2026 EUA FUNDING FORUM
A university of value

Hosted by Brno University of Technology
15-16 October 2026 | Brno, Czechia

Preliminary programme as of July

Value for society, value for money, academic values: how do these concepts permeate funding models and strategic choices? Together, the higher education and research community will explore how to support and sustain a university of value for Europe: one that is equipped to meet the demands of the present and shape the possibilities of the future.

Wednesday 14 October 2026

18.00 –19.00	*Welcome reception*

Thursday 15 October 2026

09.00 – 09.30 **Welcome address**

- Josep M. Garrell, President, European University Association
- Ladislav Janíček, Rector, Brno University of Technology, Czechia

09.30 – 10.30 **Plenary session I**

How do we deliver 'a university of value' when the coordinates we rely on keep on changing?

European universities face a paradox. Society expects them to contribute to addressing increasingly complex challenges such as skills shortages, democratic resilience, economic competitiveness and technological disruption, while the financial and political conditions needed to meet those expectations are eroding.

Public funding is tightening, costs are rising and international collaboration is now entangled with geopolitics and uneven financial commitments. So what does it mean to steer a university toward *value* in this environment?

This panel brings together leaders who are navigating these tensions in real time and must manage the trade-offs behind financial sustainability:

- What missions can we still afford?
- What missions can we *not* afford to abandon?
- And how do we make strategic choices when every choice has a cost?

We will also look to the future of international collaboration. If partnerships are essential but expensive, how do we build models that are resilient, equitable and worth the investment?

Panellists:

- Hester Bijl, Rector Magnificus, TU Delft, Netherlands
- Bernhard Fügenschuh, Rector, University of Salzburg, Austria
- Alessandra Petrucci, Rector, University of Florence, Italy

10.30 – 11.15 *Networking break*

11.15 – 12.30 **Parallel sessions I**

In this first round, participants may choose among different sessions, focusing on topics such as institutional resilience, experience in alliances, funding schemes etc.

*See the Annex below

12:30 – 14:00 *Lunch & networking*

14.00 – 15.30 **Parallel sessions II**

In this second round, participants may choose among different sessions, focusing on system steering, data management, financial strategies etc.

*See the Annex below

15.30 – 16.15 *Networking break*

16.15 – 17.30 **Plenary session II**

Funding, values and value: how funder priorities shape the university of the future

This plenary session brings funders to the centre of the conversation. Their decisions determine not only the resources available to universities, but also the frameworks within which universities define priorities, manage risks and navigate trade-offs.

The discussion will examine how different funding actors interpret *value* and how their models support or impede the academic values that underpin high-quality research, teaching and societal engagement. It will explore tensions between economic value and academic autonomy, between short-term performance metrics and long-term capacity building and between national strategic interests and the openness essential to knowledge creation.
With perspectives from different types of funding bodies, the panel will illuminate how funding choices shape the future of Europe's universities and what it would take to align funding models with a vision of universities as enduring public value institutions.

19.30 – 22.00 *Networking dinner*

Friday 16 October 2026

09.00 – 10.00 **Plenary session III**

University funding: international benchmarking

A global round-up of the latest international studies in university finances, featuring EUA, the European Student's Union, the OECD.

Panellists:

- Enora Bennetot Pruvot, Deputy Director, Governance, Funding & Public Policy Development, European University Association
- Simon Roy, Team Lead, Higher Education Policy Team, Directorate for Education and Skills, OECD
- Alex Usher, President, Higher Education Strategy Associates, Canada
- Executive Committee representative, European Students' Union

10.00 – 11.10 **Parallel sessions III**

In this final round, participants may choose among different sessions, focusing on philanthropy, funding of student mobility, exclusive interactive workshops etc.

*See the Annex below

11.10 – 11.45 *Networking break*

11.45 – 13.00 **Final plenary session**

Alliances & partnerships: from financial assemblage to strategy

As Europe looks toward the next phase of the European Universities Initiative, the question on everyone's mind is no longer whether alliances matter, but how they can be sustainably financed. Universities already face a pressing reality: the intensity of effort required to build and maintain deep transnational cooperation is growing faster than the resources available to support it.

