

2026 EUA-CDE THEMATIC WORKSHOP

Doctoral education for the future of European R&I

Hosted by the University of Liège
15-16 January 2026 | Liège – Belgium

Programme as of 4 November 2025

Following the European Commission's proposals for the next generation of EU programmes, it is a crucial moment for doctoral education in Europe. Key discussions are now underway about what important programmes for doctoral education, like Horizon Europe and Erasmus+, will look like from 2028 to 2034. In addition, the European Commission is preparing to bring forward a major piece of legislation in 2026: the European Research Area Act.

This makes the EUA Council for Doctoral Education's 2026 Thematic Workshop a timely platform to focus on the future of European funding programmes and policies that will affect the doctoral level in the years ahead. It is also an invaluable opportunity for the doctoral education community to discuss how universities can position themselves to make the most of upcoming opportunities.

Through keynote speeches, panel discussions and hands-on breakout sessions, EUA-CDE members will learn more about the proposals for the next EU funding programmes, exchange experiences and discuss how to speak with a strong voice for doctoral education. Hosted by the University of Liège in Belgium, the workshop will also showcase institutional strategies and best practices from EUA-CDE member universities on leveraging EU funding and policy instruments and explore what could be improved in the next EU funding programmes to support Europe's future generations of researchers and innovators.

In addition, a highlight of the 2026 workshop will be the launch of the second report on the results of EUA-CDE's Europe-wide survey carried out in 2025. A glance at these survey results indicates a strong relevance of EU funding instruments and policy topics for the members of the EUA-CDE community.

EUA-CDE strives to offer participants of the 2026 Thematic Workshop three main outcomes: Raising awareness and gaining insights on upcoming EU R&I and education policies and programmes, sharing best practices of making good use of EU funding instruments and contributing to European R&I and education policy – as well as empowering the EUA-CDE community to advocate for doctoral education vis-à-vis their national governments and Members of the European Parliament during this crucial legislative process.

Thursday 15 January 2026

09.10 – 09.50 Official opening

- Josep M. Garrell, President, European University Association
- Peter Hanenberg, Chair of the EUA-CDE Steering Committee; Vice-Rector for Research and Doctoral Education, Catholic University of Portugal
- Anne-Sophie Nyssen, Rector, University of Liège, Belgium

09.50 – 10.40 Plenary session I

The crucial role of the doctorate – and how EU programmes can help unlock its potential

Against the backdrop of the legislative process for the next generation of EU programmes, this session will set the scene for the workshop by discussing the doctoral education's role in the European knowledge society and how European programmes will help unlock the potential of the doctorate.

Keynote I:

The importance of doctoral education for the European knowledge society

- Dirk Inzé, Member of the Scientific Council, European Research Council; Emeritus Science Director, Center for Plant Systems Biology, Vlaams Instituut voor Biotechnologie (VIB)

Keynote II:

How the next generation of EU funding programmes will contribute to achieving the doctorate's potential

- TBC

10.40 – 11.10 Coffee break

11.10 – 12.00 Plenary session I (continued): Panel discussion

- Dirk Inzé, Member of the European Research Council (ERC) Scientific Council, Director of the Center for Plant Systems Biology of the VIB
- TBC (Speaker Keynote II)
- Maurizio Tira, ex-officio EUA Board Member; Professor of Town and Regional Planning and former Rector, University of Brescia, Italy

12.00 – 12.45 Plenary session II

Policies in doctoral education: EUA-CDE survey presentation and Q&A

During this session, the key findings of the second report based on EUA-CDE's Europe-wide survey in 2025, on policies in doctoral education, will be presented. Participants will gain valuable insights into central themes shaping the doctoral education landscape, including institutional policies to protect academic freedom, the adoption and governance of artificial intelligence within universities, evolving strategies and measures for research security and the reform of research assessment and careers. The session will

also focus on the contribution of doctoral education to the SDGs and Europe's economic competitiveness, along with the sector's views on European R&I programmes.

- Simon Marti, Head of EUA-CDE

12.45 – 14.00

Group photo and lunch

14.00 – 15.00

Parallel sessions

I. Deep dive: European funding opportunities for doctoral candidates and doctoral education activities

This session will explore key funding schemes for doctoral candidates and doctoral education activities in the next Horizon Europe programme (2028-2034). The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions will be at the centre of the discussion, given its high relevance for doctoral candidates and postdoctoral researchers.

- Claire Morel, Head of Unit, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, European Commission
- Karl Kilbo Edlund, Secretariat Coordinator, Eurodoc

II. Deep dive: the role of social sciences and humanities (SSHA) in Horizon Europe, what it means for the doctoral level and lessons for the future

Based on publications, research in the humanities, social sciences and the arts has proven to be a comparative advantage for Europe in global science. SSHA research projects, such as those funded by the ERC and MSCA, demonstrate decisive breakthroughs of knowledge and interdisciplinary collaboration. When the right instruments are in place, the SSHA disciplines also provide the critical thinking to maximise outcomes in mission-oriented research. Nevertheless, funding remains limited and constrained at both national and European levels. In this session, we will discuss why change in research policy is necessary and how it can be effectively promoted.

