

25 years of the European University Association

Shaping European higher education and research since 2001

October 2026



25 YEARS **eua** EUROPEAN
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ASSOCIATION



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25 years of the European University Association

Shaping European higher education and research since 2001

2001

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25 years of the European University Association



**Josep M. Garrell,
President of EUA**

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of our Association, this is a great opportunity to look back on where we came from and what we have achieved, while also planning for

the future. This publication is designed to shine a spotlight on some of the key achievements and developments during this time, and to show how EUA, and indeed the university sector and the broader European landscape, have evolved over the last quarter century.

To this end, we invited 25 people from across the EUA family, including members, leaders, staff and external partners who have worked or engaged with EUA at different points in its journey, to reflect on their experience. Each contribution highlights a particular milestone – some closely linked to EUA, others to EUA's contribution to significant European or global events and developments.

We hope that the publication you are about to read gives you a sense of what EUA is about and what it does, while evoking some memories for those of you who have accompanied EUA on any part of its journey. We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed to this publication and to all those who participated in the activities featured here, as well as any we were unable to include due to space constraints. History and institutional evolution are built on major decisions and events, but also on the small details of daily life. Everything contributes to shaping history; our history and that of the European university sector, which have evolved together over time.

“History and institutional evolution are built on major decisions and events, but also on the small details of daily life.”

My sincere appreciation goes to all the people who have contributed to this evolution. At a time when the world stands at a crossroads, we must remind ourselves of the vital contribution universities make to European society and the values we uphold.

Looking to the future, our new **Strategic Plan**, published before summer 2026, sets out our ambition for EUA's next chapter: to celebrate our achievements while reaffirming our identity as the most comprehensive body representing universities in Europe. As it has for many years, EUA's work remains rooted in its vision: strong universities for Europe. This vision depends on the contribution of each and every one of you.

We look forward to the next 25 years and to working with you all towards our shared ambition of building a brighter future.

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Eric Froment

The creation of EUA

2001

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At the turn of the millennium, two organisations represented Europe's university sector:

- The **Conférence des Recteurs Européens** (CRE), founded in 1959 and based in Geneva focused on providing services (e.g., the Institutional Evaluation Programme) to its 400 member universities on both sides of the Iron Curtain.
- The **Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences**, established by 15 national rectors' conferences in 1995 and based in Brussels to follow and influence EU higher education and research policies.

These two organisations were working in the same area, had overlapping membership and were competing for funding following the European Commission's emerging interest in higher education development. Nevertheless, discussions about a merger began in January 1998 and the final agreement was reached three years later, in November 2000.

Some actors didn't believe in the merger. They simply expected "opportunities for greater efficiency and some immediate financial savings". Others, aware of the weight that the future association would carry, wanted to preserve within

EUA the characteristics of their own organisation and their conception of Europe (i.e. the then 15 EU Member States, the 29 signatories to the **Bologna Process**, or even beyond).

In the end, compromises were made. The agreement was reached but not celebrated. The merger created the European University Association, with the new name reflecting the shift from an association of rectors to one of universities, and constituted a transition council "to propose candidates for the office of President and membership of the Board".

On 31 March 2001, the members of the newly merged association elected a Board and a Council at EUA's **Constitutive General Assembly in Salamanca** and sent a political message to the Prague meeting of Bologna Process ministers coming up in May of that year.

Leaving Salamanca, the Board and President knew that many fundamental decisions had to be taken to make EUA a reality. Should EUA be based in Brussels or Geneva? Who should serve as Secretary General and staff the Secretariat? How would the initial deficit be solved? What should the main lines of action and agenda look like?

These issues were resolved within the first two years, as EUA grew from strength to strength.

Eric Froment participated in the merger discussions as CRE Board member (1994-1998) and as representative of the French Conference of Presidents (1998-2000). He was elected in Salamanca as founding President of EUA (2001-2005). Previously, he was President (1991-1996) and Professor of Economics (1973-2011) at Université Lumière Lyon 2, France. He also served as Chair of the EQAR Register Committee (2012-2017).

Policy to strategy: 25 years of R&I evolution

2001

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Paul Boyle

The EUA Research Working Group was established in 2001, chaired by Professor Luc Weber (University of Geneva). In 2006, it was renamed the Research Policy Working Group (RPWG) and has provided a forum for EUA to discuss research and, latterly, innovation policy and priorities. This was particularly important after the European Research Area concept was established in 2000, marking a clear shift in the evolution of the Framework Programmes. The group met regularly for another 19 years, providing advice and insight into the changing R&I environment in Europe.

As Vice-President and member of the EUA Board, I was privileged to take on the role of chair of RPWG in 2019. The group provided a buoyant forum, led by Lidia Borrell-Damián's dynamic and tireless work, where we learned much about Commission policy and, in particular, the changing foci of Horizon Europe funding. After Lidia's move to Science Europe, Stephane Berghmans was appointed as the new Director of Research and Innovation in 2020. It was during this period that we decided to build on the strengths of RPWG and refocus into the Research and Innovation Strategy Group (RISG), with four key changes:

- The group should proactively formulate positions on EUA R&I strategy and policy for all topics of relevance to European universities, based on strategic horizon scanning and policy review.
- There would be more focus on Task and Finish Groups, rather than relying entirely on long-standing committees – the T&F Group on the EU Research and Innovation Framework Programme, chaired by Astrid Söderbergh Widding and created to position the university sector's [strategic vision and recommendations for FP10](#), was an excellent example of this work.
- The group should have clearer oversight of the R&I subcommittees that had been running within EUA for many years to ensure that the work was well aligned.
- Our new approach would be captured in the first [R&I strategy](#) developed by EUA, to provide greater direction and clarity to our work. This dynamic strategy would be updated as appropriate in the future. It is heartening that other EUA committees, such as the Learning & Teaching Steering Committee, have followed this lead by developing a clear [strategy](#) for their future work.

It was a privilege to be involved in this evolution in thinking, which demonstrates how EUA can adapt effectively to the needs of its members.

Professor Paul Boyle has been Vice-Chancellor of Swansea University in the UK since 2019. Prior to this, he was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leicester and Chief Executive of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). He has served as Vice-President of EUA and Chair of its Research and Innovation Strategy Group (RISG).

Alexandra Bitušíková

It was a sunny but freezing day in early February 2005 when the first European Bologna Seminar on doctoral education got under way in picturesque Salzburg, Austria. Around 300 academics, university leaders, doctoral candidates and policymakers participated in the event, with the aim of discussing doctoral education in Europe. As an EUA doctoral education manager, I was involved in co-organising the event together with the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and other partners. And, of course, I was very, very nervous about managing the task.

I remember intense discussions that lasted late into the night, often marked by strong disagreement. In the end, the participants reached a shared agreement that became known as the [Salzburg Principles](#).

The 10 basic principles, grounded in broad consensus, may appear very general today, but reaching an agreement on them was far from simple. The process revealed the remarkable diversity of European academic and research traditions, while also demonstrating the importance of further communication and cooperation on perspectives and practices in doctoral education.

As a social anthropologist, I have always been aware of the significance of cultural differences and similarities. Nevertheless,

witnessing such diversity within Europe's intellectual and academic environment was a new experience for me. While there was broad agreement that the essential component of doctoral education was original research, the other principles generated lively and sometimes controversial debate. Arguments such as "it is impossible to change this in my country/discipline" or "it has always been like that" were common during these first international discussions on doctoral education.

