



## ACA statement on the roll-out of the European Universities Initiative

*14 July 2021, Brussels*

The Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) welcomed the launch of the European Universities Initiative (EUI) on a pilot basis in its related 2018 [Position Paper](#). To date, ACA remains a **strong supporter of this initiative** as an ambitious way to support transnational collaboration based on the principles of excellence, inclusiveness, diversity and regional balance and also in view of the synergies between all university missions. As the European Commission is about to roll out the EUI under the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 and Horizon Europe, ACA members recall the importance of these principles that have been guiding the EUI since its inception and call for continuity under its original objectives.

The Association calls for a **balanced and fair approach** to participation in the EUI, offering equal opportunities to all kinds of higher education institutions and partnerships across Europe, regardless of type and size. Many higher education institutions have been investing precious time and other resources in the past two years in preparation for the full roll-out of the initiative and related calls, in some cases with earmarked financial support from member states. We believe that it is necessary to offer **adequate room for participation to both kinds of partnerships** – already selected European Universities alliances and new consortia, which are only now aiming to apply under this initiative.

Without predefining budget allocation beforehand, it is equally important to ensure **open and fair competition** within each of these two groups according to specific quality criteria, and not between them. The principle of fair competition should also be extended to the level of competition within each group; newcomers should not be funded on the 'leftover' principle. Such open and fair competition is the only way to **match the sector's high expectations** of the initiative, avoid any wasted effort at the preparation stage and at the same time enable the rise of additional innovative ideas that are crucial for Europe's post-pandemic recovery and resilience.

In this context, ACA members also call for a **transparent and timely communication** on the key modalities of the call for proposals 2022, which is crucial for both securing the commitment of higher education institutions and ensuring the sustainability and high profile of the initiative itself. As a new initiative, the EUI has received significant positive attention and it is subject to high expectations. To retain its political weight and attractive brand, it is important to keep higher education institutions motivated, interested and properly informed. It is therefore essential to provide **urgent clarity on the objectives of the future call** to all kinds of partnerships and supporting actors in order to build trust and enhance the commitment to the initiative across the entire higher education sector and among national funders.

Furthermore, ACA members emphasize the importance of giving the existing alliances sufficient time, resources and conditions to deliver on their ambitious goals **without overloading them with additional political goals** and in full **respect for their bottom-up nature** by letting them flexibly decide on their future. However, while bridge funding is essential to ensure **sustainability** of the European Universities in the medium term, any strategic decision on the so-called 'programmatic funding approach' in the long term should be based on an **in-depth analysis of the impact** achieved by the initiative at large and in view of the funding needs and prospects of other types of higher education collaborations supported by the EU.



Finally, a pioneering scheme to foster excellence in all university missions, the EUI should in principle be open to all excellent higher education institutions from partner countries and beyond, offering a possibility of setting-up broader, more ambitious, mutually beneficial partnerships, as deemed appropriate by the alliances themselves. It is important to involve EU's closest partners in higher education and research. In this context, **Swiss association to both Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe** in the period 2021-2027, supported by ACA members in their [joint position paper on 11 June 2021](#), would strongly reinforce the excellence dimension of the initiative and contribute to its success.

ACA remains a highly committed actor of the co-creation process towards the full roll-out of the European Universities Initiative and the launch of the European Strategy for Universities through its participation in the stakeholder consultation group and strives to support excellent and inclusive higher education collaboration and transformation across the European Education Area and the European Research Area.

#### ACA members



Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation - OeAD-GmbH, Austria



De Vlaamse Universiteiten en Hogescholen Raad (Flemish Higher Education Council) – VLUHR International, Belgium



Dům zahraniční spolupráce – DZS, Czech National Agency for International Education and Research, Czech Republic



FINNISH NATIONAL AGENCY FOR EDUCATION

Finnish National Agency for Education – EDUFI, Finland



REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA  
EDUCATION AND YOUTH BOARD

Education and Youth Board of Estonia – HARNO, Estonia



German Academic Exchange Service – DAAD, Germany



State Scholarships Foundation – IKY, Greece



The Icelandic Centre for Research – RANNIS, Iceland



Tempus Public Foundation – TPF, Hungary



Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills – Norway



Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange – NAWA, Poland



Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training Programmes (CMEPIUS), Slovenia



SAIA, n.o. (Slovak Academic Information Agency), Slovakia



National Agency for Exchange and Mobility – Movetia, Switzerland



Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities, Switzerland

#### Associate members



The International Education Center – IEC, Georgia



ETS Global, Netherlands/U.S.



Institute of International Education – IIE, United States