- Gabi Lombardo, Director, European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH)
- Ilaria Poggiolini, Professor of International History, University of Pavia, Italy; Chair of the working group on SSH, Coimbra Group

15.00 – 15.30

Coffee break

15.30 – 17.00

Breakout sessions I

Group work on European funding instruments and policies for the doctoral level

In six breakout groups, participants will focus on learning from each other's experiences with specific EU funding instruments and best practices. They will also discuss what works well and how these instruments should potentially be adapted in the next generation of EU funding programmes and how EU policies of relevance for doctoral education should be shaped.

Thematic group I

Experiences with the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA): what works well, what could be improved?

This group will exchange on experiences with the MSCA, exploring what has worked well in supporting doctoral education and fostering mobility and transferable skills development of early-career researchers, as well as areas for improvement. Participants will discuss good practices, main challenges in the proposal preparation and implementation and approaches that have maximised the benefits of MSCA funding. This session will also consider how future programme editions could better address emerging needs in doctoral education.

Thematic group II

Collaborative doctorates and doctoral education activities via projects under Horizon Europe

In this group, participants will share experiences with collaborative doctorates and related initiatives under Horizon Europe's Pillar II, the JRC's Collaborative Doctoral Partnership Programme, the COST Actions and the EIT Higher Education Institutions Initiative (HEI). Participants will also reflect on how these initiatives can be better designed in order to further strengthen intersectoral collaboration at the doctoral level and contribute to the SDGs and Europe's competitiveness.

Thematic group III

Funding of doctoral candidates in Horizon Europe projects, especially in ERC, Pillar 2, or EIC pathfinder projects. What works well, what could be improved in the next generation of funding programmes?

Doctoral candidates play crucial roles as early-career researchers in EU funding schemes such as ERC projects, in collaborative research projects under Horizon Europe's Pillar 2, as well as in EIC Pathfinder projects. This session will discuss doctoral candidates and their institutions' experiences with these projects, reflect on best practices and explore what could be improved.

Thematic group IV

Doctoral education in European Universities alliances

In recent years, European Universities alliances have become important drivers of collaboration, enabling institutions to share expertise, pool resources and create new opportunities for doctoral candidates and staff. This group will share lessons learned and brainstorm on ways to enhance alliances to better support doctoral education and contribute more effectively to the R&I landscape.

Thematic group V

Doctoral education and reforming research careers

Research careers in Europe have become increasingly competitive, driven by factors such as evolving funding models favouring project-based research. With a renewed focus on this topic in several EU initiatives, this session will allow participants to share experiences and discuss ways to reform research careers structures in Europe.

Thematic group VI

Navigating new expectations on universities' contribution to defence and dual-use research

The EU's new focus on economic competitiveness and defence preparedness is increasingly shaping funding and policy at the doctoral level. This group will explore experiences and best practices and ethical considerations in managing doctoral research linked to defence-related or dual-use areas, and discuss how universities can balance external expectations with the protection of academic values and institutional autonomy.

17.00 – 17.45 **Reporting from group work and discussion**

19.30 – 22.00 *Reception & gala dinner*

Friday 16 January 2026

09.30 – 10.15 Plenary session III

The future of European funding programmes and EUA-CDE's advocacy

This plenary session will take a forward-looking view on how European funding instruments can be designed to better integrate the doctoral education dimension within projects that include doctoral candidates. It will also explore opportunities to strengthen the role of doctoral education in the next generation of funding programmes.

- Vinciane Gaillard, Director Research & Innovation, EUA
- Peter Hanenberg, Chair of EUA-CDE Steering Committee
- Simon Marti, Head of EUA-CDE

10.15 – 10.45 *Coffee break*

10.45 – 11.45 Breakout sessions II

In six groups, EUA-CDE members will reflect on the importance of different funding schemes in European programmes for doctoral education, as well as policies that increasingly influence the doctorate, such as the efforts to improve Europe's economic competitiveness and strengthen its defence industrial base.

Participants will have the opportunity to reflect and strategize about how doctoral education can speak with a strong voice to advocate for its key priorities. Participants can decide to either focus on the same topic as during the Thursday breakout sessions – or focus on a second topic on which they have experience.

11.50 – 12.30 **Reporting of the outcomes of the interactive session and discussion**

12.30 – 13.00 **Closing session**

- Maurizio Tira, ex-officio EUA Board Member; Professor of Town and Regional Planning and former Rector, University of Brescia, Italy
- Peter Hanenberg, Chair of the EUA-CDE Steering Committee; Vice-Rector for Research and Doctoral Education, Catholic University of Portugal
- Michel Moutschen, Vice-Rector for Research, University of Liège, Belgium

13.00 – 14.00 *Lunch*

14.30 – 16.00 *Social programme*