved in transferring scientific discoveries into market-ready technologies.

Intellectual Property Management: Understanding and managing intellectual property is crucial for SMEs to protect their innovations and attract investment. Training in this area covers patenting, licensing, and other IP-related issues.

Innovation Management: SMEs need skills in innovation management to successfully bring new products and services to market. This includes project management, strategic planning, and understanding market needs.

Delivery of Programs

Interface: Institutions at the interface of knowledge production, knowledge circulation and knowledge commercialisation, can develop and integrate training and capacity-building programs into their existing frameworks. By leveraging their extensive network and expertise, they can tailor programs to meet the specific needs of SMEs within their regional and sectoral contexts.

Customised training modules: Different institutions, hosting RTIs and the RTIs themselves can develop customised training modules that address the unique challenges and opportunities faced by SMEs in different industries. These modules can be offered as part of ongoing professional development initiatives.

Collaborative platforms: Establish collaborative platforms that bring together academia, industry, and RTIs to co-create and deliver training programs. These platforms can facilitate knowledge exchange and ensure that the training is relevant and aligned with the latest industry trends.

Mentorship and support networks: Create mentorship programs that pair SMEs with experienced researchers and industry experts. This provides ongoing support and guidance, helping SMEs navigate the complexities of technology transfer and innovation management.

Workshops and seminars: Regularly organise workshops and seminars focused on key topics such as technology transfer, intellectual property management, and innovation management. These events can be tailored to the needs of different sectors and provide practical, hands-on learning experiences.

Online learning and resources: Develop online learning platforms and resources that offer flexible, accessible training options for SMEs. These platforms can include webinars, e-learning modules, and interactive tools that allow SMEs to learn at their own pace.

Guidelines for the Future

Embedding RTIs Across Programs: To maximise the impact of research and technology infrastructures (RTIs) on European innovation, it is essential to integrate RTIs into all relevant European activities and funding mechanisms. A structured approach to engaging SMEs with RTIs will ensure that these infrastructures are fully utilised to drive innovation and economic growth.

Combining Public and Private Funding: A combined funding strategy is crucial for mitigating the risks associated with technological development and attracting SMEs to engage with RTIs. Public and private investments should be aligned to support the entire innovation lifecycle, from research to commercialization.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Summary of Key Findings: The workshop underscored the importance of cohesive strategies and supportive policies to enhance SME access to RTIs. Addressing the identified challenges and leveraging opportunities can create a more inclusive and innovative ecosystem, driving European competitiveness and sustainability.

Actionable Guidelines:

1. **Policy Development:** Develop holistic programs that bridge academia, industry, and RTIs, ensuring equitable access and support for innovation.
2. **Enhanced Visibility and Knowledge Sharing:** Improve the dissemination of information about RTI services and success stories to increase SME awareness and engagement.
3. **Funding and Support Mechanisms:** Tailor funding programs to meet SME needs, ensuring they are accessible and aligned with industry requirements.

Implementation and Monitoring:

1. **Specific Action Steps:** Implement clear, actionable steps for policymakers, RTIs, and SMEs to enhance collaboration and innovation.
2. **Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:** Establish mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the implementation of these guidelines, ensuring continuous improvement and adaptation to changing needs.

ANNEX 1 - BACKGROUND AND FURTHER READING

European research and technology infrastructures (RTIs) significantly enhance research, innovation, and competitiveness across Europe. Enterprises, large and small, can gain immensely from the diverse array of cutting-edge services offered by the wide range of European RTIs, facilitating research inquiries and experimenting with innovative ideas, prototypes, and products. Leveraging existing infrastructures and their expertise eliminates the need for direct investments in costly instrumentation, specialised tools, or data resources. This approach opens up new avenues for innovation, for instance, in biotechnology and advanced materials research, driving progress across sectors and creating societal value. Therefore, it is vital to facilitate effective private sector access to the portfolio of European RTIs, with a special focus on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are the innovation engines of European competitiveness.

