



10 The Guild

**REINFORCING
DISCOVERY
REIMAGINING
COLLABORATION**

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Foreword

The Guild was created out of a common understanding that universities needed to have a stronger voice in Brussels. Our founding members were acutely aware of the EU's growing impact, through third-party research and innovation (R&I) funding, including the ERC. Our universities also reflected on the outstanding importance of Erasmus+ to students. This made it imperative to have a trusted, authoritative, and agile voice in Brussels.

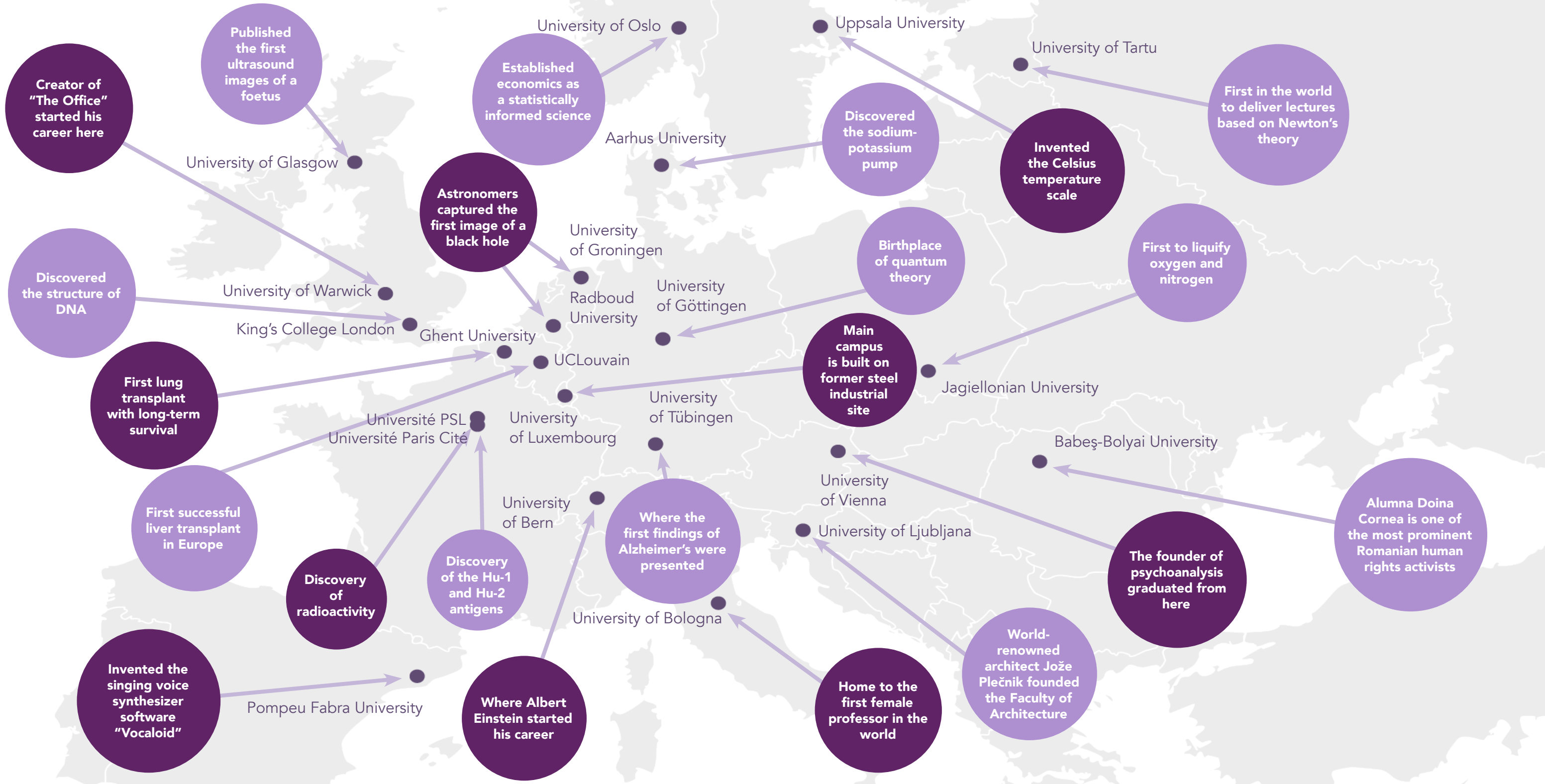
From the outset, Guild members wished to be inclusive, bringing together excellent universities from across Europe. It was also clear that The Guild needed to distinguish itself through strong internal cohesion, ensuring our working groups were fully informed, their voice articulated through clear and consensual positions. Finally, while The Guild could only ever claim to speak for its members, our positions, to be credible, could not speak for narrow self-interest, but had to speak to the sector as a whole.

In this brochure, we reflect on the impact we have had over the past decade. Personally, I would highlight:

- Our clear and distinctive voice in the articulation of Horizon Europe (FP9 and FP10), including excellence and the integration of social sciences and humanities (SSH).
- Our equally strong influence on Erasmus+, including its operational functionality, international dimension, and the European Universities Initiative.
- We became a prominent advocate of academic freedom.
- Our recognised advocacy for European inclusiveness and excellence, across the whole of the EU and extending beyond, to Switzerland, the UK, and Norway.
- Our strong, consistent impact on legislative arenas outside R&I policy which are of crucial importance to universities, including digital/AI and health.
- The network's clear impact on our own universities, whose engagement with the EU – and its funding programmes – increased, not least through Horizon Europe grant capture.
- Our unique partnership with the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA), in policy advocacy and the creation of long-term, challenge-led, equitable research clusters spanning Africa and Europe.
- With ARUA, our sector-leading voice in the articulation and implementation of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda, adopted by heads of state and governments in the African Union and European Union.

I am grateful for the unwavering support of our university leaderships, especially in our Board, and our university communities that have enabled our work through their rich investment in time and input. But I would like to thank in particular my colleagues in The Guild's office, who have made The Guild such an inspiring, collegial, energetic and fun place to work.

Jan Palmowski
Secretary-General of The Guild



Strengthening the voice of universities



685

Current working group
members



413

Internal meetings



152

Statements, Insight
and Position Papers

Our positions have been carefully curated within over 25 working groups, and cross-checked by our governance committees – the Board, our Presidents or the Vice-Presidents. Each meeting with policymakers builds on careful preparation with our university communities, in turn leading to follow-up on our side. Through The Guild, our member universities have acquired detailed expertise on EU policies, with EU policymakers gaining rich insight into university perspectives in turn.

Stuart Croft

Vice-Chancellor, University of Warwick

The Guild was formed quickly. The idea – bringing together a dynamic group of universities committed to delivering research excellence to co-create Europe's future – was immediately appealing. The founding members all felt lucky to be in the right place at the right time. I felt lucky to have Jan Palmowski as a Warwick professor, the person who drove the vision and the implementation!