A wide range of views emerged on issues such as recruitment and admission, supervision, credits, learning outcomes, doctoral theses, public versus viva defence, the composition of final examination committees, and the professionalisation of doctoral education.

The 2005 Salzburg Principles laid the foundation for the European – and soon global – academic debate on doctoral education and the need for reform in a changing world. They also paved the way for what would become the EUA Council for Doctoral Education in 2008.

But that is a different story.



Alexandra Bitušíková is Professor of Social Anthropology and Head of the University Centre for International Projects at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. From 2002 to 2017, she worked at EUA, where she played a central role in the establishment of the Council for Doctoral Education in 2008.

Building a stakeholder-driven quality assurance framework

Andrée Sursock

The European quality assurance (QA) framework is largely stakeholder-driven, and EUA has played a leading role in shaping it. EUA pursued two tracks to ensure that universities could credibly contribute to the development of this framework and were prepared to respond to national and European strategic aspirations.

The first track was directed at EUA members and consisted of the **Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP)** and the Quality Culture project. IEP was developed in 1995 by CRE at a time when only four national QA agencies existed in Europe. The Quality Culture project was launched in 2002 to strengthen universities' responsibility for internal QA. The political aim was to pivot from a burdensome and costly system of external programme evaluation to an institutional evaluation approach that would strengthen institutional autonomy.

Through these two initiatives, EUA gained solid experience that allowed it to pursue a second track. In May 2003, it presented the outline of a QA framework to European policymakers, which included: (i) a code of principles for external QA; (ii) a higher education quality board to vet QA agencies; and (iii) an annual QA forum to share good practices. Between 2003 and 2007, these proposals were further developed by the E4, a group comprising representatives of students, higher education institutions and QA agencies. The proposals became part of the EHEA framework as the **European Standards and**



“The European QA framework has endured, and its success can be credited to the E4’s shared commitment to quality in higher education.”

Guidelines (ESGs), the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) and the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF).

Three points are worth highlighting. Firstly, the ESGs require QA agencies to consider the internal QA processes set up by universities, thus enshrining universities' responsibility for their own quality. Secondly, EQAR, the only formal legal organisation created in the context of the Bologna Process, is governed by a board composed of E4 representatives. The EQAR Register Committee, which takes decisions on the registration of agencies, includes independent QA experts nominated by the E4. Thirdly, by bringing together QA agencies, students and institutions, EQAF reinforces the notion that the promotion of quality is a shared responsibility.

The European QA framework has endured, and its success can be credited to the E4's shared commitment to quality in higher education. For EUA, this experience confirmed that pursuing two mutually reinforcing types of activities – strengthening universities and leading on policy proposals – was a winning combination for living up to its motto: “Strong universities for Europe”.

Andrée Sursock is Senior Adviser at EUA. She serves on several university and scientific journal boards and, on behalf of the French government, on international juries overseeing major university investments. From 2001 to 2009, she was EUA's Deputy Secretary General and contributed to the European QA framework. She holds a PhD in anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley.



A tribute to Lesley Wilson

No publication marking the 25th anniversary of EUA would be complete without honouring Lesley Wilson, who turned the nascent European University Association into a strong and influential European organisation. As EUA's first Secretary General, she brought exactly the profile and experience required at that foundational moment: a deep understanding of diverse higher education systems and cultures, knowledge of European institutions and processes, and, perhaps most importantly, a genuinely European outlook.

Lesley's European experience and identity went far beyond the norm for her generation. Scottish by birth, she lived and worked in different parts of Europe, including Germany, France and Italy, and spent time in Romania during the country's transition from Communism. This profound Europeaness was not only part of her background; it drove everything she did. She recognised and

valued Europe's diversity, and believed strongly in the role of universities for building a more connected Europe.

Lesley established EUA as the coherent voice of universities in the Bologna Process, based on evidence and knowledge of its membership; indeed, no-one should talk for universities without understanding them. She also recognised early on the importance of research and innovation, which she embedded as core elements of EUA's mission, and honed strong and durable relationships with partners beyond Europe.

Lesley had an exceptional ability to bring people together behind a common cause: strengthening universities and higher education systems and developing their European dimension. She built EUA from a small Secretariat into an expert organisation, recruiting the right people



at the right time and fostering the quality for which EUA became known.

Her ability to build genuine connection across borders, institutions and communities left a lasting mark on EUA and on European higher education. Her colleagues from the EUA Secretariat, the national rectors' conferences and her many friends and partners from across the university community in Europe and beyond wish to express their profound gratitude for everything she did.

Lesley Wilson held the post of Secretary General until 2019. She now lives in the UK.



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The road to establishing the EUA Council for Doctoral Education

2008

“The Council for Doctoral Education...paved the way for a common understanding of doctorates in Europe.”

5



Georg Winckler

In 2001, when EUA was founded, European universities were challenged by two policy actions. First, the Bologna Declaration of 1999 stated that ministers “expect universities... to respond promptly and positively”. Yet ministers did not acknowledge universities as key stakeholders. For example, EUA and other stakeholders were excluded from the final meeting in Prague in 2001, when the communiqué of the Bologna Ministerial Conference was adopted. Second, the Lisbon European Council Presidency Conclusions of 2000 (“the Lisbon Strategy”) mentioned universities as critical for establishing the European Research Area (ERA), but called for “modernised” institutions. The outstanding question was what role universities would play in shaping the “Modernisation Agenda for Universities” that subsequently emerged at European level.

It was in this context that EUA emphasised the importance of doctoral programmes. Including these programmes in the Bologna Process would strengthen the role of universities, as doctorates were their *proprium*. Together with Eurodoc, EUA stressed the role of PhD candidates not as students, but as early-career researchers, essential to the Lisbon Strategy.

The 2003 Bologna Ministerial Conference in Berlin signalled a turning point. In the future, a board – including EUA in a

consultative role – would oversee the work of the Follow-up Group. As an additional action, the doctoral level was included as the third cycle in the Bologna Process, emphasising the importance of research and research training and linking the European Higher Education Area with ERA.

In pursuing this additional action line, EUA was in lead position at the 2005 Bologna Seminar in Salzburg, titled “Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society”, which EUA organised with the Austrian and German ministries. The draft committee for the conference, consisting of two people from EUA and one representative each from the Austrian and German ministries, drew on previous EUA studies to formulate 10 Salzburg Principles advocating for structured and professionalised doctoral training for which universities would take responsibility at institutional level.

The 2005 Bergen Ministerial Conference unanimously approved the Salzburg Principles. EUA was invited to deliver a report on the topic for the 2007 ministerial meeting in London. This report was prepared during a 2006 conference in Nice titled “Doctoral Programmes in Europe”. Building on this report, and supported by the London Ministerial conclusions, which encouraged EUA to help institutions implement “innovative doctoral programmes”, EUA established the [Council for Doctoral Education](#) in 2008, which has since paved the way for a common understanding of doctorates in Europe.

Georg Winckler has served as EUA President (2005-2009) and Vice-President (2001-2005). He studied economics at Princeton and Vienna (PhD, 1968). He has been Professor of Economics (1978-2011) and Rector (1999-2011) at the University of Vienna, Chair of Universities Austria (uniko) (2000-2005), a member of the European Research Area Board (2004-2012) and President of the ERSTE Foundation (2011-2019).

