



STRATEGY 2023-26



Empower Europe to rise to global challenges

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1. Introductory remarks by our Chairs

Since the foundation of UAS4EUROPE in 2016, we have grown both in size - from initially five to nine members in 2022 - and in impact. Founded as a platform for knowledge exchange, we are today a permanent member of the ERA Forum's stakeholder group of university associations and an established presence as the voice of the applied sciences in Brussels. With the professionalisation of the network, new challenges and opportunities are arising, that we will address through our new Strategy 2023-26.

Starting on 1 June 2022, Vereniging Hogescholen and ARENE form the Executive Committee of the network and represent the presidency until May 2024, when ARENE will take over the presidency until 2026. Following intense discussions and consultations with our members, we have identified priority areas and topics of engagement that will guide our work over the next years until the end of 2026.

Firstly, we identify our new vision: "Empower Europe to rise to global challenges". The scientific debate coins the current era as a time of poly- or even permacrisis. Many crises, long- and short-term, need to be overcome and tackled which can only work in a bottom-up approach with a huge contribution of research, innovation and education. We are ready to take our responsibility in overcoming current and upcoming crises by empowering young students and researchers, and thus Europe as a whole, to rise to these challenges.

With our mission "UAS4EUROPE is *the* go-to for applied research and innovation in Europe" we strive to achieve our vision with an ambitious approach. Not only do we see ourselves as the voice of universities of applied sciences in Europe but rather as a melting pot for all of our members and their institutions.

Until the end of 2026, we will work through the lenses of our vision and mission and have identified four strands of activities:

- The implementation of the European Research Area (ERA) and European Education Area (EEA);
- Innovation & entrepreneurship, i.e. the implementation of the New European Innovation Agenda (NEIA);
- Transnational cooperation; and
- Inter-institutional engagement with the European institutions.

These four strands all depart from the sustainability agenda, namely the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Today's crises can often be addressed through the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As regionally-embedded institutions, UAS are working closely with citizens, authorities and industry in their ecosystems and hence act on the ground. This specifically includes all of the 17 SDGs. Through this strategy, we want to connect European UAS in combining our strengths to contribute and empower to rise to global challenges.

We look forward to maintaining the strength of the voice of the applied sciences over the coming years and are confident that this strategy will be an important guiding document to do so.

Yours sincerely,

Marjolijn Brussaard & Heidi Fagerholm, UAS4EUROPE Chairs



2. Vision

“Empower Europe to rise to global challenges”

3. Mission

“UAS4EUROPE is *the* go-to for applied research and innovation in Europe”

4. Services

4.1 Inform stakeholders

- Gather European R&I intelligence
- Provide timely and high quality information
- Regular newsletter

4.2 Liaise with stakeholders

- Organisation of (high-level) visits and events
- Organisation of thematic workshops and participation in events

4.3 Support

- Biennial Croissant Event
- Biennial Networking Conference
- Thematic events in consultation with our members

4.4 Promote

- Organisation of promotional events for stakeholders
- Cooperation with Brussels European R&I ecosystem
- Contribution of research policy expertise at all levels
- Strong and visible voice in Brussels through position papers and engagement with policy processes

5. Thematic focus areas

The following thematic areas will be of particular importance over the next years.

5.1 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the starting point

On 23 February 2021, the presidents of UAS4EUROPE’s member associations issued a [joint commitment](#) to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), supported by a [background paper](#) of good practices.

Between March and July 2021, UAS4EUROPE conducted an open survey among UAS researchers, EU advisors and administrative officers with the goal of identifying challenges and opportunities related to the SDG framework. The results are published in the SDG [Survey Report](#), which recommends the promotion of SDG research, facilitating the networking of researchers and the exchange of best practices.

The contribution to the sustainability agenda is hence the starting point for the implementation of this strategy.

5.2 ERA/EEA governance and implementation

5.2.1 ERA Forum

The European Research Area (ERA) aims to develop a European single market for research and researchers to move freely across borders and with a minimum of differing standards between EU countries to allow for best possible framework conditions for collaborative research and innovation.

Timeline - most important developments and documents:

- 30 September 2020
 - Commission Communication [“A new ERA for Research and Innovation”](#)
 - See also: UAS4EUROPE Position Paper [here](#)
- 1 December 2020
 - [Council Conclusions](#) on the new ERA
- 26 November 2021
 - [Council Conclusions](#) on the ERA Governance, incl. Pact for Research and Innovation and the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-24

Overview of the ERA governance



What does this mean for UAS4EUROPE?