Anton Muscatelli

Principal and Vice-Chancellor,
University of Glasgow (2009-2025)



The creation of the Guild has made a fundamental contribution to the development of Europe's research area and our university systems. Prior to its establishment the voice of Europe's research-intensive universities was less strong and less varied. The Guild has brought a diversity of significant voices into this space, spanning beyond the EU.



Ole Petter Ottersen

Rector of the University of Oslo (2009-2017)
and first Chair of The Guild

Having helped establish The Guild as its founding Chair and later serving as Interim Secretary General, I have witnessed its remarkable evolution. In ten years, it has grown from a newcomer to a leading European voice for research and higher education - thanks to dedicated staff, committed members, and Jan's outstanding leadership.

Vincent Blondel

Rector of UCLouvain (2014-2024)
and second Chair of The Guild

I served as President of The Guild for five years (2017-2022), during the association's formative period. Under the energetic leadership of Jan Palmowski, our association quickly became a major player in the European academic landscape and a source of inspiration for many. This was an extraordinary achievement and one of the most rewarding experiences of my academic career.



Making a concrete difference

Research Excellence

We have consistently argued that Horizon Europe must be distinguished by research excellence, pushing back tendencies in the Commission to steer funding towards predefined policy goals. The global impact of Horizon Europe depends on the quality of the problems identified and the research undertaken, as recognised by researchers, not politicians, including through world-leading programmes like the European Research Council and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions.

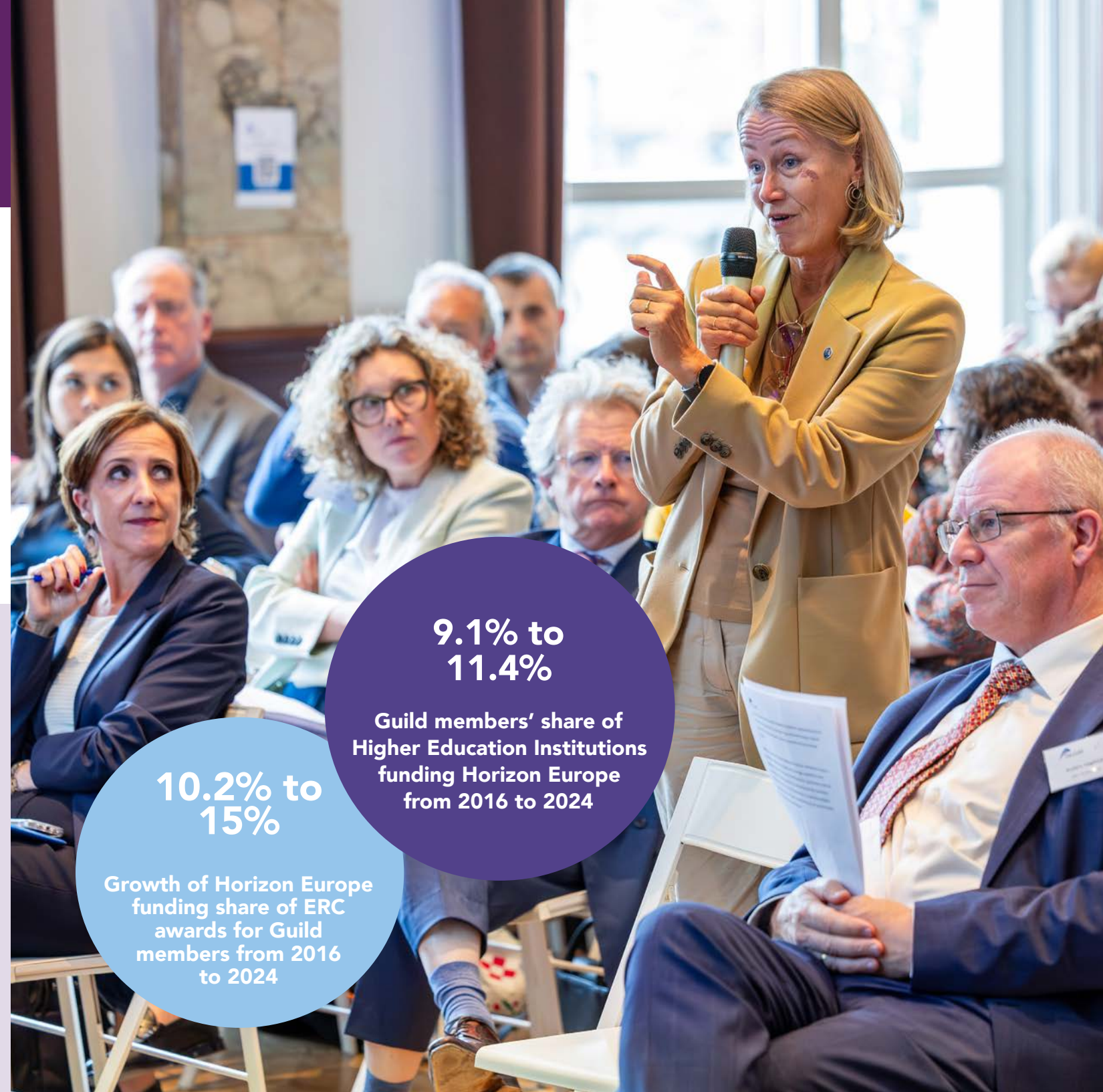
**€332.8m to
€491.8m**

**Growth in Horizon Europe
funding received by Guild
members from 2016 to
2024**

The Guild is a devoted advocate for research excellence at the heart of European R&I policy. By uniting leading universities and amplifying their voice, it ensures that curiosity-driven, quality research remains central to EU funding frameworks. Its commitment to academic freedom and cross-border collaboration strengthens Europe's global scientific leadership. Excellence is not negotiable – it is the foundation for innovation, societal progress, and trust in science. For the University of Tartu, it is an honour to be part of The Guild family, as excellence in research is the core strategic objective of our university's research policy.

Mari Moora

Vice-Rector for Research, University of Tartu



**9.1% to
11.4%**

**Guild members' share of
Higher Education Institutions
funding Horizon Europe
from 2016 to 2024**

**10.2% to
15%**

**Growth of Horizon Europe
funding share of ERC
awards for Guild
members from 2016
to 2024**

ERC



Maria Leptin

President of the European Research Council

Curiosity and scientific excellence are seeds from which new knowledge grows. European universities offer the fertile ground where ideas, methods, and instruments are developed, and the next generation of critical thinkers are trained. The Guild shows how vital it is to defend excellence and curiosity-driven research as a foundation for the values and skills on which our society depends.

Claire Morel

Head of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Unit, European Commission (2020-2026)

Over the years, The Guild has been a committed advocate of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, supporting their excellence-driven model, openness, researcher-centred design, and high standards. By mobilising its universities and engaging policymakers, it has helped ensure that the programme remains ambitious and true to its core values, notably by defending academic freedom, an area in which the Guild has taken a leading role by speaking out against political interference.