What is needed to facilitate SME uptake and usage of physical and digital RTIs

- **Access to instrumentation, digital knowledge, and data analysis tools:** Enable physical and digital access to the latest RTI cutting-edge technologies and associated unique services for SMEs - both in proximity to the SME's home site and by enabling European-wide remote and virtual access to RTI physical and digital services.
- **Development of bespoke, advanced skills**: Cultivate specific, bespoke, advanced skills that support not only technical and scientific interaction but also empower SMEs in the context of their own business and industrial needs. This ensures comprehensive capability development, aligning technical prowess with strategic business goals and fostering a deeper integration of SMEs into the RTI ecosystem.
- **Strategy development**: Promote an ecosystem where SMEs can contribute to identifying strategic priorities for RTI service development and investment decisions.
- **Centres of Excellence in innovation**: Ensure that RTIs deliver top-tier services to companies and maintain their competitiveness by enabling continuous development and adaptation of services to the needs of innovators. RTI service compliance with prevailing regulations, standards, and policies where required. This will reinforce their status as centres of excellence and drive innovation.
- **Increased visibility of RTI services:** Improve the visibility of RTI services amongst SMEs through targeted outreach and transparent service and access models. Support RTIs in their engagement with industry networks and associations and the development of a tailored service offer and access management for SMEs and industry.
- **De-risking RTI access:** Support RTIs in offering ad hoc and longer-term collaboration models through simple, harmonised access models for SMEs. Pump-prime funding for initial access, pilot, or proof-of-concept studies will allow SME researchers to assess operational and technical feasibility and the quality of provided services. This will build trusted relationships between the SMEs and RTIs and foster long-term collaboration.
- **Funding and partnerships**: Initiate specific funding programmes to help SMEs to access RTI services, integrating them with new and existing financing instruments such as Joint Undertakings, INFRA programme, Innovation Fund and challenges in the European Innovation Council (EIC) accelerator.
- **Recognition of SMEs:** Acknowledge SMEs for their use of, or contribution to, RTI resources, including engagement in Open Science practices or contributions to Open Data.

Focus on industry sectors for the workshop

The European Commission has recently published two communications on technology areas strategic to European sovereignty, security, and sustainability: *"Advanced Materials for Industrial Leadership"*[3] (27 February 2024) and *"Building the Future with Nature: Boosting Biotechnology and Biomanufacturing in the EU"*[4] (20 March 2024).

Both of these sectors of activity have innovation at their heart and an R&D intensity incomparable with other sectors. The need to stay at the forefront of scientific and technological advances by performing research

[3] https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/0fcf06ea-c242-44a6-b2cb-daed39584996_en?filename=com_2024_98_1_en_act_part1.pdf

[4] https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2024-03/ec_communication-biotechnology-biomanufacturing.pdf

activities, and the associated requirements for continuous investments into equipment and talent, poses immense financial and organisational challenges to SME innovators. Both RTIs and SMEs play a crucial role in the development but, despite significant efforts, there remains a recognised need to better understand and enhance the synergy between infrastructures and the industrial sector, especially with SMEs, a key step to boost and accelerate the initial steps of R&D in these fields.

The demand for advanced materials and biotechnologies will increase significantly in the coming years. Renewable energy, batteries, zero-emission buildings, disease prevention and control, semiconductors, medicines, medical devices, and aerospace are some of the relevant industry sectors impacted. Europe has a strong position in their development, but continuous innovation is key to ensuring technological sovereignty and strategic autonomy.

RTI services and existing European Commission support

RTIs already offer a wide range of research services and are developing further technologies and tools, through dedicated calls in the Horizon Europe work programme for research infrastructures (INFRA-SERV and INFRA-DEV). For biotechnologies, examples include canSERV, ISIDORe), food (AgroSERV) and marine biotech (ANERIS), which provide, for example, access to clinical samples and data, high-throughput screening for drug discovery, regulatory advice and trial preparation, plant phenotyping or marine sampling and genomics. For advanced materials, examples include ReMade@ARI (for circular economy-related materials) and RIANA (for nanotechnology). Service provision often includes substantial technical consultation and training of RI users, contributing to the professional development and international competitiveness of highly demanded talent.