Building on the achievements of the Bologna Process to launch the European Higher Education Area

Jean-Marc Rapp

On 11 and 12 March 2010, I had the honour, as EUA President, of presenting the results of a study on the 10-year implementation of the Bologna Process and European universities' vision for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to the European Ministers of Education in Budapest and Vienna.

This was an opportunity to celebrate the great achievements of the Bologna Process, such as the widespread introduction of the three-cycle degree structure, reported by 95% of respondents, and the creation and implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESGs), which had been drafted by the stakeholders, i.e. European associations representing agencies, higher education institutions and students (ENQA, EUA, EURASHE and ESU).

For other aspects, such as the social dimension, mobility and recognition of credit transfers, the assessment was more nuanced. EUA was clearly calling for the strengthening of the student-centred learning approach and greater efforts to address these challenges.

However, beyond an analysis of the Bologna reforms and their implementation in the EHEA that was being launched, the focus of my presentation was on the methods used and how they could be

strengthened – that is, through the involvement of all actors, including students and institutions, in policy discussions and the implementation of change.

Indeed, compared to other areas of European policies, the Bologna Process was unique in its approach: dependent on non-binding legal instruments (commonly adopted declarations by ministers) and enriched by stakeholders' input. In other words, it was an improbable success deriving from strong dialogue and weak legal enforcement at the European level.

On a more personal note, I had the chance to experience this “Bologna-style” approach during the train journey between Budapest and Vienna! Due to some unexpected events during the trip, the short session between the EUA President and then Commissioner for Education Androulla Vassiliou from Cyprus that was planned for the journey turned into a long, friendly and fruitful discussion. I will always remember this moment as a symbol of the spirit behind the building of the EHEA: flexible, informal and efficient.



Jean-Marc Rapp was President of EUA from 2009 to 2012. He is Honorary Professor of Law and former Rector of the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. In Switzerland, he has chaired the Swiss Rectors' Conference, Euresearch and the Swiss Accreditation Council, while in France, he has chaired the international jury in charge of selecting IdEx programmes (2011-2022).

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The first steps towards a European model of university autonomy

2011



Liviu Matei

Over its 25 years, EUA has made concrete contributions to the development of policy frameworks supporting the work of universities in Europe. One of the most consequential of these was the [Autonomy Scorecard](#). Developed by a small team from the EUA Secretariat – remarkably young at the time, having only recently been established – and in collaboration with representatives of the Board and member organisations, the Autonomy Scorecard is not merely a transparency or monitoring tool; it has also articulated a European model of university autonomy.

This model has been implemented in practice with considerable success. Other regions of the world have also used it as a reference point.

The model has been further strengthened in Europe through its formal codification within the European Higher Education Area, in the form of a statement on institutional autonomy adopted at the 2024 Ministerial Conference in Tirana.

“The Autonomy Scorecard is not merely a transparency or monitoring tool; it has also articulated a European model of university autonomy.”

Being part of the Scorecard’s development was a remarkable experience. As a young academic, I had the opportunity to witness how a policy model develops – not that I was fully aware at the time that this was what was happening – and to make a small contribution to the process. Not everything was planned algorithmically by the team. We were not always entirely sure where we were going, and clearly not everything turned out perfectly in the end. As with any ambitious policy initiative, significant risks were involved – for EUA, for the individual members of the project team and for the cause at stake: promoting university autonomy. The well-balanced composition of the team, which brought together senior university leaders, higher education professionals, academics and EUA staff, contributed to the initiative’s success. Whatever their commitment and wisdom, however, these qualities alone would not have been sufficient. The extensive and well-organised consultation with stakeholders both within and beyond EUA helped enormously.

Liviu Matei is Professor of Higher Education and Public Policy and Head of the School of Education, Communication and Society at King’s College London, UK. He is also Vice-President of the Magna Charta Observatory and Director of the Global Observatory on Academic Freedom.

“The role and mission of an institution such as EUA will be even more relevant in the coming 25 years.”

From observatory to authority: EUA's growing expertise in funding and system steering

Pedro Teixeira

The establishment of EUA took place at a time when institutional autonomy had become a centrepiece of policy debates and higher education regulation in Europe. Unpacking its different dimensions, including financial ones, has therefore been a cornerstone of EUA's activity over the last 25 years.

The trend towards greater autonomy has also been reflected in the funding mechanisms of European higher education. Nonetheless, it has posed challenges, notably through the pervading influence of economic rationales and incentives on funding reforms. Funding systems have increasingly incorporated incentives to drive institutional behaviour, reflecting a shift towards market-oriented and performance-driven models.

Higher education has taken on a central role in public policy, though this increased visibility has also brought pressure. Therefore, the reforms implemented since the early 2000s have emphasised output-based or performance-oriented funding, where allocations depend on outcomes, with the aim of increasing accountability and aligning institutional activities with national priorities. These trends have eroded the very institutional autonomy they were supposed to promote.

The work developed within EUA on funding systems has been essential for mapping these changes and their interplay with various

dimensions of the higher education system and institutional governance. The year 2012 represented a specific milestone in this process. Several initiatives kicked off that year, including the **Public Funding Observatory**, the **DEFINE project** to explore **funding mechanisms across Europe**, and the first Funding Forum, which all contributed to an understanding of funding trends and their implications. Moreover, the initiatives provided a comparative framework for these trends at European level and raised awareness of developments at management and policy levels.

A puzzling aspect of these trends is the limited sectoral response and the apparent inability of most higher education institutions to react to them. The normalisation of competition, between and within institutions, has become a defining feature of the sector, making collective advocacy and coordinated responses to policy challenges more difficult. As a result, the sector's reaction has often been fragmented or muted, with limited collective resistance or strategic engagement.

This shows that the role and mission of an institution such as EUA will be even more relevant in the coming 25 years. One would hope that EUA's future work will contribute to a renewed understanding of institutional autonomy, based on more cooperative behaviour, expanding universities' substantive degree of autonomy and mitigating the trend towards greater state interference.



Pedro Nuno Teixeira is a Professor of Economics and Rector of the University of Porto (2026-2030). He was Director of the Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies (2009-2022). He has also served as special adviser to the President of Portugal on Higher Education, Science and Economic Affairs (2016-2022) and Secretary of State for Higher Education in the Portuguese Government (2022-2024).



Michael Gaebel

In 2015, over one million refugees, mainly from Syria, arrived in Europe. State authorities were unprepared and the situation fuelled anti-immigration sentiment, but it also led to a wave of solidarity, including universities. A few news stories highlighted universities' engagement, but there was no systematic overview.

Therefore, EUA launched the “[Refugees Welcome Map](#)”, an interactive online tool allowing universities and other stakeholders to share their initiatives. By 2018, it had showcased a kaleidoscope of 400 initiatives in more than 30 countries: from aid for those on the road, to provisional accommodation on campus, legal and translation services, cultural events and, of course, access to higher education for students and staff, including adjusted recognition procedures and language and bridging courses.

The initiative illustrates universities' capacity to take action, drawing on their transdisciplinary knowledge and skills, international outlook, infrastructure and people willing to engage. According to data, many initiatives kicked off by individual staff and students evolved into permanent programmes and contributed to institutional change.

For EUA, the map led to exchange and collaboration with members, as well as with other organisations, such as Scholars at Risk Europe, the Alexander von

Humboldt Foundation, France's PAUSE programme, DAAD and UNIMED, and with different parts of the European Commission.