MSCA

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During the 10 years of its existence The Guild has become a key player at European level, representing effectively its member universities and ensuring that their expert knowledge on key issues such as academic freedom, public-private partnerships and international cooperation is heard. The Guild has been most successful in advising and influencing the policymaking of the European Commission in the field of education, science and innovation. As such The Guild has become a voice that's listened to and that is quite an achievement on which I congratulate you. Happy Birthday!

Robert-Jan Smits, Director-General of Research and Innovation, European Commission (2010-2018)



Framework programme for R&I

As one of the world's largest public research funding schemes, the framework programme sits at the heart of our policy advocacy. We have worked intensively with the European Commission, key Members of the European Parliament and Member State (and associated country) research councillors to secure strong budgets for key instruments (including the ERC and MSCA) and to identify and reduce as much as possible barriers for applicants.

Social sciences, arts and humanities (SSAH)

From the beginning, we have been vocal about the importance of research for culture and society, promoting sustained support for SSAH through EU funding programmes. Through input from our academic communities, not least through three separate working groups at Deans' level (SSAH, Law, and Theology) we helped ensure that SSAH remained a key issue in the EU's approach to R&I.

The Guild and its Deans of SSAH working group have been a meaningful arena for learning about, and taking part in shaping, research policy on the European level. It has further been a rewarding international network for important collegial discussions on issues such as the status of humanities, social sciences, and interdisciplinarity. I have particularly valued the diverse range of idealistic and pragmatic arguments that have been proposed, debated, and refined within this dynamic group.



Claes-Fredrik Helgesson

Director of the Centre for Integrated Research on Culture and Society, Uppsala University



Strengthening SSAH

We build on the input of SSAH communities and strengthen them through sharing best practice and regular meetings



Horizon Europe

We teamed up with other networks to ensure that SSAH integration was introduced as an explicit objective – and legal requirement – in FP9



ERC and MSCA

Our vocal support for the ERC and MSCA directly supported SSAH researchers, as in recent years over 25% of ERC grants have been awarded to SSAH researchers



Key to EU strategy

We have consistently sought to place SSAH research at the centre of the Commission's strategic priorities, most recently in formulating ambitious SSAH-led R&I Moonshots (2025)

Standalone programme

In 2024–25, it appeared very uncertain whether there would be a new Framework Programme (FP10), independent of the European Competitiveness Fund. Together with LERU, we spearheaded the advocacy for a standalone FP10. Our call to safeguard FP10's integrity as a cutting-edge programme for research and innovation was supported by over 200 university leaders, and by organisations (including national rectors' conferences) representing Europe's university sector.

European Innovation Council

To improve European success in the field of knowledge and technology transfer, there must be constant exchange between institutions and professionals working on the ground. The Guild has successfully mobilised relevant European networks, such as ASTP and EARTO, which all shared the concern that the initial EIC exploitation rules would detrimentally have pitted researchers against the institutions that employ them. Together, we convinced the EIC Board to instead adopt a realistic, balanced and evidence-based stance on access to EIC IP rights resulting from the activities of universities and research institutions.



Christophe Haunold

In his capacity as President of ASTP (2022-2024)
Head of Partnership, Knowledge and Technology
Transfer Office, University of Luxembourg (2024-...)



Driving EU research cohesion

The EU has become an increasingly important space for framing research practices, standards, and priorities. This has been expressed in the renewal of the European Research Area (ERA), prepared from 2018 and launched in 2020. The quality of our input depended crucially on the persistent engagement of our members. This is apparent also in our rich contributions to the European Research Assessment Reform, where we interacted closely with the reform's writing team as part of the steering group.

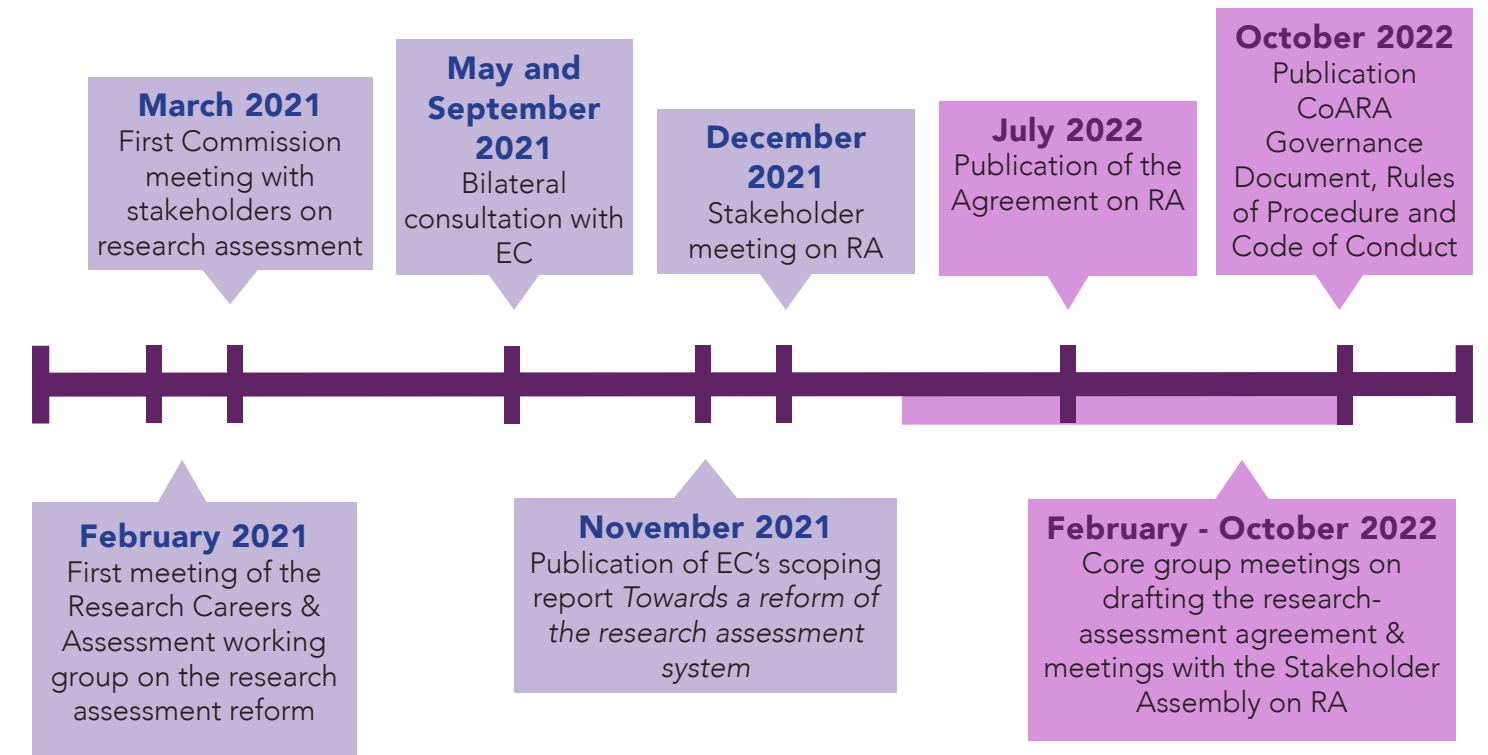
Research Assessment Reform (RA)

Discussions feeding into the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment focused on how we can better recognise changing research practices, including open science. In these ongoing discussions, rich engagement with our university communities was essential – to that end, we organised a total of eight meetings with our research careers group, and seven special meetings of our Vice-Presidents, in addition to our regular governance meetings.

