



Europe's Universities  
Shaping the Future  
EUA Strategic Plan



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# Foreword



The European University Association (EUA) is the collective voice of the universities of Europe, institutions that have shaped our world for a millennium. Our members exhibit extraordinary diversity in age, institutional missions, governance, scale and modus operandi, but they are all sensitive to change, adapting continuously to sustain relevance, excellence and success. By creating knowledge, by handing it down to successive generations, and by upholding the values that define our rich European culture, universities have invented, inspired, taught and trained in the service of society.

In the 20 years since it was founded, EUA has established itself as one of the largest and most influential university collective bodies in the world. Our membership comprises over 800 universities from 48 countries, as well as national rectors' conferences (NRC) from more than 30 countries; it encompasses 1.8 million staff supporting over 18 million students on their learning paths, conducting outstanding research and serving their local societies. Through our representational role and through the services we provide, the EUA leadership, working groups and Secretariat support our members in their commitment to excellence in learning, teaching, research, innovation and community engagement, optimising efficiency, discharging accountability and ensuring timely responsiveness to emerging opportunities and threats.

In 2020, the need for strong universities has never been greater in addressing societal challenges – the Covid-19 pandemic and other public health crises, climate change, resource scarcity, ageing populations, migration and managing artificial intelligence among many examples. The need for bold, cohesive, collective action across European universities is unprecedented. As the major forum for pan-European university decision making, as the platform for sharing university institutional best practices, as the 'eyes and ears' of higher education in Brussels, and as the voice of the sector in influencing public policy and opinion, EUA has the opportunity and responsibility to grow its impact.



We present here an outline of the goals embraced by EUA, our values and the principles that will guide the actions of our membership, leadership and Secretariat. They have been arrived at through extensive consultation with members, external stakeholders and staff. They will inform the development of operational plans to deliver these goals, subject to annual review by the Board to ensure relevance in the face of rapidly changing circumstances. The plan will succeed through active, committed, energetic partnership between members, NRCs, the Secretariat and leadership and will be evaluated by measures of impact.

We would like to express our gratitude to all those who have contributed to the consultation process: the 660 survey respondents from 385 universities in 44 countries, the EUA Board and Council members, the secretaries general of 24 NRCs, and representatives of European and international associations. In addition, nearly 20 interviews were conducted with key European and international actors to review EUA's past performance and to seek guidance on our future trajectory.

Special thanks go to Professor Peter-André Alt (President of HRK, the German Rectors' Conference), Professor Paul Boyle (Vice-Chancellor of Swansea University, UK, and EUA Vice-President) and Professor Snježana Prijić Samaržija (Rector of the University of Rijeka, Croatia), who joined us in overseeing the consultation process and drafting the strategy.

Finally, we are deeply indebted to Dr Andrée Sursock who led the consultation process, conducted many interviews, distilled the feedback and, through generously sharing her experience and wisdom, guided the drafting of the plan.

**Professor Michael Murphy**  
President

**Amanda Crowfoot**  
Secretary General

## OUR VISION

Strong universities for Europe

## OUR MISSION

Supporting our members to excel in the service of society

## OUR VALUES

EUA protects and promotes the values of universities: academic freedom, institutional autonomy, freedom of speech, integrity, inclusivity, diversity, equality and equity, sustainability, solidarity, promotion of creativity and critical thinking.

In its daily work, EUA further upholds service to members, professionalism, openness and transparency.

## OUR GOALS

- ◆ Effective advocacy, impacting public policy in order to enable members' success
- ◆ Timely and reliable identification of emerging opportunities, as well as threats to society and our sector
- ◆ An Association that is alert and responsive to the needs of members, committed to solidarity and collective actions
- ◆ Understanding the practices and capacity of our members to address societal needs and optimising this capacity through collaboration and sharing of good policies, practices, expertise and resources



A close-up photograph of hands building with colorful LEGO bricks. The scene is lit with a cool blue light, creating a focused and creative atmosphere. The bricks are in various colors like red, yellow, blue, and green, and are being assembled into a structure. The background is blurred, showing more of the building process.