The Commission did not immediately adopt our joint suggestion for dedicated grant programmes for students and academics. But its continued project funding support for our work helped lay the foundations for what became the [MSCA4Ukraine](#) scheme in 2022, just a few months after the Russian invasion. This was followed by [SAFE](#), a pilot providing grants to researchers at risk globally, which will hopefully become a permanent programme under the next Horizon programme. A broad European alliance of organisations provided the concepts for these initiatives, but credit for their implementation goes to the European Commission, in particular Claire Morel and her team, and the European Parliament, with the initiative led by MEP Christian Ehler. It is a fine illustration of Europe's potential.

What started as a rather niche, ad hoc and temporary activity has become a key matter for universities and policymaking. In June 2026, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of our annual meeting of organisations that support what we prefer to call “[international talent with an at-risk background](#)”. By now, many of these talents have established careers with research bodies, universities and European enterprises, as well as having contributed to rebuilding their home countries.

Michael Gaebel is Director of Higher Education Policy at EUA. Before joining EUA in 2006, he worked in higher education cooperation and development in the Middle East, the former Soviet Union and Asia.

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Launch of the European Universities Initiative

2017

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Vanessa Debiais-Sainton

2017 marked not only the 30th anniversary of Erasmus+, but also the birth of the **European Universities alliances**. My team had already begun exploring, with a handful of universities, how higher education cooperation could move beyond mobility towards deeper sustainable and structural impact. Then came **President Macron's Sorbonne speech**, proposing European Universities alliances, and with the support of DG EAC's leadership, under Commissioner Navracsics, we moved quickly to widen these early discussions to the whole higher education community. Two months later, heads of government at the European Summit of Gothenburg endorsed the idea.

Many were sceptical at first. That is why we organised an unprecedented co-creation process, helping to shape the strategic objectives of something genuinely new and impactful for future generations. EUA's willingness to bring the critical, yet constructive, voice of its 800 members to the process has been instrumental to carry the initiative through.

Almost a decade on, I am positively impressed by what has grown from those early conversations: 73 alliances, bringing together nearly 650 higher education institutions and millions of students across Europe, are transforming the landscape from within. They prepare graduates for the jobs of

"EUA's willingness to bring the critical, yet constructive, voice of its 800 members to the process has been instrumental to carry the initiative through."

tomorrow with a speed and scale no single institution could match, connecting education to innovation and research to build knowledge ecosystems at continental scale – turning excellence into competitiveness and prosperity. They link universities into long-term integrated systems, grounded in academic freedom and standing as guardians of our democratic values. They are, I believe, best placed to make the "fifth freedom" of the single market a lived reality.

Their strength lies in a combination that individual institutions or ad hoc partnerships cannot replicate at scale: long-term strategic alignment, shared governance, shared outputs and trust. This allows them to pool capabilities – shared infrastructure, expertise, resources that stretch public and private investment further – and capacities, from joint degree programmes to microcredentials, across borders. A lot of progress can still be made, so that many more students can benefit, including by reforming existing programmes. Still, that critical mass is what positions alliances to translate European excellence into sovereignty and global leadership, and to make Europe the place the world's top talent chooses.

None of this would have taken the shape it did without EUA's steady partnership from the very first, uncertain days – and I am glad that it has continued over the years.

Vanessa Debiais-Sainton is Head of Department for the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and Support to Experts at the European Research Executive Agency.

With two decades of experience in EU policies and programmes, she has shaped initiatives such as the European Universities alliances, driven major programmes like Erasmus+ and coordinated the Union of Skills agenda as a member of Executive Vice-President Roxana Minzatu's Cabinet.

**The information and views set out in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Institution.*



David Crosier

Translating Bologna Process commitments into institutional practice

For more than two decades, EUA has periodically provided an institutional perspective on developments in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) through its [Trends reports](#).

In 2018, for the first time, the [Bologna Process Implementation Report](#) (BPIR) directly integrated data on learning and teaching from EUA's [Trends 2018](#) survey, with figures analysing measures to develop teaching skills, requirements for academics holding teaching responsibilities, trends regarding digital learning, and methods to assess and improve teaching in higher education institutions (HEIs).

This was an important step forward for the BPIR, as it made it possible to explore not just how far Bologna commitments were being translated into legislation and policy documents, but also how HEIs were responding to the changing European higher education landscape.

The BPIR aims to present an overview of how reforms are shaping the EHEA, drawing on publicly available evidence provided by national authorities and statistical agencies. However, for anyone interested in exploring the impact of the Bologna Process on European higher education, this “official data” has its limitations, which can be crudely summarised as the gap between what exists on paper and what is experienced in reality. The value of integrating Trends survey data

lies in its ability to provide a more complete picture of how Bologna reforms have been perceived within universities.

This is particularly relevant for higher education reforms related to teaching and learning. Here, national legislation provides a framework, but HEIs have to make sense of the concepts at play at European level, such as qualifications frameworks, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), Diploma Supplements, and joint/European programmes and degrees. For example, only evidence from HEIs can provide a realistic assessment of progress in implementing learning outcomes and the extent to which transparent learning outcomes have been developed. This perspective from HEIs therefore provides an important counterpoint to national-level information on topics such as progress in the implementation of these Bologna tools.

EUA's Trends reports therefore constitute an important evidence base for the BPIR. An understanding of the EHEA needs to be based on both national-level information and evidence coming directly from HEIs. In 2018, at the [Paris Ministerial Conference](#), and partly as an outcome of this more comprehensive thinking embedded in the BPIR, the central question within the EHEA shifted from “Have the Bologna reforms been introduced?” to “Have the reforms produced meaningful and positive changes to institutional practice?”

David Crosier managed Eurydice, the EU's education information network, overseeing its higher education studies from 2008 until his retirement in 2026, and producing the BPIRs for the EHEA Ministerial Conferences. David worked closely on all European-level higher education policy issues and was involved in many European Commission-led policy developments over the last two decades. Before joining Eurydice, David worked for EUA, where he was responsible for various projects on different aspects of Bologna Process implementation and managing Trends reports. He was also co-author of [EUA's Trends V](#) publication.

A breakthrough in EUA's work on scientific publishing

2018

12



Lidia Borrell-Damián

The *EUA Big Deals Survey Report – The First Mapping of Major Scientific Publishing Contracts in Europe* (2018) was a breakthrough publication at EUA. At the time, the overall costs and provisions of the so-called “Big Deals” contracts between universities or regional/national consortia and publishers were a black box – there were no known previous studies at European level in this area.

EUA based this activity on the *Amsterdam Call for Action on Open Science* (2016) and the *EUA Statement on Open Science to EU Institutions and National Governments* (2017).

At the time, a major goal was to achieve full open access in the scholarly publishing system by 2020 and more transparency regarding the costs. My colleagues Rita Morais, Julian Bauer and I embarked on this project to estimate, for the first time, how much money every country represented by EUA was spending on scholarly publications in these Big Deals with publishers.

The project was initiated by the EUA High-Level Group on Big Deals, composed of highly skilled professionals negotiating with publishers. The EUA Expert Group on Science

2.0 / Open Science, chaired by Professor Jean-Pierre Finance, oversaw the project, while the EUA National Rectors' Conferences (NRCs) strongly supported it.