In the end, the agreement expressed our members' key concerns, including better recognition of the importance of research excellence, and of the diverse ways that this could be measured and articulated.

8
Research Careers & Assessment working group meetings

7
Special Vice-President meetings





Nele Bracke
Research Policy Adviser, Ghent University

In the early 2020s, The Guild played a key role in shaping the European Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment. Ghent University found in The Guild a network of like-minded institutions with which it could build a broader coalition to advance research assessment reform. Through close consultation with its members, The Guild amplified the voices of Ghent University and others already engaged in reforming their evaluation practices. This contribution was invaluable in ensuring that the reform was informed by practical experience and aligned with change processes already underway at various universities.

The year is 2021 and it's spring in Brussels. The European Commission convened a stakeholder meeting to discuss a reform initiative addressing core academic activities with potential impact on hiring and promoting academic and research staff, as well as for funding of research. After an intensive 1 ½ years, filled with numerous consultations, several drafts, open assemblies, and the like, the Agreement was signed September 2022. The Guild was involved throughout the process – engaged, respected, critical and constructive. Its 21 member universities prepared input and reflected on the evolving debate in working group, Vice-Presidents' meetings and General Assemblies. Meanwhile, The Guild's energetic and extremely competent secretariat kept its ears to the ground, securing early access to the policy process and ensuring the voice of its members was heard.



Åse Gornitzka
Pro-Rector, University of Oslo (2021-2025)



ERA Forum

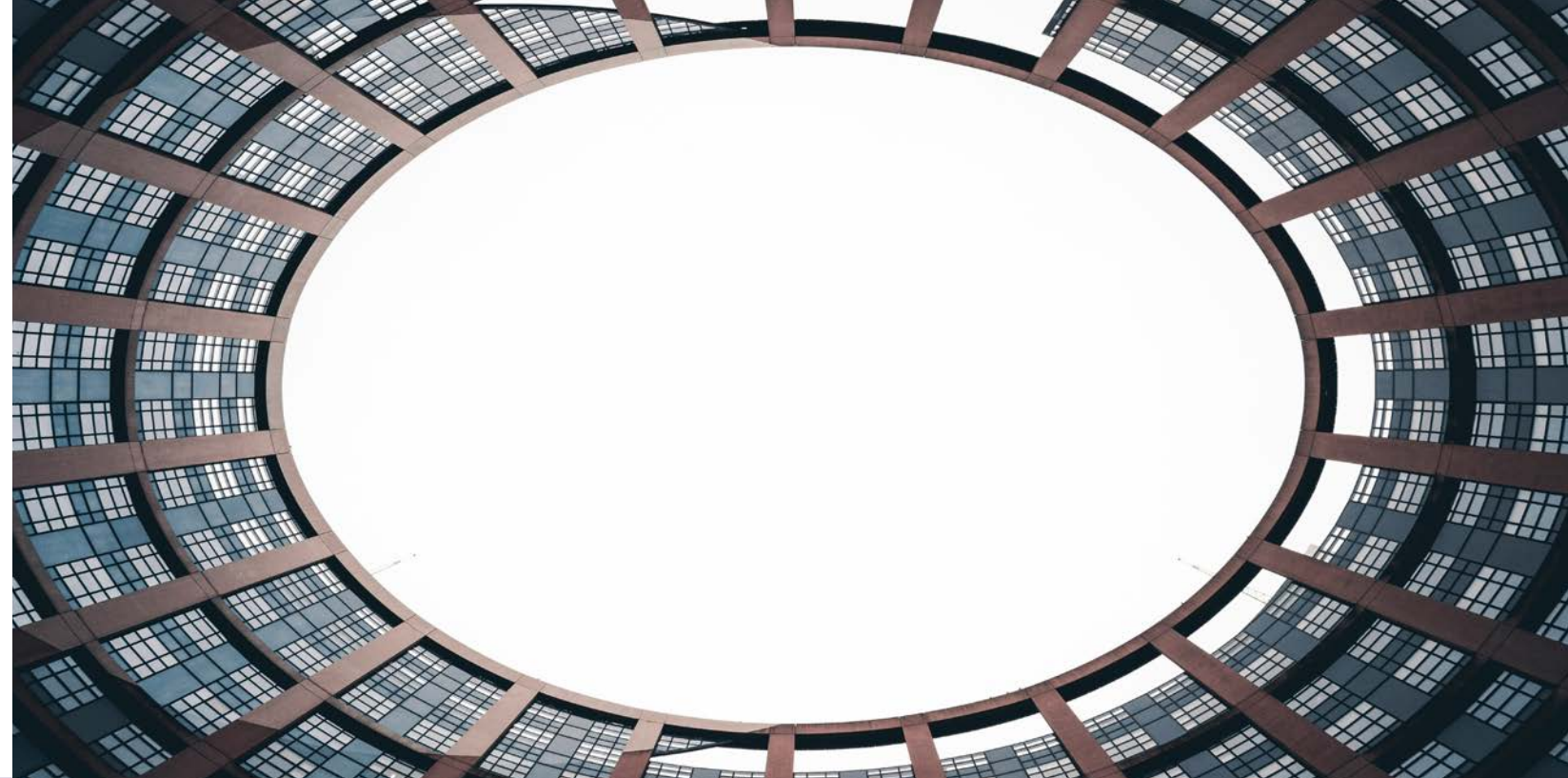
When the European Research Area was relaunched, we insisted successfully on research excellence being key to the ERA Strategy Document, the Pact for Research and Innovation (2021). Subsequently, we contributed to the ERA Policy Agenda by leading a cross-sector coalition calling for stronger emphasis on scientific leadership. We also helped shape ERA Actions in practice (e.g. on international collaboration and the Global Approach) and in 2025, we were the university sector co-representatives in the ERA Forum.



Sergej Možina

Slovenian Councillor for Research,
Chair of the ERA Forum (2021-2025)

The Guild has been an invaluable partner throughout my work on EU-level R&I policy, particularly in the context of the ERA. Over the years, I have greatly valued the close, trusted relationship built with its exceptionally professional team, whose insights consistently grounded our work in the real needs of universities. Their engagement was essential for the development of the ERA Forum, offering a crucial bridge between policymaking and institutional realities. The Guild's early, unwavering support was instrumental in establishing the Forum's collaborative model, and its contributions were a reliable reality check and catalyst for practical policy solutions.