# Setting the context

For two decades, EUA has played a key role in reshaping European higher education and has become a trusted source of expertise among global peers. Through the Bologna Process we facilitate the growth of a common European identity for the sector, influencing policy while members implement common educational structures, quality and accountability processes and mutual recognition of awards. We support and promote the mobility of students and staff across our multicultural, multilingual continent. The Institutional Evaluation Programme and the Council for Doctoral Education introduce and underline good practices in many facets of university life.

EUA's research policy work has made the Association a 'go-to' expert body at the European level and beyond. Our learning and teaching activities have restored parity of esteem between learning and research and have attained Bologna Ministerial endorsement. Our work on the Salzburg Principles and Recommendations has defined doctoral education in Europe. Our activities around 'Smart Specialisation', innovation, and graduate attributes help our members to adapt research and teaching programmes to evolving demands, in dialogue with society. Our observatories on funding and on institutional autonomy, as well as our regular surveys on numerous topics, provide invaluable benchmarks to governments, national agencies and members. We play a key role in building university communities across the whole of Europe, and in creating a coherent system for European research and higher education. EUA is truly the premier voice for Europe's universities.

The Association's third decade will be more demanding. Societies are changing, and the speed of change is accelerating. Globalisation is fostering uniformity while technology and demographic trends are creating complexity and diversity. The world is facing enormous challenges, but growth in knowledge is providing a wealth of potential solutions. Universities, as creators, transmitters and deployers of knowledge and culture, are crucial to the wellbeing and sustainability of a global society. The scale of today's global challenges and opportunities demands that as a sector we collaborate and cooperate to a degree that is unprecedented in history. To do that, we must have a fit-for-purpose European platform where we pool our wisdom in horizon scanning, strategising, communicating with power holders and shaping public discourse. We must share our experiences and expertise to optimise creativity, research, learning, innovation, governance and operations, across all of our campuses, both real and virtual.

As great societal upheavals challenge our members' ingenuity as never before, artificial intelligence impacting all we do, we are also braced for breathtaking developments in learning (distant, digitalised, lifelong, student-centred approaches, microcredentials), research (Open Science, global virtual laboratories, data-driven research, integrity assurance) and innovation (deeper partnerships with business, cultural, civic and public actors). Members are likely to have to engage with new governance arrangements, regulatory frameworks, funding models and accountability practices.

To serve the needs of all members and to enable the sector to be as effective as possible within this landscape, EUA must do more, do it better, do it quickly and do it sustainably. We must also maximise the 'added value' of what we do by prioritising our activities and making best use of our resources. It is in this context that we commit to the following 'leading actions' in the coming years.



# Our leading actions

## PRIORITY 1: EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

Impact on public policy is a key responsibility of the Association. Armed with persuasive evidence, we will:

- ◆ position the Association as the definitive expert body in Europe on the transformational role of universities in society, including the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), our responses to the European Green Deal and the part we play in innovation ecosystems.
- ◆ enhance communication to Europe's political, media, public administration, civic, business and cultural leaders about the collective views of our members on emerging opportunities and threats to our society, the actions to be undertaken and the potential of our sector to address them.
- ◆ promote to European leaders, both in the EU Institutions and at national level, the legislative, regulatory, funding, governance and structural reforms necessary to address Europe's higher education and research needs and to create and optimise the environment for universities to be successful. We will emphasise the need for respect for our members' values and autonomy, as well as sufficient resourcing.
- ◆ take the lead in Europe in defining the future of universities, setting out a vision for the sector and representing members in European debate. We will influence the development and implementation of EU funding programmes and policies of direct and indirect relevance to universities, to ensure that these are accessible, efficient and impactful.
- ◆ enlist support from the representative bodies of other sectors in society that may be effective advocates for our university mission, including student, business, and labour organisations.