The first study provided a rough estimate of the expenditure of European universities with Big Deals contracts – around half a billion euros per year. Due to the limited sample, Rita Morais, Lennart Stoy and I collected more comprehensive data from a larger sample. The resulting *2019 Big Deals Survey Report. An Updated Mapping of Major Scholarly Publishing Contracts in Europe* revealed that a staggering one billion euros were being spent per year on publishing contracts by universities and regional/national consortia. This was estimated to represent only 11% of the total expenditure, as article processing charges (APCs) were not included. At that time, APCs were seen as a potentially important instrument for the transition to full open access. The situation has evolved a lot since then, however, and the most novel practices nowadays are working to avoid APCs.

The two projects together shed light on the important role of academia in shaping the scholarly publication system and prompted actions to explore more and better ways to facilitate open access, such as ‘read and publish’ agreements. Importantly, internal discussions within EUA were reinforced and created a community of practice and mutual support that remains in place today.

Since 2019, Lidia Borrell-Damián has been Secretary General of Science Europe, an association representing national organisations that fund and perform research in Europe. From 2006 to 2019, after many years at university and with experience in the business sector, she worked at EUA, including as Director for Research and Innovation in the final five years.

“The Secretariat team is, and always has been, highly international.”

A turning point for EUA's work to shape the future of universities

I joined EUA as Secretary General in 2020, taking the reins from Lesley Wilson, whose essential contribution to the establishment and success of the Association we highlight on pages 14-17.

It was a privilege to join such a dynamic and dedicated team, and it is a pleasure to have the opportunity to reflect on the development of EUA and its Secretariat over this quarter century.

The first EUA Annual Report, published in 2002, shows that the Secretariat had a total of 20 staff members by the end of its first year of operation. At the time of writing, EUA has 43 staff members, complemented by a number of external advisors. This growth reflects not only the increase in membership over the intervening years, but also the significant expansion of the topics on which EUA works and the activities that it undertakes.

The Secretariat team is, and always has been, highly international. Its current workforce comes from over 20 countries, across Europe and beyond. This is important, as it provides crucial linguistic and cultural diversity, helping to foster links across Europe, allowing us to understand national contexts and challenges, and strengthening the support that we can consequently offer to our members, the wider higher education community and society.

Over the 25 years, more than 220 people have been employed by the Association, in addition to advisors and trainees, meaning that we now have a diaspora of 'EUA alumni'. Many individuals remain in Brussels, or connected with European affairs, while others have moved on to different roles across the globe. EUA therefore has an extensive network of friends and ambassadors amongst its former staff, including within universities, EU institutions, governments and associations.

Since 2001, EUA has operated in both Brussels and Geneva, the latter being the home of EUA-CDE and EUA-IEP. In 2010, in response to the growth of the Association, EUA moved into its permanent Brussels premises, which provides the base for the majority of EUA's advocacy and other activities.

Aside from operational issues, 2020 also saw the publication of the first EUA strategic plan, [Europe's Universities Shaping the Future](#). This set out our vision for strong universities for Europe, and our mission to support our members to excel in the service of society. Since then, the document has guided the Association, and indeed the work of its Secretariat, and provided the foundation for our new [Strategic Plan](#), released in 2026.

Amanda Crowfoot

Amanda Crowfoot is Secretary General of EUA, responsible for leading its Secretariat. She has over 20 years of experience in Brussels, first as a European Advisor and then as Director of the UK Research Office, and subsequently as Director of Science Europe. Before that, Amanda worked at several UK universities.



Responses to the Covid-19 pandemic 2020



Lewis Purser

As the Covid-19 pandemic spread rapidly across the world in the first few months of 2020, the immediate focus for European universities was naturally on their own students and staff, within the emergency public health frameworks that were rapidly evolving in each country.

As campuses across most of Europe suddenly emptied and teaching moved online, with students and staff based at home (or their student residences), so did inter-university cooperation. With almost no travel possible, national and European networks continued their work online, incorporating new and urgent topics into their usual agendas, such as how best to enhance online teaching and assessment, ensure research continuity, maintain student engagement and attempt to “keep the show on the road” while the pandemic raged.

Long before a vaccine became a realistic proposition, EUA was using its network to help promote information sharing and the identification of good practices. This led to a [survey of National Rectors' Conferences](#) at the start of the 2021-22 academic year to provide a comprehensive overview of the ongoing impacts of Covid-19 on European higher education. The resulting report was helpful in

“EUA was using its network to help promote information sharing and the identification of good practices.”

assisting with policy discussions and the evolution of practice across European higher education systems.

A second EUA publication, this time a [briefing](#) note in April 2022, distilled the strategic responses to the pandemic, including work to preserve student enrolment, retention and well-being, and EUA began to look to the future regarding potential lessons. Apart from the exponential growth of online learning and the need for a basic research base to develop adequate responses to this once-in-a-generation societal challenge, these lessons included the importance of institutional values, universities' contributions to society, and the need for higher education to continue being seen as a public responsibility across Europe.

These resources helped encourage the resilience of the university sector during those difficult times, and likewise provided nourishment for novel institutional and sector-wide responses to the many challenges thrown up by the pandemic. While work is still ongoing regarding optimal online learning and teaching, and in particular how best to support student well-being, the lessons learned during the pandemic have helped underpin a durable recovery in European higher education.

Lewis Purser is Director for Learning, Teaching & Academic Affairs at the Irish Universities Association. He worked at EUA from 1998 to 2005, and with several UN agencies from 1992 to 1997. He is a graduate of Trinity College Dublin and the Graduate Institute of International & Development Studies at the University of Geneva. Lewis has contributed to EUA's flagship IEP initiative since 1998 and is a member of the EQAR Register Committee.

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A vision for 2030: Universities without walls

2021

“We wanted to define our own future rather than reacting to visions from elsewhere.”

15



Michael Murphy

“Get your retaliation in first”. This immortal advice from Irish rugby captain Willie John McBride to his Lions teammates before a game in South Africa in 1974 should be engraved in stone at Avenue de l’Yser 24. The publication of *Universities without walls* as a common vision for the decade, developed by universities and for universities, was, of course, a pre-emptive strike to shape the European Commission’s higher education strategy, which was quietly maturing within DG EAC over the course of 2020-2021. We wanted to define our own future rather than reacting to visions from elsewhere. When the European Commission’s “*European Strategy for Universities*” ultimately emerged in 2022, a year after the *Universities without walls* vision was published, it certainly looked familiar!

Universities without walls ultimately enjoyed much broader impact than simply influencing policy texts. With over 9,000 downloads and 75,000 Twitter impressions, it set a record as the most accessed EUA document of the digital era. ChatGPT (yes, I know!) estimates that perhaps 45% of universities in European Alliances cite it in their strategic plans and that its ideas have become standard language in European university strategy.

That it was compiled at all was remarkable. In 2020, Covid was upending life across the planet and EUA itself was in flux. Following 18 years at the helm, Lesley Wilson had unexpectedly retired, Amanda Crowfoot was barely through the Secretary General’s door and the Secretariat was sizing up the unusually hands-on new President. The Board was grappling with *EUA’s first formal strategic plan*, while the buzzword in the global media was “resilience”; given these circumstances, a second major project would certainly test the resilience of the Secretariat. But when the going gets tough, the tough get going. *Universities without walls* was researched, drafted, stakeholder-tested, Board-endorsed, Council-approved and published within 12 months.