ERA in practice

Within the ERA we have been a leading contributor to the Action on Global Approach to R&I (2022-27) and its multilateral dialogues on principles and values for international research. We co-organised three workshops with the European Commission and individual Member States that gathered national and stakeholder representatives from Europe and overseas and to discuss academic freedom, research excellence, and equitable research and innovation partnerships with low- and middle-income countries. These workshops, and others in which we participated, established a common understanding for international cooperation endorsed in the Brussels Statement at the International Ministerial Conference on 16 February 2024.

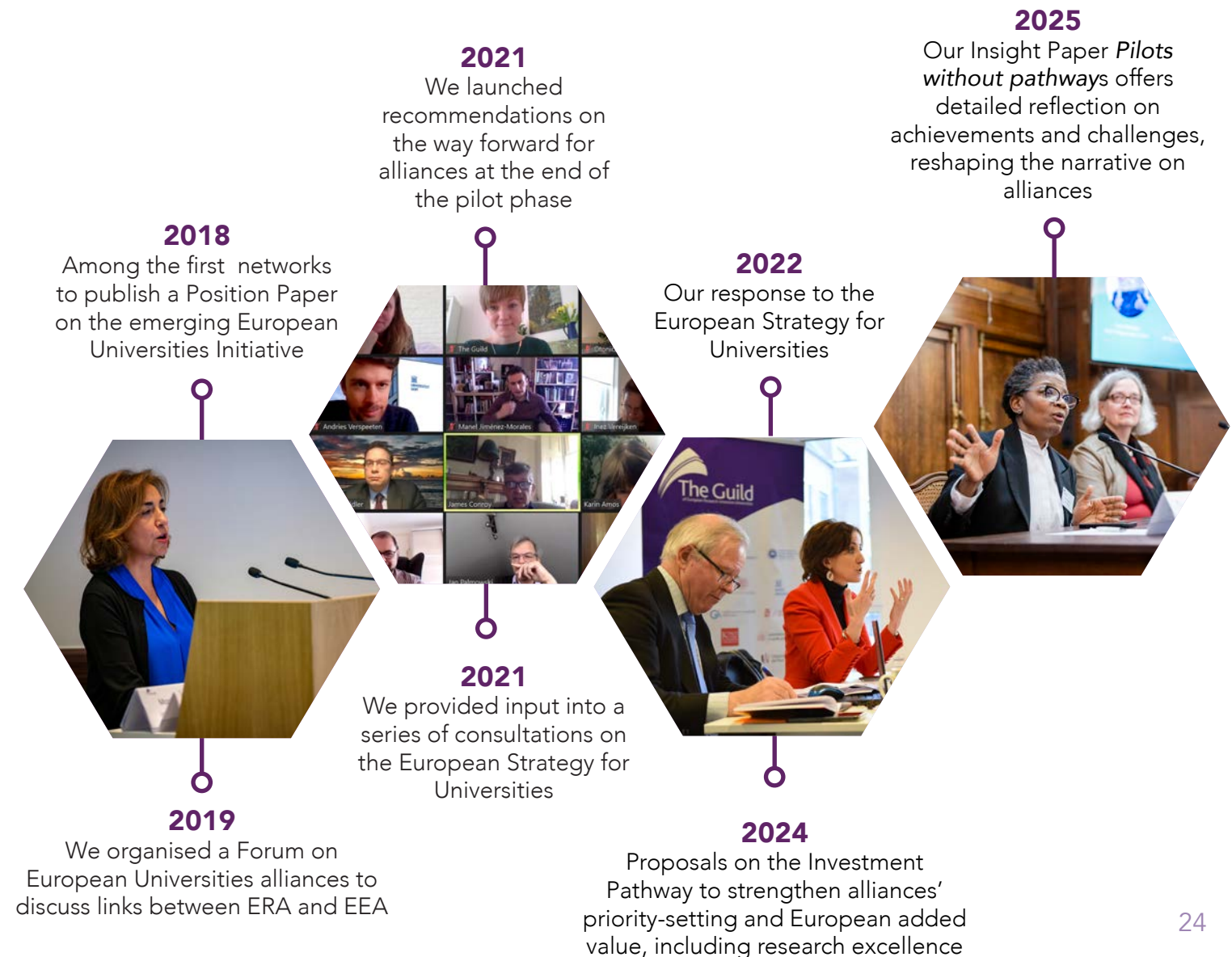
Advancing European higher education

Alongside research policy, education has played an equally important role in our activities. "Europe needs Erasmus+ more than ever" summarises our commitment to Europe's flagship programme. Thanks to the thoughtful expertise of our members, we have been able to help shape new initiatives such as the European Universities Initiative, finetune existing actions, and bring rich contours to our feedback on Erasmus+ in practice. Participation in several stakeholder groups enabled Guild universities to bring their expertise to the heart of EU policymaking.

We also brought together our thought leaders in education, to foster a wider debate in the sector on common challenges facing higher education at a time of crisis and transformation. They also provided distinct input to policy initiatives ranging from the European Strategy for Universities to the European degree.

European Universities alliances

Our network helped shape a vision for a scheme that could be truly transformative for the sector. As early as March 2018 we presented core elements of the initiative – including the need for alliances to define their own strategies and priorities bottom-up – which were later reflected in the first pilot call. Since then, all our members participate in the initiative. As the alliances have evolved, we have become a trusted stakeholder that openly acknowledges their possibilities and practical realities.



Europe needs Erasmus+ more than ever

Since 2017, our input to Erasmus+ interim evaluations has contributed to conversations in the wider sector about the next programme. Emphasis on flexible and shorter mobility formats, opportunities to develop transferable skills in all study fields, and a digitalisation agenda that is truly driven by the university community were some of our key messages. During the pandemic, which coincided with the transition to the new programme, our members quickly reacted by proposing additional measures to ease implementation. More recently, building on our expertise with ARUA colleagues, we provided proposals for the international dimension of Erasmus+ that can help Europe and our global partners.



The aim of the European Universities Initiative – to support not only European education but also European integration, democratic values and competitiveness — spurred institutional creativity and rapid networking among universities. The Guild became a dance floor and some of its universities initially formed the core of Circle U. Since then, The Guild has been an invaluable partner to reflect on our experience with colleagues from other alliances, craft collective policy input, and engage with the Commission in regular dialogue about how to make the initiative the best it could be.

Svein Stølen

Rector, University of Oslo (2017-2025)

The Guild has been a key contributor in co-shaping the European Universities Initiative, alongside other universities and student associations, from the very start, in 2018. Thanks to this collective engagement, the initiative has managed to reflect the diversity and ambition of Europe's higher education landscape, laying the foundations of Europe's future universities. The Guild continues playing an important role by providing regular evidence-based reports on what the European Universities alliances have delivered so far, their strengths and systemic impact but also where they could further develop for a competitive and attractive Europe. Strategic partners like The Guild are key to advancing a strong, skills-driven Europe that delivers for all students and lifelong learners.