Alliances were created to generate value in academic, societal and strategic terms. But as highlighted in EUA's recent briefing on ' Strategies for the financial sustainability of European Universities alliances', sustainable cooperation requires a clear understanding of full costs, diversified income streams, efficiency and effectiveness and strong leadership and governance. Above all, it requires that alliances remain anchored in institutional purpose and added value, rather than being driven by a short-term project logic.

This session will focus on the institutional purpose of international partnerships in general and European Universities alliances in particular, the added value they generate and the shared responsibility of European, national and university leaders to ensure their financial viability.

It will also address an uncomfortable but necessary question: what level of ambition can alliances realistically sustain under current funding conditions and what must change to close the gap between expectations and resources?

Panellists:

- Ioana Dewandeler, Policy Officer for Higher Education – European Universities Initiative coordination, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission
- Margareth Hagen, Rector, University of Bergen, Norway
- Jens Schneider, Rector, TU Wien, Austria

Concluding remarks

- Thomas Estermann, Director, Governance, Funding & Public Policy Development, European University Association
- Manuel Tunon de Lara, Board member, European University Association

13.00 *Lunch & departure*

Annex

Parallel sessions are described in full below.

Session description	Contributors
Thursday 15 October 11.15 – 12.30	
Breakout session 1 **Shock waves: moving from crisis recovery to resilience** *Resilience; Peer-learning: universities* Policy and budgetary shock waves are the new normal. They force universities to manage acute crises while simultaneously building strategic resilience. Here, some of the heavy lifting falls on leaders who must make consequential choices under pressure, prioritise with determination and live with the trade-offs. In this session, three university professionals who have experienced crisis firsthand, navigated recovery and rebuilt strategic capacity will speak honestly about what worked, what did not, and what they would do differently. Together, the stories will illuminate the role of leadership in steering through different pressure points, finding workable solutions and making decisions that may be unpopular. The cases will come from different types of institutions. The conversation will start from common ground: shared pressures and instincts, before examining the differences that complicate any straightforward transfer of lessons from one context to another. As such, the session will give participants a broader European perspective on building structural resilience through income diversification and digital transformation, while raising urgent questions around institutional autonomy and the risks of excessive dependency on narrow income streams.	• Anna Arsova-Odrich, Head of Department, University Strategy and Governance, Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, Germany • Charles Larkin, Director of Research, University of Bath, UK • Ákos Domahidi, Chief Financial Officer, Óbuda University, Hungary
Breakout session 2 **Rethinking sustainable models for integrated partnerships** *Partnerships; Peer-learning: universities* Universities have long relied on partnerships to extend their reach, deepen their expertise and strengthen their societal impact. Yet the landscape has shifted: European Universities alliances have created political momentum, new collaboration structures and ambitious integration agendas. A fundamental strategic question remains: not whether universities should collaborate, but how to make partnerships structurally sustainable, resilient to funding cycles and capable of genuine long-term integration. This session will examine how universities are moving beyond ad-hoc cooperation toward more intentional architectures of integration in three ways: • Aligning institutional strategies and funding rhythms with the demands of joining an established alliance – showing how sustainability depends on synchronizing internal and external priorities.	• Kateřina Maršíková, Institutional Leader of the RUN-EU alliance, Technical University of Liberec, Czechia • Wilbert van der Meer, Director of International Programmes, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark • Jiri Nantl, Co-project Manager,European Campus Hainburg, Austria

