

A Sustainable Funding Pathway for European University Alliances

Statement by the ENHANCE Alliance

Berlin, September 12, 2024

ENHANCE, the European Universities of Technology Alliance, envisions a world where scientists and students work closely with society to develop innovative solutions that tackle our world's most pressing challenges. A crucial driver of this synergy is the European Universities Initiative (EUI), which nurtures a common values-based European identity, fosters mobility, drives innovation, strengthens inclusion and equality, and promotes digitalisation and creativity. The EUI is an important catalyst for European universities to launch this long-term transformational process. ENHANCE welcomes the renewed support for the initiative from current EU Commissioner Iliana Ivanova. The realisation of the ambitious goals of the European university alliances and the wider initiative is, however, reliant on a sustainable funding mechanism that can match this commitment to long-term structural, strategic and excellence-based cooperation.

In 2022, the European Council invited the Commission and the member states to “enable alliances of higher education institutions to reach their full potential” by taking steps to move towards “a more sustainable, holistic and integrated EU funding perspective.”^[1]

ENHANCE supports this sentiment and welcomes the European Commission's direct engagement with universities, alliances and member states to understand their needs for a future funding mechanism. The budget for the next Multi-annual Financial Framework is currently being negotiated and a sustainable funding pathway for the European university alliances must be part of these discussions. In this context, the ENHANCE Alliance takes this opportunity to outline our priorities for the future financing of the European university alliances.

A sustainable funding pathway for the European university alliances must:

1. Reflect the long-term nature of the European university alliances

ENHANCE sees the European university alliances as a long-term development that goes far beyond any single project and requires the long-term strategic cooperation between complex institutional structures. ENHANCE is already taking concrete steps to foster synergies in education and research amongst its members, with a clear long-term perspective. A sustainable and adequate funding mechanism is urgently required to enable this and to allow alliances to move beyond a project-based logic to consolidated and robust governance and operational structures, and to achieve meaningful transformation of education, research, innovation and service to society.

This vision requires long-term financial and political commitment at local, national and European levels, to allow universities to invest time and resources efficiently without jeopardising quality. A funding pathway must, therefore, be accompanied by trust in the European university alliances' ability to create innovative activities and effectively deploy funding according to the shared EUI objectives.

^[1] <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7936-2022-INIT/en/pdf>

2. Match the ambitious goals of the European Universities Initiative

European university alliances are committed to an ambitious agenda for transforming international education cooperation, engaging considerable institutional resources. However, sustainable transformation of this depth, particularly the EUI mobility goals, cannot be achieved without significant funding. Alliance members currently support these efforts above and beyond the allocated resources and, in many cases, are supported by national funding programmes. However, over-reliance on this support risks driving inequalities both at university and national levels.

ENHANCE students, researchers and staff should be able to learn and teach across the whole Alliance. To open up these offers to even more members of our community, we require additional funding for mobility activities that can be deployed without complex administrative requirements for universities or participating learners. This is a fundamental prerequisite for the further intensification of European education cooperation, including the continuation and completion of the Bologna reforms.

3. Support European university alliances in addressing all four university missions

Research-intensive universities support European innovation and competitiveness through their four missions: education, research, innovation and service to society. The European university alliances so far have a strong focus on education. However, to ensure that learners receive an education that is updated and societally-relevant, education should be informed by and intertwined with the forefront of research. In this way, the missions of universities are closely linked, and ENHANCE sees great potential in the EUI to support universities in strengthening these links and contributing to the successful realisation of both the European Education Area (EEA) and the European Research Area (ERA), as well as delivery of the European Innovation Agenda. In this context we welcome the recommendation outlined in the Letta report to introduce a fifth freedom, to enhance research, innovation and education in the Single Market [2]. A future funding mechanism must help strengthen these synergies and take a holistic approach to support universities in efficiently integrating activities and delivering across all four missions, without creating new administrative barriers for universities.

4. Be complementary to other funding sources

European university alliances positively contribute to the implementation of the ERA by jointly working on framework conditions for excellent research and providing platforms for collaboration leading to successful cooperation in research and innovation based on excellence. While we strongly support that the European Commission explores possible avenues to provide increased funding for the alliances, any proposal to combine multiple funding channels in a sustainable funding pathway must be well-designed. Calls combining funds from different EU programmes, (with one entry point for applicants) do have the potential to simplify project administration and facilitate more efficient use of resources, but this can also lead to a less focused approach. The focus must remain on impact and ensuring a well-integrated approach. We also emphasise the importance of maintaining the excellence-based competitive character of Horizon Europe in its successor programme, FP10

[2] <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf>

5. Facilitate effective use of resources and individual alliance strengths

The EUI encompasses many policy objectives, and the objectives of the European university alliances are correspondingly broad and complex. It is important that a sustainable funding pathway enables European university alliances to take a holistic approach and integrate their expertise and strengths into their work. By placing trust in the universities and simplifying project reporting measures we enable the alliances to prioritise resources for the development of innovative solutions for transnational cooperation, building crucial operational structures for mobility, and the creation of effective methods and tools to share expertise. To achieve the desired long-term impact, we must enable flexible approaches and minimise project administration. In doing so we can ensure a focus on achieving the best results from these collaborations.

Now, more than ever, European universities make a decisive contribution to European society and drive social cohesion. To enhance Europe's competitiveness, we must support these learning and research spaces in their core activities and societal roles by upholding European values. Given the proper funding and freedom to explore innovative approaches, the European university alliances have great potential to bolster these efforts and amplify their impact.

ENHANCE calls on both European and national policymakers to commit to ambitious funding for higher education, research, and innovation and to support the development of a sustainable funding pathway for European university alliances capable of meeting their long-term needs. To truly empower alliances and to fulfil their potential, we must aim for funding that is significantly above the current level. This will enable alliances to leverage a higher level of cooperation, expand their initiatives to a wider community and create a stronger and far-reaching impact. Only with an appropriate funding mechanism can we unlock the transformation potential of the European university alliances and maximise the benefits for our institutions, people and society.



For further enquiries, please contact:

Naveed Syed, ENHANCE Secretary General
secretary.general@enhanceuniversity.eu

Sarah Fowkes, ENHANCE Senior Project Officer Governance
sarah.fowkes@enhanceuniversity.eu

About ENHANCE

The ENHANCE Alliance brings together ten leading European universities of technology, with the aim to transform the future of European Education and Research. ENHANCE offers innovative educational programmes and initiatives, to empower people and institutions to drive responsible transformation for the benefit of society. Inspired by important topics such as climate action, artificial intelligence, diversity, and sustainable entrepreneurship, we work towards a stronger and more resilient Europe in an everchanging world. ENHANCE is part of the European University Initiative, a flagship initiative of the European strategy for universities, which is funded by the European Commission. The EUI currently encompasses 64 European Universities alliances with more than 560 higher education institutions of all types, from all across Europe.

For more information, please visit the ENHANCE website <https://enhanceuniversity.eu/>.