Vanessa Debiais-Sainton

Head of the Higher Education Unit, DG EAC (2018-2024),
Member of Cabinet for Executive Vice-President Roxana
Mînzatu, European Commission (2024-2026)

The Guild provides us with a platform to pool efforts and strategically advocate our interests and perspectives at the European level. It offers an essential opportunity to feed universities' expertise in the further development of Erasmus+, for example, our work on the simplification of the grant system or the digitalisation agenda. As a long-standing member of The Guild's Erasmus+ working group, I am continually inspired by the group's professionalism and collegial spirit.



Karin Krall

Deputy Head of International Office,
University of Vienna

Thought leadership for a fast-changing world



Academic Freedom

Our first founding principle, academic freedom, has been a key part of our work, as the freedom of scientific research has been increasingly under threat, within and beyond the EU. These attacks have not only become more intense, but also more diverse. Certain subjects and methodologies have been susceptible to ideological (and financial) censure by governments and funding bodies with significant impact on global research collaboration.

As academic freedom suffered in response to recent geopolitical shifts, we were forthright in calling for a differentiated response from the EU, focusing not on self-interest but the interest of global science. Culminating in our Annual Lecture on Academic Freedom on International Academic Freedom Day, we have worked tirelessly in fostering debate in the sector and among policymakers and providing concrete proposals on how to strengthen academic freedom.



Deepening collaboration on global challenges like AI and health

The EU has assumed an increasingly important role in setting common rules and standards and reducing barriers in areas such as health and digital/AI. Because of the importance of these domains to universities, we have been one of the most active university networks influencing broader EU initiatives, including the European Health Data Space (EHDS) Regulation, research involving animals, the AI Act, and the EU's concerted efforts to be globally competitive in AI.



Forsberg Nilsson
Dean of Medicine, Uppsala University

Through initiatives such as the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and the European Health Data Space, the European Health Union boosts collaboration and access to healthcare and research across Member States. The Guild has played a crucial role in shaping this transformation through policy advocacy and engagement by its member universities. Alongside calls for robust investment in early-stage research and skills development, The Guild supports the facilitation of international multicentre clinical trials and strategies to guarantee affordable, accessible, and innovative medicines in Europe and beyond. By aligning universities' capabilities with EU health strategies, The Guild helps create a knowledge ecosystem that is inclusive, innovative, and prepared for future challenges.

Ensuring the European Health Data Regulation facilitates health research

2021

Publication of our vision for the EHDS Regulation



Annual meetings with the European Commission from 2022, bringing forward EHDS Regulation challenges

2022

Statement on the Commission's proposal

2026

Statement on implementing the EHDS Regulation

2025

Providing our universities and researchers with guiding documents on the EHDS Regulation



Over the past year, The Guild has played a pivotal role in empowering my engagement with the rapidly evolving landscape of artificial intelligence in research and higher education. Thanks to The Guild's support, I was able to actively contribute to the development of the EU living guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI in research – an experience that has profoundly shaped my understanding of how European values are integrated ethically and effectively across scientific disciplines. The Guild not only facilitated my participation but also provided a collaborative environment where academic expertise, institutional values, and forward-looking perspectives could come together to influence policy at a European level.



Vladimir Estivill-Castro
Professor, Pompeu Fabra University



Representing the voice of universities in EU AI in Science policy dialogues

2023

In dialogue with the European Commission on uptake of AI systems in research since March 2023



2025

Speaker at Polish Presidency event on applications of AI in science co-organised with the Commission

May

Contribution to the call for evidence on the Commission's AI in Science Strategy

June

Active participation in the ERA Action on AI in science

2024

Ongoing contributions to drafting and updating the Living Guidelines on responsible Generative AI use in Research since Spring 2024

Position Paper on the use of AI in research



Nov

Official partner and speaker at the AI in Science Summit, organised by the Danish Presidency, which launched the Resource for AI in Science (RAISE)

Empowering institutions in Widening countries

Our pan-European membership brings together leading universities across Europe, including the EU-13. Excellence in R&I must be inclusive, strengthened wherever it exists. This is why we have consistently been championing robust Widening Participation measures in the Framework Programme to boost research excellence and enhance involvement from lower-performing countries in competitive R&I initiatives.



Shaping the future of education

The Future of Education project, launched early during the COVID-19 pandemic, offered our members a unique space to reimagine research-led education in a digital age. Our Insight Papers and online webinars have sparked sector-wide conversations on transnational collaboration, pedagogic innovation and policy implications.



Widening has been an important part of The Guild's activities over the years, and I have been pleased to contribute to it. The innovation gap still exists between the EU-13 and EU-14 countries, but several EU-13 countries have managed to narrow the gap through their own active work and strong support from external partners. Estonia is among them. Now our task is to use the knowledge and experience gained so that the remaining countries can also move forward faster. The goal is that one day there will no longer be a need for the European Union's widening programs, but all Member States will be ready and able to use their research and innovation potential on an equal basis and with maximum efficiency.



Toivo Maimets
Professor, University of Tartu



Jo Angouri
Professor, University of Warwick

Europe, through the European Universities Initiative, has a unique opportunity to lead the future of education if we find effective ways to embed pilots and mobilise relevant systems and structures. For this, new frameworks, policy tools, and funding models are required, alongside spaces that bring together all key stakeholders to work collectively and identify pathways to implementation. This is where The Guild plays a vital role: representing and supporting a collective voice, creating the space needed to mobilise change and develop new structures. Our aspiration has been to contribute an intervention that brings like-minded colleagues together around shared challenges and ambitions. I am confident that our work will have a sustained impact as The Guild continues to expand its influence, shape debates and feed into policy across European higher education.

Convening long-term equitable collaboration with Africa

In 2018 we launched a unique collaboration with the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA), which represents 23 of Africa’s leading universities. Together, we helped shape a distinctive argument about the need for equitable, long-term research partnerships between our neighbouring continents to address common challenges.

AU-EU Innovation Agenda

With ARUA, we developed a series of detailed policy proposals. These formed the basis of a close and persistent dialogue with policymakers, together with ARUA. In response, our arguments were adopted as a key objective of the draft AU-EU Innovation Agenda, agreed between heads of state from both continents at the EU-AU Summit in 2022. Our joint vision also has practical application, forming the basis of our Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence which enacts the Agenda by investing in stable, long-term research partnerships based on excellence. This work has defied growing uncertainty around global collaboration for public good.