## PRIORITY 2: HORIZON SCANNING

The success of any societal sector is forged through early detection of impending change and astute planning to manage it. To ensure that we are alert, responsive, resilient, flexible and agile, we will:

- ◆ survey and consult regularly with our member universities to identify trends and developments across the sector; engage with those charged with horizon scanning and strategic planning to establish collective needs and concerns as they emerge.
- ◆ engage continuously with our external stakeholders to identify, in a timely fashion, emerging political, economic, civic, cultural, industrial and technological change, as well as ongoing evolution in expectations of our sector.
- ◆ consult regularly with peer associations and relevant bodies in other global regions on their perceptions of emerging trends.
- ◆ give high regard to monitoring the impact of digitalisation, artificial intelligence and Big Data on the world of work, on learning and teaching, on research, on governance and on management.

## PRIORITY 3: EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY

Solidarity is a fundamental value of EUA and to implement this we will:

- ◆ map capacities of the national rectors' conferences across the continent, identifying and sharing good practices, and supporting those with developmental needs so that they, in turn, better support their member universities.
- ◆ monitor and influence European policies and programmes, including Horizon Europe, Erasmus + and the European Universities Initiative, to ensure that they bolster European solidarity, including beyond the borders of the EU; promote investment of European Structural and Investment Funds in universities as key infrastructure in developing regions.
- ◆ embrace the concept of 'distributed excellence' in order to narrow research and innovation gaps in Europe. Distributed excellence is achieved when all regions and member states are capable of participating in global research activity in a competitive way, at least in some selected fields. Achieving this requires public investment and reforms by those with modest innovation performance, and proactive engagement in mentorships and partnerships by those with stronger research performance.
- ◆ share experiences, expertise and solutions, particularly in the face of emergencies and unforeseen challenges, to ensure that members can benefit from the support and innovations of others from across Europe; collaborate beyond Europe on matters where global solidarity is needed.

## PRIORITY 4: ENABLING ENHANCED PERFORMANCE

Society expects excellence in all facets of university endeavour. To support our members to be the best they can be and to have the necessary agility to respond to change and thrive in the face of global challenges, we will:

- ◆ defend our common university values, institutional autonomy and academic freedom at all times.
- ◆ champion all academic disciplines, as well as interdisciplinarity; celebrate parity of esteem for learning and teaching with research and innovation within our institutions, ensuring that novel and effective learning and teaching approaches are continuously shared among all members.
- ◆ enhance awareness of member institutions' capacity in governance, academic and operational leadership and management, and design activities that highlight good practices, share expertise and enhance these capacities.
- ◆ promote policies and procedures to support Open Science, to sustain academic integrity, and to uphold enhancement-led quality assurance frameworks while combating harmful consequences of spurious rankings.
- ◆ identify and share good practices in shaping academic careers, addressing gender imbalance, sexual harassment and under-representation of minority groups.
- ◆ encourage university practices that are inclusive, promote European identity and focus on developing all students as ethical, critical and creative thinkers and contributors to society; support the broadening of access to university and the diversity of our communities, catering for students from all backgrounds.
- ◆ reinforce societal relevance and impact as key drivers of institutional agendas.







# Our way of working

EUA is a membership organisation created by and for the universities and national rectors' conferences to magnify the societal influence and impact of their work through collective action at European level. Its elected leadership (the Board), advised by the Council (NRC representatives), and its professional staff (the Secretariat) take their direction from the members.

The Board, supported by the Secretariat, is charged with formulating the policy positions of the Association, informed by intelligence gathering and consultation with members and experts. The Council also ensures that current national and European policy issues, as well as international trends, are discussed and shared across the membership. The Secretariat designs and delivers services to meet the needs of the members.

Building on two decades of experience and responding to opportunities and demands that grow in scale and complexity, EUA now commits to redesigning some of its working practices.

## **ROLE OF NATIONAL RECTORS' CONFERENCES**

We will ensure better collective knowledge in the Association of the diversity of European higher education and research systems, and of the breadth of challenges faced by members. This will require enhanced, two-way communication and reporting methods, as well as real or virtual visits to individual NRCs by EUA leaders and staff.