I make few claims to *Universities without walls* ownership, but I do claim its title! On another locked-down Zoom meeting with the Secretariat in July 2020, I glanced across Baltimore Harbour in West Cork at the roofless ruins of a 15th-century Franciscan monastery on Sherkin Island. Only walls and friars’ graves remain. Our members’ fate in this virtual reality-dominated world? A serendipitous sign to reimagine universities for a resource-depleted, overheated era? Perhaps “universities without walls”?

Michael Murphy is Chancellor of the National University of Ireland. He previously served as President of EUA (2019-2023) and of University College Cork (2007-2017). He has spent 56 years in the university sector in Ireland, the UK and the US –first as a student, researcher, teacher and clinician in medicine, followed by 25 years in university leadership.



Annick Castiaux

2021

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An agenda for innovation for a sustainable future

I have been collaborating with EUA on innovation for almost ten years, representing Belgian rectors in the Expert Group on Innovation (EGInno). Participating in this group is extremely valuable, both as an individual researcher whose topic is innovation management and in the context of my leadership responsibilities at the University of Namur. The discussions during our meetings and the surveys led by EUA on the topic have helped me better understand the role of universities in local innovation dynamics. In particular, contextualising this role in different geopolitical and economic environments once again highlights the importance of a strong connection between universities, governments and economic actors.

“Universities must enhance dialogue with all stakeholders in society and ensure that they themselves engage in this dialogue to build a better future.”

Such a connection is fundamental to enhancing the role of “universities as key drivers of sustainable innovation ecosystems”, as the [EUA survey report on universities and innovation](#) was titled. This was probably my most engaging experience with EUA. This analysis led us to propose [an innovation agenda for universities](#) that we continue to update in light of Europe’s new challenges.

Among the priorities of this agenda, I want to underline the role of universities as honest brokers in innovation for a sustainable future. It is, more than ever, a duty and a challenge in today’s difficult contexts. Universities must enhance dialogue with all stakeholders in society and ensure that they themselves engage in this dialogue to build a better future, affirming their specific role in ecosystems through scientific rigour and integrity.

Annick Castiaux is Rector of the University of Namur in Belgium and a member of EUA’s Expert Group on Innovation. With a background in physics, she worked as a consultant in information management in the private sector after completing her PhD, before returning to academia in 2002 to focus on teaching and research in innovation management.



Olusola Bandele Oyewole

A defining strength of higher education is its ability to solve global challenges through collective action. Beyond individual institutions, this principle extends to the organisations that represent them, as demonstrated by the creation of the [Global University Associations Forum](#) (GUAF).

For the [Association of African Universities](#) (AAU), participating alongside EUA and peer associations from around the world has highlighted the value of engaging as equal partners. For us, GUAF has never been simply another international network. It provides a trusted space for regional associations to share their distinct experiences, build common ground and speak with a collective voice. Whether on academic mobility, digital transformation or the role of universities in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the conversations have been enriched by the diversity of perspectives around the table.

Our relationship with EUA has been especially valuable because it is built on mutual learning rather than one-way exchange. European universities have shared insights from decades of policy development and cross-border cooperation, while African universities have contributed practical experience in expanding access, fostering innovation under constrained resources and aligning higher education with rapidly evolving societal needs. This complementarity has strengthened the

positions developed through GUAF and enhanced their global relevance.

One outcome that stands out is our joint support for the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications. By working together to advocate for fairer and more transparent recognition systems, we have reinforced the idea of talent and knowledge moving more freely across borders. This is not simply a policy objective; it directly benefits students, researchers and institutions seeking to collaborate internationally. The impact of GUAF is measured not only by its statements but also by the relationships it has fostered. As higher education faces geopolitical tensions, technological disruption and growing expectations from society, sustained dialogue between regional university associations has become more important than ever.

On EUA's 25th anniversary, GUAF stands as an example of its commitment to partnerships beyond Europe. Here at AAU, we value this collaboration because it has strengthened our shared capacity to advocate for universities globally while respecting the diversity that makes each region unique. The challenges ahead will require even deeper cooperation, and the foundation built through GUAF gives us confidence that universities, working together through their representative associations, will continue to lead with purpose and shared vision.

Olusola Bandele Oyewole is Secretary-General of the Association of African Universities (AAU). He is a Professor of Food Science and Technology and has previously served as Vice-Chancellor of the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria. With more than four decades of experience in higher education, Professor Oyewole has championed quality assurance, research, innovation and internationalisation across African universities.



Marcin Pałys

Research assessment: from bibliometrics to the full picture

In 2016, EUA signed the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#) and prepared its own action plan for research assessment. The starting point was to support institutions in developing research assessment approaches that would focus more on quality, potential and impact, and also to recognise open science practices. Universities are indeed central actors in research and academic assessment, and EUA has ensured that they have an active voice in shaping research assessment reforms.

As a member of the EUA Board and of the Steering Board of the [Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment \(CoARA\)](#), I have been fortunate enough to witness the immense progress made in this field, at various levels:

- Reforming research assessment became a hot topic, as community-driven momentum met national and transnational political support.
- Organisations took on the role of agents of change, with the launch of CoARA in December 2022. EUA is a proud CoARA founding member alongside its sister organisation Science Europe and the European Commission, with

the invaluable input of Dr. Karen Stroobants (currently CoARA Vice-Chair). There are now more than 800 CoARA member organisations across the world, 60% of which are universities.

- In universities and other organisations, the discussion is broadening from research assessment to academic assessment, with the aim of cultivating robust, diverse and collaborative academic cultures.

The difficult part often comes when the conclusions of general discussions have to be put into practice through concrete procedures. And we recognise a pressing need among the community for support in this area. This is where CoARA's toolbox approach can be useful to cope with the diversity of legal systems, disciplines and traditions found in the academic world. As an example, the [CoARA Working Group on Reforming Academic Career Assessment \(ACA\)](#), co-chaired by EUA, will soon release the “Rethink ACA” framework, an interactive, conceptual framework designed to support institutions in reforming academic career assessment for the purposes of recruitment or promotion. Rethink ACA provides practical tools, real-world examples and contextual information to build fairer, more inclusive and more transparent evaluation processes. In parallel, [CoARA National Chapters](#) facilitate knowledge exchange, mutual learning and discussions on issues specific to a given country.

The real test is what happens next: moving from bibliometrics to the full picture means turning momentum into action and putting meaningful assessment reform into practice.

Marcin Pałys is Vice-President of EUA and former Rector of the University of Warsaw, Poland. He has served on the EUA Board since 2019, championing the areas of innovation and open science, and has been a member of the CoARA Steering Board since 2024. His research area is electrochemistry.



Ivanka Popović

Supporting university communities in Ukraine

Based on my experiences of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and how it impacted the academic community in the region, the Russian invasion of Ukraine moved me deeply. In the wake of the destruction, student and staff displacement, limited access to quality online education, psychological stress and trauma, as well as limited financial capacity, our Ukrainian colleagues needed to know that they were not, and are not, alone.

Academics from all over the world, especially Europe, rallied to support Ukrainian colleagues both within and outside the country's borders. EUA member institutions engaged in humanitarian aid, hosted Ukrainian university students and staff, and provided practical help to their Ukrainian partner institutions, from equipment for hospitals to online courses.