• How alliances can serve as strategic amplifiers, enabling universities to scale institutional ambitions and accelerate transformation in ways that would be impossible alone. • Experimenting with physical co-location as a driver of integration, exemplified by the European Campus Hainburg. Together, these perspectives offer participants a strategic lens on what sustainable partnership models may look like in the next decade.	
Breakout session 3 **Funding that transforms: insights from bilateral, EU, and national support mechanisms** *Instruments; Peer-learning: funders* As Europe's universities navigate an increasingly complex funding landscape, this session will showcase three instruments that illustrate how targeted investment can strengthen institutional capacity: • The DFG's International Research Training Groups demonstrate how structured doctoral programmes can drive deep, bilateral collaboration: joint research agendas, coordinated supervision across borders and reciprocal long-term mobility for doctoral researchers. Indeed, they offer a model for how funding can simultaneously support internationalisation, research excellence and sustainable partnerships. • At European level, the EIT Higher Education Initiative provides universities with resources to build innovation capacity by supporting institutional transformation, entrepreneurship ecosystems and cross-sector collaboration. • Complementing these perspectives, the France 2030 programme shows how national-level investment strategies can empower universities to contribute to major societal and technological transitions, from green industry to cutting-edge research. Participants will gain a comparative view of how funding instruments, whether bilateral, European, or national, can shape university strategy, strengthen research and innovation ecosystems, and open new pathways for international cooperation.	• Guillaume Bordry, Director for Knowledge, General Secretariat for Investment, Office of the Prime Minister, France • Martin Roatsch, Programme Officer, German Research Foundation (DFG) • Dolores Volkert, Head of Strategic Education Initiatives, EIT Higher Education Initiative
Breakout session 4 **What does the future hold for your university's finances? (Part 1)** *Workshop* Ten years from now, where do you want to see your institution, financially? What will you have achieved, in terms of income generation, partnerships, savings? Will your student population have changed significantly? Will your institution develop new activities? How will your collaborations play into the overall financial picture?	• Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik, Senior Adviser, EUA

This Funding Forum offers an exclusive two-part foresight training to participants. Focused on fostering agency, this workshop is not so much about guessing what the future might hold, but how to act in the present with the future in mind. On the first day, participants will learn about futures thinking and foresight methodologies. They will get to know how to use tools such as environmental scanning (STEEP) and future wheel to structure their approaches to, for instance, strategic plan development. *Participants who complete this session can then participate in the second part of the workshop on Friday (Breakout session 13, 10.00 – 11.10).*	
Thursday 15 October 14.00 – 15.30	
Breakout session 5 **Steering (for) system diversity: funding models and institutional heterogeneity in Europe** *Studies; Country analysis; European analysis* Funding models reveal much about how a country thinks about, and caters for, diversity in higher education provision. This session will explore large-scale developments in different European countries, focusing on the link between funding and system governance. • In Czechia, simultaneous legislative reforms in R&D and higher education are trying to address long-standing structural problems: fragmentation, low policy coherence and the unresolved question of what the state's interest in higher education actually is. • In Spain, the private sector has expanded from 31 to 44 universities in a single decade, raising questions about whether private institutions are better positioned to respond to shifting demand, and what that means for the governance of a diversifying system. • And across Europe, evidence shows that institutional core funding builds capacity in lower-performing universities, while competitive project funding drives innovation primarily in already research-intensive institutions.	• Pavel Doleček, Member of the Board, Technology Agency of the Czech Republic • Thomas Zacharewicz, Professor of Economics, University of Seville, Spain • Carmen Perez-Esparrells, Associate Professor, Autonomous University of Madrid, Spain
Breakout session 6 **Data as strategy: collaborating across institutions to drive smarter (campus) decisions** *Workshop* Universities are sitting on untapped data, and those that learn to harness it collaboratively gain a real strategic edge. This session will bring together practitioners and senior leaders to share experiences and co-develop ideas around cross-institutional data cooperation for financial planning, academic portfolio management and campus optimisation.	• Jasmine Baccani, Doctoral candidate, Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands • Alexandra den Heijer, Professor, Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands

• TU Delft draws on the Campus NL initiative, which has built a national knowledge base around campus space utilisation data in the Netherlands and is now supporting the discussion across Europe, while the University of Amsterdam provides a complementary example through its mapping of national space standards in response to changing patterns of space utilisation. • Atlantic Technological University then presents the Enhancing Data Infrastructure Project, developed as part of a sector-wide collaboration across Ireland's technological universities. It shows how shared investment in structured data and business intelligence can become a hands-on tool for strategic financial planning, academic portfolio decisions, and rethinking campus use — including recognising interdisciplinary programme delivery. The session will close with an interactive co-design exercise, inviting participants to map pathways for sharing data and intelligence across European higher education and to connect with peers already doing it.	• Femke Kamp, advisor on campus development strategy and policy, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands • Elizabeth McCabe, Vice-President for Financial Planning & Analysis, Atlantic Technological University, Ireland
Breakout session 7 **Alliance-ology: looking into the financial future of alliances** *Alliances; Partnerships; European analysis* The session will explore one of the core challenges of the European Universities Initiative: building solid financial foundations. Three contributions combining research, policy making and practitioner experience will shed light on the opportunities and challenges shaping the future of European Universities alliances. • The first presentation compares financial support by public authorities to alliances over time, from targeted subsidies to indirect incentives, and how these choices reflect political contexts and shape the sustainability of transnational cooperation. • The second perspective underlines cooperation among public authorities through the work of the FUTURE4ALLIANCES project, which aims to strengthen coherence across funding frameworks, support peer learning and develop shared recommendations for the next phase of alliance development. • The session concludes with a focus on the effectiveness and sustainability of alliances, based on the evaluation of an existing alliance, examining what drives return on investment and the indicators that could shape the post-2028 phase.	• Daniela Craciun, Researcher,University of Twente, the Netherlands • Brigitte Ecker, Managing Director, WPZ Research, Austria • Ladislav Janicek, Rector, Brno University of Technology, Czechia
Breakout session 8 **Resources for innovation: back-of-the-napkin exercise** *Workshop* Innovation is often celebrated in universities, yet its financial architecture is rarely examined with the same enthusiasm. This interactive workshop invites	• Dara Melnyk, Director of Global Engagement, Higher Education Strategy Associates, Canada

participants to confront a deceptively simple but crucial question: what does it actually cost to innovate? The session offers a practical, evidence-informed framework for estimating the real resource needs behind institutional change: time, expertise and financial investment. From living labs to add-ons, full institutional transformations and bottom-up initiatives, participants will explore a typology of innovation illustrated with examples from across European higher education. Through whole-room brainstorming and a structured hands-on exercise, they will map the resources required for each innovation type and produce a rough cost estimate for an initiative relevant to their own context, using AI tools to support rapid evidence-based calculations. The workshop will culminate in a group discussion on hidden assumptions and divergent cost models, offering a rare opportunity to reflect on how institutions think about the funding of innovation and how they might do so more strategically. This workshop will be highly relevant for participants interested in institutional innovation, university financial planning, or strengthening collaboration between visionary change-makers and the financial leaders who make transformation possible.	
Friday 16 October 10.00 – 11.10	
Breakout session 9 **The art of fundraising: structures & culture** *Partnerships; Peer-learning: universities* Universities across Europe are increasingly exploring how to mobilise additional resources, partnerships and external support to advance their missions. But what does it take to diversify income sources in the current economic context, and how do institutions actually get there? This session will map the current landscape of income diversification, fundraising and philanthropy in higher education. It will then explore two approaches to a central question: how can universities develop the strategic capacity to mobilise resources, partnerships and societal support in ways that strengthen both their financial sustainability and their long-term value to society? • The Amidex Foundation at Aix-Marseille University shows what a university-led foundation can achieve at scale. Through strategic partnerships, endowment management and consortium coordination, the foundation has become an important instrument for supporting the university's research mission and broader development. • The second perspective shifts attention from structures to relationships and engagement. It explores how universities attract and retain donors and sponsors not primarily through campaigns, but by cultivating trust, shared values and a long-term purpose. Beyond a source of income,	• Denis Bertin, Vice-President for the Amidex University Foundation, Aix-Marseille University, France • Christian Vranek, Culture Creates Values, Austria