Whilst the framework of these projects in principle allows for the use of services by SMEs, in practice, participation is generally very low due to the administrative complexity and length of procedures that do not encourage the type of short, proof-of-concept projects that SMEs need before entering a long-term relationship with RIs and constitute a mismatch between the effort required for applications versus available funding that discourages cost-conscious companies. Pilot access SME schemes in RI project CALIPSOplus and LEAPS INNOV have shown the value of supporting SMEs in using synchrotron light sources with almost 50 SMEs benefiting from a low-barrier and rapid access.

RTIs are well suited to mitigate some of the early investment risks of SMEs:

- **High-performance tech and tools:** RTIs provide immediate access to the latest high-end technology and tools, as well as highly trained, multi-disciplinary, and multi-national staff with an in-depth expertise that can be exploited across the board in the industry. This skill, technique and instrument set can relieve SMEs from the need to develop their own capacities for activities outside their core competencies and to invest in highly expensive state-of-the-art technologies and instruments, thus de-risking exploratory early R&D.
- **Cost effective high-throughput:** RTIs can provide high-throughput and cost-effective characterisation and analysis methods, in-operando and in-situ characterisation, enabling large-scale sample libraries to be scanned with input directly to industrial design, manufacturing and control processes.
- **Triple-helix engagement:** RTIs are embedded in a functional broader innovation ecosystem of universities, research institutions, start-up networks, and technology clusters and respond to stakeholder societal drivers, thus giving SMEs access to the latest knowledge, data, and trends.
- **European initiatives, regulatory frameworks, and standards:** RTIs operate in an extensive framework of European initiatives (e.g., EOSC, Open Science, Open Data), and some RTIs follow compliance with regulatory frameworks, quality assurance, and control, European policies, and standards. RTIs can, therefore, not only advise companies on the correct implementation of their project but also support them in accessing and exploiting the growing number of public resources such as data repositories, virtual access, and cloud-compatible data tools.

Further reading:

- European Commission's communication on “Advanced Materials for Industrial Leadership”: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_1121; https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/0fcf06ea-c242-44a6-b2cb-daed39584996_en?filename=com_2024_98_1_en_act_part1.pdf

- European Commission's communication on "Building the future with nature: Boosting Biotechnology and Biomanufacturing in the EU" https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_1570; https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2024-03/ec_communication-biotechnology-biomanufacturing.pdf ESFRI reports on RI access and cooperation with industry,
- Commission takes action to boost biotechnology and biomanufacturing in the EU
- TI workshop folder and Discussion paper
- ELIXIR open data report
- Materials 2030 Roadmap, December, https://www.ami2030.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2022-12-09_Materials_2030_RoadMap_VF4.pdf
- "The TamaTA Programme Presents: Why SMEs Need Light Sources: Advanced Composites, Food Safety, Recycled Rubber and More" https://zenodo.org/records/10137788
- Annual Report on European SMEs 2022/2023; doi:10.2760/028705

ANNEX 2 - EXAMPLES OF RTI RELEVANCE TO BIOTECHNOLOGIES AND ADVANCED MATERIALS

High-performance imaging for biotechnology: The development of new imaging biomarkers, probes, and data analysis solutions, often in close collaboration between academic labs, biotech SMEs and spinouts, has led to an enhanced innovation cycle in recent years. Research needs directly feed into development, and resulting finished products are then returned back to the research institution for routine use, transferred to other fields, or from research applications to clinical diagnostics. Here, RTIs can provide an early testbed for new products and applications, allowing validation with both service providers and end-users as a way of market testing while also constituting a group of early technology adopters that can create wider market visibility through their service provision.