UAS4EUROPE has signed up to the ERA Forum, a Commission expert group that advises the institutions on the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda. UAS4EUROPE is part of the University associations stakeholder group. All members of this group have sector meetings on a regular basis in order to prepare for the ERA Forum meetings. Mainly, the ERA Forum will focus on the implementation of the ERA actions as outlined in the Policy Agenda:

Pact for R&I	Principles for R&I in Europe	Priority Areas for joint action	Prioritizing investments and reforms	Monitoring and coordination
ERA Policy Agenda 2022-24: <i>UAS4EUROPE's priority actions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action 3: “Advance towards the reform of the Assessment System for research, researchers and institutions to improve their quality, performance and impact” • Action 7: “Upgrade the EU guidance for a better knowledge valorisation” • Action 12: “Accelerate the green/digital transition of Europe’s key industrial ecosystems” • Action 13: “Empower Higher Education Institutions to develop in line with ERA, and in synergy with the European Education Area” • Action 15: “Build-up regional and national R&I ecosystems to improve regional/national excellence and competitiveness” • Action 16: “Improve EU-wide excellence and competitiveness” 			

5.2.2 CoARA

Since autumn 2021, the research community is discussing the way research and researchers are being assessed. The aim is to focus more on qualitative criteria when evaluating research performance. UAS4EUROPE has been following this development from the beginning and is actively contributing to the reform process as a member of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA).

Strategy/Scope:

- As a member of the university associations stakeholder group in the ERA Forum, UAS4EUROPE is closely following the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda. Furthermore, UAS4EUROPE is coordinating the university sector in Actions 7 (knowledge valorisation) and 12 (twin transitions in key industrial ecosystems).
- UAS4EUROPE is contributing to the research assessment reform through its membership in CoARA. In order to coordinate the UAS sector in this development, a CoARA sounding board will be set up in which nominated experts from among the UAS4EUROPE membership will prepare and de-brief the CoARA meetings and developments.

5.3 Innovation and entrepreneurship

5.3.1 New European Innovation Agenda

The European Commission in summer 2021 entrusted UAS4EUROPE with the creation of an Action Plan for European innovation. The action plan, which contains 12 concrete recommendations for the creation of a European Innovation Area, was compiled by a dedicated [expert group](#) of UAS leaders and entrepreneurs.



5.3.2 Increased participation in EU instruments, i.e. pillar 3

As a separate instrument in Horizon Europe funding (pillar 3), the European innovation ecosystems (EIE) are a promising tool to strengthen networks and coordination efforts among higher education institutions in Europe. EIEs will act complementary to and in synergy with the European Innovation Council (EIC) and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) with the aim of improving ecosystems for European innovation.

Strategy/Scope:

- In close consultation with the innovation expert group, UAS4EUROPE will closely monitor and contribute to the implementation of the New European Innovation Agenda (NEIA). Particular focus will be dedicated to [UAS and their role in innovation ecosystems](#), i.e. maintaining and strengthening deep relationships with local industry, public authorities and citizens to develop and refine innovations, fostering the notion of distributed excellence and a European model of entrepreneurship.
- In close concertation with the expert group on innovation, UAS4EUROPE will contribute to an increased visibility of UAS in the European Innovation Council (EIC), the European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) and the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT).

5.4 Transnational cooperation

5.4.1 European Strategy for Universities

The European Commission on 18 January 2022 published its European Strategy for Universities, which addresses both the Education and Research Areas through the following flagship initiatives:

- Increase the number of European University alliances within the European Universities Initiative to 60 by mid-2025, covering 500+ higher education institutions
- Creation of a legal statute for university alliances
- Creation of joint European degree labels
- Generalising the use of the European Student Card Initiative

The COMPET Council on 5 April 2022 in its Council Recommendation on Building Bridges for Effective European Higher Education Cooperation outlined the pathway for implementation of the four points above.

On 16 May 2022, we published our position “[Building Bridges for Effective European Higher Education Cooperation - Implementing the European Strategy for Universities](#)” with a focus on the strategy’s implementation phase. Throughout the next years, we will constructively engage in the implementation process of a European Knowledge Area of education, research and innovation.

5.4.2 European Universities Initiative

Although the share of UAS in the EUI alliances did continuously grow since the 2nd Call, UAS remain underrepresented in the European Universities Initiative. However, the inclusion of the entire higher education sector is imperative to ensure that transnational skills



development and knowledge production benefits our societies in their entirety. In addition, the testing of new policies and frameworks within the EUI alliances can only lead to conclusive feedback if UAS are sufficiently represented. Therefore, we will work on a sufficient representation of the entire higher education sector in the development of new tools and policies, within and beyond EU-funded university alliances.