2018

Start of ARUA partnership

Stakeholders representing over 2,000 universities support our Call for Action to implement the Innovation Agenda

Input into all the consultations informing EU strategy



2023

Launch of the Africa-Europe CoRE in Brussels

Final AU-EU Innovation Agenda adopted

2020

First Insight Paper, authored by Peter Maassen, and joint policy papers with ARUA



2022

AU-EU Summit endorses draft AU-EU Innovation Agenda

2024

Africa-Europe CoRE officially recognised as an AU-EU Innovation Initiative



2021

ARUA-The Guild transcontinental conference

We championed the AU-EU Innovation Agenda at two Global Gateway Forums and AU-EU Business Forum in Luanda

2025



“

The question of the relevance of the 21st century university to society can no longer be delayed, particularly in Africa where knowledge institutions remain even more relevant to the question of social transformation. Beyond the academic impact of research, I want to argue that there is a real need for intentionality in the way that universities bring knowledge to bear if we were to have significant societal impact.

'Funmi Olonisakin, Vice President, International, Engagement and Service,
King's College London

– From ARUA's Second Annual Public Distinguished Public Lecture, 2024

The Guild and ARUA's collaboration started at a crucial time, coinciding with the AU and EU's announcement that they were going to negotiate a new strategic agreement. For this agreement to include a more equitable scientific relationship, The Guild and ARUA published a series of joint papers (2019-2022) presenting innovative ideas for strengthening African-European university collaborations. Their impact is clearly visible in the groundbreaking joint AU-EU Innovation Agenda, adopted July 2023. The Guild-ARUA ideas are reflected, for example, in the agenda's long-term focus and scope, the promotion of more balanced scientific collaborations, and its link to local and regional needs in both Africa and Europe. Consequently, The Guild-ARUA collaboration has proven to be of great importance not just for the member universities of the two alliances, but for the scientific relations between the two continents in general.



Peter Maassen
Professor, University of Oslo

Africa-Europe CoRE

When the AU-EU Innovation Agenda was adopted in July 2023, building on the mandate given by Africa's and Europe's political leaders at the 6th AU-EU Summit in February 2022, ARUA and The Guild jointly led the creation of the Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence (CoREs): an initiative of cross-continental, multi-institutional research consortia. CoREs presented an innovative internationalisation strategy based on the Agenda's broad thematic priorities. These bring together researchers from both continents (within and beyond our networks) and use their expertise to help overcome key challenges where frontier research, collaborative higher education and institutional capacity building are key to addressing fundamental societal problems. Guild and ARUA universities have committed to long-term support with a 10-year outlook, mobilising more than EUR17m of funding and in-kind resources to foster equity among partners, and establish the CoREs as well-prepared participants in groundbreaking funding research and teaching initiatives.

The Guild-ARUA collaboration has deepened equitable research partnership between African and European universities. Our model of joint knowledge creation through the Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence (CoRE) addresses shared global challenges while strengthening institutional capacities across both regions. This collaboration has forged long-term, interdisciplinary platforms that connect excellent researchers, expand postgraduate training, and embed African leadership in shaping global research agendas. This partnership exemplifies the key tenets of the Africa Charter such as mutual respect, co-creation, and a shared vision for impactful research that advances sustainable development. We now have a vibrant network of scholars, with bridged resource gaps, and new opportunities for scientific leadership for all. ARUA greatly values this collaboration and is pleased to have The Guild as a partner.

John Gyapong
Secretary-General of ARUA

22
Africa-Europe
Clusters of Research
Excellence

**Within
two years**

143

Principal investigators in
European institutions

269

Principal investigators in
African institutions

88

Publications in
academic journals

+\$40m

Third-party funding
awards for CoRE partners
and activities

\$4.3m

ARUA-Mastercard
Early Career Fellowship
Initiative

**Launch of a new Africa-Europe Partnership to
strengthen research on mpox and Lassa fever
under Team Europe's AU-EU Health Partnership**



Interview with former Secretary-General of ARUA (2015-2024), Ernest Aryeetey

What motivated you to join forces with The Guild?

I heard about The Guild for the first time through Nico Cloete of Stellenbosch University in September 2018. Nico had spoken to Peter Maassen, associated with The Guild, and mentioned ARUA to him. That led to my being invited by The Guild to attend a meeting of DVCs held at The Guild offices in Brussels in October 2018. The meeting led to an agreement between The Guild and ARUA to work together. It was great to see that we shared the same ideals, had similar programmes, and both parties were committed to equitable research. The Guild was led by Jan Palmowski, an indefatigable and resourceful leader, who made our collaboration easy and productive.

What are your strongest memories of the collaboration?

The two networks agreed very early that our partnership should focus on long-term relationships that enable addressing the several demographic, social and environmental changes that Africa and Europe were facing. We figured that that would be in the interest of the two regions in view of the interconnected nature of the transformations taking place globally. Our Memorandum of Understanding emphasised shared long-term goals. We agreed on the need to ensure that collaboration was beneficial to all stakeholders, including students, academic and research staff, professional services staff, and those with responsibility

for university leadership. We wanted to establish an equal and mutually beneficial relationship between the two networks. Making the partnership an equal one was most important to me. We worked hard to produce a Position Paper in February 2020 making recommendations for strengthening African research universities. We followed the Position Paper with a concept note titled "Confronting our Common Challenges: a new Approach to Strengthening Africa's Research, Innovation and Higher Education Capacity". This document, which captured our aspirations as a network of African universities working closely with elite European universities, had the endorsement of all ARUA Vice-Chancellors and signalled the approach we were going to pursue in engaging the European Union. It was basically our common ask. Working with The Guild was truly rewarding.

Can the CoREs sustain their long-term purpose in the face of geopolitical shifts?

The CoREs were initiated to become a formalised arrangement for collaboration between researchers from different institutions. The advantage of the arrangement is that it has the institutional endorsement of university leaders but depends largely on the willingness and commitment of individuals to make it work. It is therefore the attitudes of individuals that will shape the capacity of each CoRE to deliver on its mandate in the long term despite geopolitical shifts. I remain optimistic about this.



University network collaborations

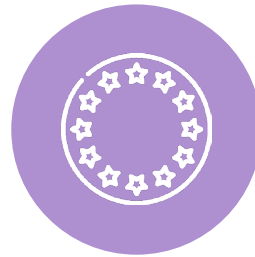
Public visibility

To maximise our impact, we build coalitions with other networks on critical EU policy decisions, which benefits our advocacy for the wider sector.



Horizon Europe and Erasmus+

The Guild was part of a core group of university networks that led the sector in providing joint amendments to the Commission's proposals for FP9, FP10 and Erasmus+



UK/Swiss association

From the beginning, The Guild has emphasised the importance of UK and Swiss association, from leading an open letter to Commission President von der Leyen, to engaging with joint initiatives with other networks and stakeholders in Brussels, the UK and Switzerland.



EIC Board

The Guild led a coalition of university networks, research and technology organisations, and knowledge valorisation professionals to engage with the EIC Board and convince them to amend the EIC IP rules.