philanthropy becomes a way of strengthening the connection between universities and society.	
Breakout session 10 **Financial strategies for institutional transformation** *Peer-learning: universities; Instruments* Universities increasingly face funding environments that strain their core missions. This session offers participants a practical look at how institutions are responding by designing their own strategic funding mechanisms – tools that not only fill gaps in the external landscape but also drive internal cultural and organisational change. This session will explore three university case studies that show how institutions identify specific shortcomings in their funding context and proactively build pathways to address them. • Ghent University will present its non-competitive internal funding mechanism for research, designed to restore trust, reduce pressure, and give academics space for creativity. • The University of Luxembourg will share insights from its competitive Education Innovation Fund, which stimulates bottom-up learning & teaching innovation among staff and students. • Finally, the Université Catholique de Lille, a private non-profit university, will showcase how it leverages European and national funding to advance its sustainability agenda. The session will highlight how universities diagnose strategic challenges, design funding mechanisms that respond to them, and evaluate their impact.	• Jeroen Vanden Berghe, Logistics Manager, Ghent University, Belgium • Dayana Sanchez, Project Officer, University of Luxembourg • Maryline Rousselle, Director of European and Institutional Funding, Université Catholique de Lille, France
Breakout session 11 **Reform under pressure: scalable approaches from Ukraine's research and autonomy overhaul** *Peer-learning: funders; Resilience* Ukraine's higher education and research system is rebuilding under extraordinary pressure while preparing for deeper integration into the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. This provides us with a unique window into how targeted collaboration can accelerate systemic transformation. This session will present the Research Infrastructures for the Future of Ukraine (RIFF) project, co-funded by the European Commission, which supports Ukraine in aligning its research infrastructures with European standards, expanding international cooperation and sustaining research capacity through remote fellowships for Ukrainian scholars. Alongside this multilateral effort, Estonia's bilateral cooperation with Ukraine tackles one of the most consequential reform areas: financial autonomy. Drawing on EUA's Autonomy Scorecard, the initiative helps redesign governance	• Ondrej Hradil, Department Head, Masaryk University, Czechia • Hanna Kanep, Secretary General, Universities Estonia

frameworks, strengthen universities' ability to manage resources independently and build resilient financial structures fit for a modern higher education system. Of high relevance to participants interested in university governance, research infrastructure policy, or the future of European support for Ukraine, this session will provide a unique window into how targeted collaboration can accelerate systemic transformation.	
Breakout session 12 **Financing mobility: managing the real costs for students and universities** *Studies; European analysis* Student mobility is under growing financial pressure, and Europe is only beginning to understand the full cost implications for students, universities and national systems. This session will offer a timely overview of the trends and hot topics defining mobility today, from affordability and funding gaps to the evolving expectations of students navigating cross-border study, providing participants with an essential grounding in the latest evidence shaping the debate. • The Academic Cooperation Association will present insights from its recent study on the true costs of student mobility, shedding light on how financial barriers shape participation, equity and programme design across Europe. • The Erasmus Student Network will complement this with fresh data from the student perspective, revealing how economic realities influence mobility choices, lived experiences and the accessibility of opportunities.	• Wim Gabriels, Director, Erasmus Student Network • Veronika Kupriyanova, Deputy Director, Academic Cooperation Association
Breakout session 13 **What does the future hold for your university's finances? (Part 2)** *Workshop* *N.B. To participate in this session, conference attendees must have competed part 1 of the workshop on Thursday (Breakout session 4, 11.15-12.30).* In the second half of this workshop, participants will apply their newly acquired knowledge to explore different possible futures and sense into the direction to take for their institution's strategic development, enabling them to progress from foresight to insight.	• Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik, Senior Adviser, EUA