NRCs will play an active role in setting the agenda for the Association, deepening engagement with our members and ensuring that the issues addressed are those that are most important to them at any point in time. In order to fully involve them in activities, and to make use of their wealth of experience for the benefit of all members, we will invite NRCs to take on specific tasks on behalf of EUA, with the endorsement of the Board and in cooperation with the Secretariat.

Alongside consolidating the role of the NRCs within EUA, we will ensure that individual members remain consulted and engaged, particularly in those countries without a collective member.

## **COMMUNICATION AND DELIVERY MECHANISMS**

Aware that the external world acts at an increasingly fast pace, we will adopt new methods and technologies to accelerate decision making. We will embrace new technologies and platforms in the delivery of our services to members and engagement with the wider community, for example by increasing our offering of online events and by exploring ways to make these as interactive as possible. We will take full advantage of the opportunities presented by social media to disseminate and communicate, while recognising the diversity of the recipients of our information and ensuring that we also continue to support traditional formats.

At the same time as increasing the number of virtual events, we will review the formats of our physical meetings to ensure that they add real value to the work of our members and provide exceptional opportunities to forge relationships, to share knowledge and to debate policy. Our annual General Assembly will act as a flagship forum for exchange between university leaders, and our Annual Conference will engage and benefit individuals and institutions across the sector.



## COLLABORATION WITH OTHER ASSOCIATIONS

Niche university groupings, comprised predominantly of EUA members, have emerged in recent decades to take collective positions on specialised areas. We will work with them where appropriate in order to effect maximum efficiency in addressing common challenges (such as Open Science, academic values, the Green Deal and SDGs) and to ensure that the universities of Europe present a cohesive, coherent input to society. Furthermore, we will endeavour to design platforms within the Association that will serve the collective needs of subgroups of members pursuing common specialised agendas.

## EUROPEAN AND GLOBAL ISSUES

EUA pledges to focus primarily on policy issues that are shared across the European continent. We will not avoid important issues because they are controversial, or not consensual. Where consensus is not possible, EUA will speak up on issues in a timely manner, by clarifying, highlighting and identifying the various aspects that they raise, thus contributing to deeper understanding.

While the Association will predominantly address themes of wide-ranging interest to its members, identified through consultation with them, we will also undertake a small number of activities aimed at specific segments of the membership that lack the capacity to deliver those activities individually.

Recognising that the missions of our member universities are global in scope, serving society not just locally but around the world, we will grow our collaboration with our peer global university organisations in pursuit of maximum impact and efficiencies.

## LONG-TERM AND SHORT-TERM ACTIVITIES

We will distinguish between those of our actions that are enduring, on which EUA will work continuously, and those that relate to issues of particular relevance or urgency at a specific point in time, or where our contribution is focused on an explicit short-term objective. This will be implemented through the increased use of 'task and finish' groups, bringing together experts from across the membership to work with the Secretariat on agreed priority topics, with the expectation of timely and concrete outcomes. These groups will be set up quickly in situations where speed is essential and will be disbanded once their work has been completed.

## OPERATIONAL PLANNING

In order to implement this Strategic Plan effectively, and to manage the work of the Association efficiently, we will develop annual operational plans together with a set of rules of procedure. These will set out the concrete actions that we will take in meeting these pledges, will provide a basis on which we can measure our progress, and will set a framework for how we will work together collectively in pursuit of our goals.

Finally, we will test all our ways of working to ensure that, at all times, we respect the objectives of the SDGs.



The European University Association (EUA) is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 48 European countries. EUA plays a crucial role in the Bologna Process and in influencing EU policies on higher education, research and innovation. Thanks to its interaction with a range of other European and international organisations, EUA ensures that the voice of European universities is heard wherever decisions are being taken that will impact their activities.

The Association provides unique expertise in higher education and research as well as a forum for exchange of ideas and good practice among universities. The results of EUA's work are made available to members and stakeholders through conferences, seminars, websites and publications.

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