Translational imaging for drug development: Translational imaging biomarkers (exemplified by the use of positron emission tomography (PET) probes in the brain) enable the assessment of novel drug target engagement in relevant preclinical models and the translation of this biomarker paradigm to studies in man. This approach can provide crucial information on the relationship between drug dose and response during the early clinical stages of drug development, as well as supporting precision medicine approaches for early phase trials ("the right dose in the right patient at the right time"). Crucially, RTIs can provide access to the required academic and clinical expertise for imaging biomarker translation to spin-out and SMEs engaged in drug development, improving confidence in drug development pipelines.

Semiconductor innovation and development: Semiconductors are central to almost all areas of societal challenge, sustainability, and sovereignty, and Europe requires a strong semiconductor ecosystem. Starting with the investigation of new materials presenting high performance, chip design (including high power semiconductors), prototyping, testing, and, finally, bringing the product to market, RTIs can provide a powerful boost to drive and speed innovation. Each step presents challenges that can only be overcome with synergies among experienced actors in this field. Within this ecosystem, RTIs provide (for example) advanced and high-throughput materials characterisation, radiation hardness testing, access to clean rooms and pilot FAB lines, as well as expertise in semiconductor design and development.

Additive manufacturing: Smart methods of manufacturing increasingly rely on additive manufacturing (AM) processes as used in aerospace, health, dental, and construction. AM processes depend upon the raw materials (fresh or recycled), process conditions, and the precision required. These infrastructures offer access to state-of-the-art equipment, such as advanced 3D printers and materials testing facilities, enabling researchers and manufacturers to experiment with new materials and refine printing processes. Their multidisciplinary teams can support the development of novel additive manufacturing techniques that optimise precision, reduce production time and minimise material waste. Further, RTIs provide access to characterisation methods that scan for micro-defects in AM products, supporting process perfection and product quality control.

ANNEX 3 - WORKSHOP AGENDA

Enhancing SME Access to European Research and Technology Infrastructures – A Pathway to Innovation & Growth

10:20 **Welcome and meeting objectives (Ricardo Miguéis, INESC)**

10:30 **Insights from guest panels of policy makers, industry leaders and RTI strategists**

10:30 **Panel 1 - Current policy landscape and SME R&D&I needs**

(Moderator: Ricardo Miguéis, INECS; co-moderator: Claudia Pfander, Euro-BioImaging ERIC)

Panellists: Dominik Soubczak, European Commission; Nuría Valls, ALBA Synchrotron; Nikolaj Zangenberg, Danish Technological Institute, José Peres, EuropaBio

11:20 **Panel 2 - Added value of SME-RTI collaboration, access challenges and visibility**

(Moderator: Claudia Pfander, Euro-BioImaging ERIC; co-moderator: Ricardo Miguéis, INECS)

Panellists: Kristina Eskenazi, Health and Life Sciences Cluster Bulgaria; Bernd Hinrichsen, Momentum Transfer; Izhar Ul-Haq, STFC-UKRI or Alastair Gibbons, BBSRC; José Luis Martínez, ESFRI; Gaëlle Decroix, RITIFI Coord/CEA; Erik Fernández, INEUSTAR

12:00 Networking lunch

13:15 **Breakout groups to develop practical solutions to enhance SME access and use of RTIs**

- Role of policies, incentives and support frameworks (moderator: Andrew Smith, ELIXIR; rapporteur: Ricardo Miguéis, INESC)
- Marketing and communications to SME communities (moderator: Anne-Charlotte Joubert, Euro-BioImaging ERIC; rapporteur: Ed Mitchell, ESRF)
- Matching RTI capacities and skills to SME needs(moderator: Claudia Pfander, Euro-BioImaging ERIC; rapporteur: Nuría Valls, ALBA)

14:30 Coffee break

15:00 Rapporteur feedback and discussion

15:45 Key take-aways and next steps

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