To ensure a strategic response, EUA established a Ukraine Task Force to exchange information and provide its members with analysis and advice to address the immediate aftermath, but also to prepare for the post-war reconstruction of the higher education system. These activities produced two documents: [Impact of the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine on the Ukrainian higher](#)

[education sector](#) and [Supporting the Ukrainian university sector: EUA recommendations](#), a review of common good practices with detailed suggestions on how to enhance partnership and cooperation between institutions, and an appeal to enhance information sharing, cooperation and coordination among major actors and stakeholders.

EUA is part of the consortium implementing the [MSCA4Ukraine](#) initiative that supports Ukrainian researchers. To date, a budget of 35 million euros has been used to support 178 displaced researchers from Ukraine in 24 countries, enabling them to further their individual careers and develop institutional partnerships and capacity building with their home institutions in Ukraine, while supporting research in areas of strategic importance for Ukraine, including post-war recovery and future EU integration.

The universities and the wider higher education and research sector in Ukraine have shown remarkable resilience. Higher education must be central to Ukraine's reconstruction. Some measures will need to wait until the war ends, but others can, and must, take place now to ensure the survival and sustainability of the Ukrainian higher education system. The most important task is preserving and nurturing the dedicated people working at Ukrainian universities. They are academia's key asset.

EUA and its dedicated Task Force for Ukraine will continue to support this approach as one of its core goals.

Ivanka Popović is Professor Emerita of Polymer Science and Engineering and former Rector at the University of Belgrade, Vice-President of EUA and chair of its Task Force for Ukraine.

“One of EUA’s greatest strengths: connecting collective reflection, European policy and practical institutional change.”



Fabrice Lemoine

My engagement with EUA has accompanied several important stages of my professional journey. I was first involved in the development of the European Platform of Universities in Energy Research and Education (EUA-EPUE) through the [UNI-SET project](#) led by EUA and InnoEnergy (EIT). This platform created a valuable space for universities to share experiences, contribute to European foresight and reflect collectively on the role of higher education in the energy transition, particularly through the renewal of master’s degree curricula and the integration of research, education and societal needs.

This work had a very tangible personal impact. It strongly inspired the creation of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master’s Degree in Decentralised Smart Energy Systems ([DENSYS](#)), which I coordinate. The consortium was built partly on partnerships established through the former UNI-SET project, and the programme welcomed its first students in 2020. DENSYS develops interdisciplinary engineering competences for the energy transition and climate neutrality, combining technology, systems thinking, European mobility and intercultural learning, complemented by a broader education encompassing the social sciences and humanities.

My most formative experience with EUA, however, was contributing to [the Green Deal roadmap for universities](#). The European Green Deal is not simply an environmental policy: it connects energy, industry, biodiversity, soils, food, mobility, social justice and territorial transformation. The roadmap helped me understand how these interdependent policies should also reshape universities themselves – our research priorities, curricula, skills strategies, operations and engagement with society. It provided a particularly useful framework for my responsibilities as Vice-President for European Strategy at Université de Lorraine. It also influenced the structuring of our local excellence initiative around interdisciplinary programmes linking research, education and societal challenges. The roadmap’s four dimensions – research and innovation, education and students, staff and operations, and public engagement and societal impact – offer a powerful basis for institutional transformation rather than a collection of isolated sustainability actions.

I am now pleased to contribute to EUA’s Task-and-Finish Group on Sustainability, which is developing future scenarios and a shared vision of universities’ role beyond the [2030 Agenda](#). This continuity is one of EUA’s greatest strengths: connecting collective reflection, European policy and practical institutional change.

Fabrice Lemoine is Professor of Energy Systems and Vice-President for European Strategy at Université de Lorraine, France. He coordinates the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master’s Degree in Decentralised Smart Energy Systems (DENSYS) and co-leads the French national research programme PEPR SPLEEN on industrial decarbonisation.



Vinciane Gaillard

A vision for the future of university R&I

In December 2023, EUA published its vision for the future of research and innovation (R&I) in universities: the [EUA Research & Innovation Agenda 2027](#), aptly subtitled “Seizing the moment, driving the change”. Looking back three years later, I am struck by how timely and ambitious that document was.

The Agenda was initiated by Professor Paul Boyle, formerly EUA Vice-President and Chair of its Research and Innovation Strategy Group (RISG), and our late colleague and friend

Stephane Berghmans, EUA Director for R&I. Their joint leadership was instrumental in bringing this vision together. Extensive discussions with EUA's RISG and Expert Groups on Innovation and Open Science, as well as the EUA Board and Council, helped turn a broad ambition into a shared agenda for the university sector.

The Agenda was conceived as an umbrella for EUA's R&I work, bringing together and complementing existing agendas on open science and innovation. It set out three priorities for university R&I:

- amplifying the societal impact of university R&I,

- cultivating robust, diverse and collaborative R&I cultures, and
- championing a well-designed and sustainable R&I system.

The Agenda was intended as more than a statement of principles. It was a catalyst for universities to reflect, engage and act as they navigate and shape a rapidly changing R&I landscape, and a basis for the sector to articulate a stronger, more coherent voice in European policy debates. Developments in research assessment, open science, research security, artificial intelligence, research careers and the future of European R&I funding have only reinforced the need for the comprehensive perspective it advocated.

Much of EUA's work today is rooted in these priorities, advancing them with and for our members and partners across the wider R&I ecosystem. The Agenda remains a reference point for collective reflection, advocacy and action.

Yet an agenda is never an endpoint. As the R&I landscape evolves, EUA is looking ahead to its next R&I Agenda. The task is not simply to update the previous one, but to build on its foundations, highlight how universities can contribute to Europe's long-term prosperity, resilience and competitiveness, and identify what they need from tomorrow's R&I system to fulfil this role.

That, ultimately, is what “seizing the moment, driving the change” was about: giving the sector a shared vision, a stronger voice and a basis for collective action.

Vinciane Gaillard is Director for Research and Innovation at EUA, where she leads the implementation of its agendas for R&I, innovation and open science. Before joining EUA in 2019, Vinciane spent over 15 years as a researcher and research manager in cognitive psychology and neuroscience.



Monika Steinel

2025

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What keeps universities going: values, autonomy and academic freedom

Universities are values-driven organisations: a university's values capture what gives it purpose and drive – or “what keeps it going”. This is why, over the past 25 years, EUA has been steadfast in its attention to university values.

A staunch advocate for the autonomy of universities in Europe, EUA developed its flagship Autonomy Scorecard in the early 2010s, shaping definitions of [institutional autonomy](#) and supporting its members during important reform processes that affected the relationship between states and universities in several countries. The value of this tool, for EUA members, has been lasting: the most recent edition was published [in 2023](#).

Later that decade, in response to intensifying and harmful government pressure on universities in Europe, the focus shifted to academic freedom. EUA's advocacy efforts resulted in the 2025 publication of its [principles and guidelines](#), which were intended as a tool to empower universities to take the protection and promotion of this core value into their own hands. In view of their positive reception, the practical suggestions

included in these principles were clearly seen as helpful at a time when many universities found themselves all too exposed to threats from overbearing, or downright hostile, governments.

With respect to values, everyone should pull in the same direction. EUA has therefore emphasised the importance of cooperation to uphold them. In 2019, a [joint statement on academic freedom and institutional autonomy](#) was published by EUA, All European Academies (ALLEA) and Science Europe, organisations representing a broad section of Europe's research and higher education system.