Strategy/Scope:

Building on our position paper on the European Strategy for Universities from May 2022 and in the light of our engagement in ERA Policy Action 13 (EMPOWER HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS TO DEVELOP IN LINE WITH THE ERA, AND IN SYNERGY WITH THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA), this expert group will contribute on creating a truly pan-European ecosystem of innovation, research and education.

5.5 Interinstitutional engagement

5.5.1 Council presidencies

The presidency of the Council of the European Union (Council of Ministers) is rotating every six months. Throughout each term, the respective national government presides over the different Council constellations (with a few exceptions), which also includes the Competitiveness Council (for Research & Space). The upcoming Council presidencies, which this strategy will cover, are as follows:

07/2023 - 12/2023	Spain
01/2024 - 06/2024	Belgium
07/2024 - 12/2024	Hungary
01/2025 - 06/2025	Poland
07/2025 - 12/2025	Denmark
01/2026 - 06/2026	Cyprus
07/2026 - 12/2026	Ireland

5.5.2 European Commission priorities

The European Commission identifies priorities for the duration of the political leadership's mandate. The current College of Commissioners started their term in December 2019 and will be in office until after the parliamentary approval of the new Commission following the European Parliament elections in spring 2024.

The six priority areas of the von der Leyen Commission are:

- A European Green Deal
- A Europe fit for the digital age
- An economy that works for the people
- A stronger Europe in the world
- Promoting our European way of life
- A new push for European democracy

A detailed overview of the priorities can be found on the [Commission's website](#).

Strategy/Scope:

- Future Council presidency priorities must be identified in advance and engaged with throughout the presidencies' terms. This can be successful, e.g. through the inclusion of presidency priorities in our events or through targeted advocacy on single priority topics.
- Similar to the Council presidency priorities, UAS4EUROPE needs to closely follow the Commission's priorities, i.e. in the areas of green, digital and resilience. UAS, through their regional embeddedness and application-oriented research and training, can contribute to the realisation of European ambitions. However, for this to function properly, the Commission must constantly be reminded of the added-value of UAS. In the best case, the Commission will task us to contribute concrete policy advice, as was the case with the Innovation Action Plan (10/21). UAS4EUROPE will further follow the European elections 2024 and all the changes in personnel and political priorities very closely.

6. Partnerships and advocacy

6.1 European institutions

To ensure timely positioning and visualize the value of UAS, we will ensure early intelligence and dialogue with the following European institutions:

- European Commission, i.e.
 - DG Research & Innovation (DG RTD), in charge of both the European Research and Innovation Areas. In terms of funding programmes, they are in charge of Horizon Europe, Digital Europe and the health programmes.
 - DG Education, Culture and Youth (DG EAC), in charge of the European (Higher) Education Area and the Erasmus+ programme.
 - DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), in charge of the European Skills Agenda (together with DG EAC).
 - Joint Research Centre (JRC), as the Commission's science and knowledge service, providing scientific evidence and services to Member States. Among the services it provides, the JRC offers scientific laboratories and facilities to people working in academia and research as part of their Open Access strategy as well as offering training programmes and expert guidance in EU-funded projects.
- In addition to the European Commission, UAS4EUROPE will exchange with and collaborate with the European Parliament (i.e. ITRE Committee), as well as the respective Council presidencies (see above, 5.5.1).

6.2 Expert groups

UAS4EUROPE will continue its active engagement in the expert groups that are vital for the community of UAS in Europe, i.e. the ERA Forum and the Coalition on Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA). Furthermore, UAS4EUROPE will operate its own expert constellations



on innovation & entrepreneurship, transnational cooperation and the research assessment reform.

6.3 Brussels-based R&I platforms

Close collaboration with networks that aim to strengthen regional research and innovation ecosystems and foster place-based ecosystems in order to increase visibility on policy areas that are within the interests of the members of UAS4EUROPE and that can foster increased participation in funding programmes.



UAS4EUROPE – Who we are

UAS4EUROPE is an informal network (founded 2016) representing more than 450 Universities of Applied Sciences from 24 European countries. The network aims to strengthen the voice of Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) in Europe in the field of applied research and innovation. UAS4EUROPE is a (networking) platform for exchanging knowledge and for reaching out to European Institutions and other R&I stakeholders to ensure a better integration and visibility of UAS in Europe's research and innovation policies and programmes.

More about UAS4EUROPE: www.uas4europe.eu

[Sign up](#) for more information



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