Yet, reflections and discussions on university values should extend well beyond institutional autonomy and academic freedom. Indeed, it is up to each institution, as well as its leaders and communities, to define the values it stands for and works towards; while some work hard to nurture openness and promote diversity by integrating refugees or other underserved groups, others prioritise contributions to the social and economic development of their local community, particularly if it is deprived.

So values are a deeply personal business. And while they deserve a long-term perspective, they are also – for better or for worse – highly susceptible to external stimuli and changing contexts. This is why supporting universities to balance resilience in the face of massive and rapid societal change with respect for and promotion of enduring values will “keep EUA going” into its next quarter century.

Monika Steinel is Deputy Secretary General of EUA, where she shares strategic oversight of EUA's work and contributes to its organisational development. She leads activities on academic freedom and university values, having participated in and contributed to many related initiatives and expert groups. Monika has been with EUA since 2010, initially in the Governance, Autonomy and Funding Unit, where she implemented the flagship Autonomy Scorecard project.

Looking back on many firsts in learning and teaching, and looking ahead with a new agenda

Oliver Vettori

I am writing this recollection almost exactly ten years after Tia Loukkola, then EUA's Director of Institutional Development, asked me to join the Steering Committee for the very first European Learning & Teaching (L&T) Forum. I gladly accepted.

For one, I had enjoyed working with Tia and other EUA colleagues on a number of other initiatives. Their spirit and enthusiasm has always been, and still, is contagious. But even more importantly, the time was ripe: many policymakers had realised that educating new generations of European citizens was key to the future of European societies and economies, even more so than any R&D funding programme. And EUA was ready. Having gained vast experience of how to connect different perspectives and levels of experience through its highly successful European Quality Assurance Forums, but also realising that just copying its formula would not be enough, the Association started something new: [the L&T Initiative](#), an umbrella framework comprising the European L&T Forum, various dissemination activities such as webinars and the EUA L&T papers, and the Thematic Peer Groups (TPGs). The latter, bringing together a selected group of EUA member

“Many policymakers had realised that educating new generations of European citizens was key to the future of European societies and economies.”

universities each year to discuss and explore practices and lessons learned in the broad field of education, have been going strong ever since, covering a great variety of topics and laying the foundations for longstanding institutional and professional partnerships. In fact, they were so well received that, ten years later, the first Quality Assurance TPGs have been launched – almost like returning the favour for having borrowed the Forum idea.

But the L&T Initiative, too, keeps changing and innovating, as evidenced by the [EUA Learning & Teaching Agenda 2030](#), which was launched last year. The Agenda sets the framework for EUA's learning- and teaching-oriented activities for the coming years, as well as providing guidance for member institutions. I will be happily and curiously waiting for the next ideas and activities to emerge. Happy anniversary, dear EUA!



Oliver Vettori is Dean for Accreditation and Quality Management and Director of Programme Management and Teaching & Learning at WU Vienna. Since 2020, he has led Area Learning for ENGAGE.EU and now serves as its Director for Academic Affairs. He has worked with EUA on projects such as the European Quality Assurance Forum, the Learning & Teaching Initiative, the Institutional Evaluation Programme and the Leadership Development Programme.



Eeva Leinonen

After spending almost a decade away from European higher education, one of the defining aspects of becoming President of Maynooth University in Ireland was the opportunity to become more closely involved in the European higher education community once again.

I was struck by how deeply collaboration had become embedded across European higher education in the intervening years.

Universities had always worked together, but collaboration had evolved beyond individual partnerships into something much more meaningful. Institutions were coming together to strengthen capacity, inform policy and tackle challenges that no university – or indeed country – could address alone. EUA has been central to that evolution, providing not only a representative voice for universities but also a trusted platform for collaboration.

I have come to see that EUA's greatest strength lies not simply in shaping policy, but in bringing university leaders together to share experiences, challenge one another's thinking, develop collective responses to shared challenges and collectively seize new opportunities. At a time when institutions are navigating a shifting landscape of artificial intelligence, geopolitical uncertainty, sustainability, demographic change and increasing societal expectations, those conversations have never been more valuable.

That is precisely why 2025 was the right moment for EUA to launch its [Leadership Development Programme](#) (LDP). Universities are operating in an environment of unprecedented complexity, and the challenges and opportunities are increasingly interconnected. Europe needed a trusted space where leaders could develop new ways of thinking and doing, together.

My experience of contributing to the LDP as a member of its Advisory Board reinforced this for me. I found myself learning just as much from colleagues across Europe as I contributed. The discussions consistently reinforced a simple but important realisation: the most effective leadership is collaborative, built on trust, openness and a willingness to learn from different perspectives.

Seen in that context, the LDP is about much more than leadership development. It is an important chapter in EUA's long-standing commitment to building a stronger European higher education community. Through the programme, it has begun to cultivate a network of leaders who will continue to make a difference to Europe's future through education, research and innovation long after the formal programme has ended. That may prove to be one of the Association's most enduring legacies.

Eeva Leinonen is President of Maynooth University in Ireland and a member of EUA's LDP Advisory Board. A Finnish-born academic and experienced university leader, she previously served as Vice Chancellor and President of Murdoch University in Australia. She has also held senior leadership and advisory roles across the higher education sector in Europe, Asia and Australia.

“EUA helped establish a trusted European space where universities could jointly shape their response to AI.”

Responding to AI while remaining anchored in European universities' shared values



Pedro M. Ruiz

When the EUA Task-and-Finish Group on Artificial Intelligence began its work in 2024, generative AI had suddenly become part of everyday life in universities. Institutions across Europe were asking similar questions: How should AI be integrated into teaching, research and administration? How could universities embrace its opportunities without compromising their academic values? More importantly, how could they navigate this transformation together, rather than in isolation?

Having had the privilege of chairing the group, one of the most rewarding aspects was working with an exceptionally diverse team. Our members brought together expertise in university leadership, research, teaching, digital transformation, ethics, law and public policy. This diversity proved invaluable. Rather than seeking quick technological answers, we were able to explore AI through multiple lenses, challenge each other's assumptions and gradually build a

richer, more balanced understanding of what responsible AI adoption should look like for European universities.

The report [Adopting AI that Serves the needs and values of universities](#) was an important outcome of this collaboration, but the real value lay in the conversations that shaped it. I particularly remember the workshops, where we experimented with futures thinking methodologies to imagine alternative futures for AI in higher education. These sessions encouraged participants to move beyond immediate concerns and think strategically about the long-term implications of today's decisions. The enthusiastic response was remarkable and confirmed how strongly universities were seeking spaces for collective reflection. EUA's online conference in May 2025, which showcased diverse approaches to AI adoption in universities across Europe and beyond, drew a similarly positive response, bringing together institutional leaders and experts to learn from one another at a moment of profound change.

Looking back, I believe this milestone marked the beginning of something more significant than a single report or event. EUA helped establish a trusted European space where universities could jointly shape their response to AI while remaining anchored in their shared values. As AI continues to evolve at unprecedented speed, I remain convinced that this spirit of collaboration, openness and mutual learning will be one of the most enduring contributions to Europe's higher education community.

Pedro M. Ruiz is Professor of Computer Science at the University of Murcia in Spain, where he has served as Vice-Rector for Strategy and Digital University. He has also served as Secretary General of CRUE-Digitalisation and chaired EUA's Task-and-Finish Group on Artificial Intelligence.

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