Trusted space

We have provided a trusted space for informal discussions among Secretary-Generals of the European Universities alliances with whom we share members, and with a group of R&I Councillors from Widening countries.



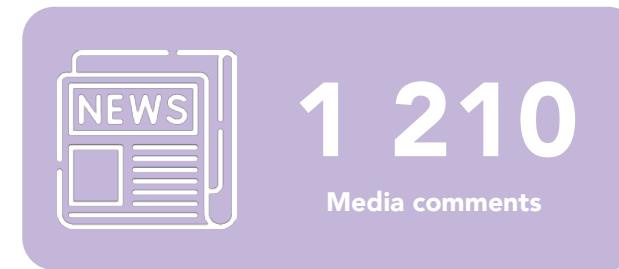
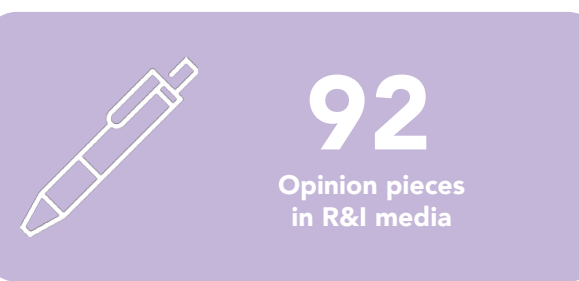
ERASud collaboration

Together with the European Research Alliance for Sustainable Development (ERASuD), which brings together think tanks, universities and research centres, we have advocated for a strong research dimension as part of the EU Global Gateway.



Research matters

We are a founding organisation of Research Matters, an informal network of stakeholders, to ensure unity, clarity and impact in calling for an increase to the Horizon Europe's budget to EUR200bn in 2028–34.



Over the last decade we have steadily increased our public profile becoming one of the most impactful Brussels-based university networks on social media. Through public events we have provided timely opportunities for members and non-members alike to engage with policymakers. And through our Secretary-General and policy team we have been one of the most active networks providing comments and opinion pieces to news outlets such as *Research Professional* and *Times Higher Education*, generating a wider public sphere for European policy affecting universities.



Jan Palmowski and Director-General of Research and Innovation, Robert-Jan Smits, Brussels, 2017



Jan Palmowski, Director for International Cooperation in R&I, Maria Cristina Russo and Deputy Director for Africa of the EEAS, Bernard Quintin, Brussels, 2023



Guild Vice-Presidents meeting, University of Bern, 2022



Guild's Innovation and Strategic Leads of Education working groups, Ghent, 2023

A decade in images



Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence Conference, 2024



Guild Institutional Liaisons at the European Parliament, 2022



Guild General Assembly, Radboud University, 2024



Jan Palmowski and Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu, Brussels, 2025



Launch of The Guild's fifth Insight Paper "The Twin Transition Century", Brussels, 2023



Data Task Force, Radboud University, 2019



University of Tübingen Rector Bernd Engler and ERC President Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, Brussels, 2017



Jan Palmowski and Heinz Faßmann, Austrian Federal Minister of Education, Science and Research during the Austrian Presidency, 2019



Guild Chair Anders Hagfeldt, Vice-Chair Toomas Asser, Jan Palmowski and Julien Chicot meet Commissioner Ekaterina Zaharieva, Brussels, 2025



ARUA Biennial Conference, University of Lagos, 2023



Guild Chair Svein Stølen and Commissioner Mariya Gabriel in Silicon Valley, 2023



Danish Minister for Higher Education and Science, Christina Egelund, Rector of KULeuven, Luc Sels and Rector of UCLouvain, Françoise Smets, Brussels, 2024



Preparing for the ARUA-Guild Summit, Stellenbosch University, 2022



ARUA-The Guild Summit, Brussels, 2023



ARUA Secretary-General John Gyapong and Rector of Radboud University Daniel Wigboldus, 2024



Last day at the office before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, 2020



Guild Office meeting with newly appointed Commissioner Gabriel, 2020



Strategic Leads on Education, University of Tübingen, 2025



Guild Office outing day, Ghent University, 2022



Guild General Assembly, University of Warwick, 2025



Guild General Assembly, University of Vienna, 2018



University of Luxembourg joins The Guild as its newest member, 2025



Guild Office, Brussels, 2026



ARUA-The Guild Summit, Brussels, 2023



Guild Vice-Presidents meeting, University of Bern, 2022



Director for International Cooperation in R&I, Maria Cristina Russo, Jan Palmowski, President of the Board Adam Piotrowski (VIGO Photonics S.A.), MEP Lina Gálvez Muñoz, Director for Common Policy Centre, Pauline Rouch, Brussels, 2025



Africa-Europe Cluster of Research Excellence on Advanced Infectious Diseases Research and Training at CoRE Conference, South Africa, 2024



University networks meet MEP René Repasi, Brussels, 2026



R&I Policy working group, Brussels, 2024



Guild General Assembly, University of Tartu, 2017



Preparing for the ARUA-Guild Summit, Stellenbosch University, 2022



Guild Office outing day, Brussels, 2019



Guild Office, Brussels, 2022



ARUA Secretary-General John Gyapong and Chair Anders Hagfeldt, Africa-Europe CoRE Conference, 2024



Guild Forum, 2017



Guild Office outing day, Brussels, 2019



Guild Office outing day, 2025



Taking The Guild's FP9 amendments to Strasbourg, 2019



Guild delegation in Marseille during French Presidency, 2022



Responsible Internationalisation working group, Brussels, 2024



Deans of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Uppsala, 2023



Guild General Assembly, Brussels, 2022



Gender & Diversity working group, Brussels, 2023



Deans of Law, University of Vienna, 2023



Guild Vice-Presidents meeting, University of Tartu, 2025



Guild Founding meeting, Brussels, 2016

Afterword

Reflecting on the past ten years, it is clear to me that The Guild has provided huge benefits to its members. It has provided us ways to engage in EU policy that we could never have done on our own, and it has inspired our communities internally to reflect on how we can better engage with policy and society around us. Indeed, I have been struck by how much the discussions in Brussels about research, innovation and higher education also form part of our domestic discussions, as clearly our national policies and debates are closely interlinked with those of the EU.

Another benefit of The Guild has been the collegiality I have experienced. I have valued enormously the opportunity to meet, and learn from, other colleagues in Europe in our meetings, as we discussed so many challenging issues, ranging from our responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, to new policy areas such as research security or European Universities alliances.

From my personal perspective I would also highlight our collaboration with the African Research Universities Alliance, which reaches deep into our research communities, as an unanticipated benefit. Through the Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence (CoREs), we are trying to develop equitable partnerships in new ways. As the multilateral geopolitical order is increasingly being challenged, with strong repercussions on science collaborations, the CoREs are an important response to underline the need for transcontinental collaboration, trust, and excellence as we address fundamental challenges together.

Over the past decade, we have not only witnessed the growing financial aspirations of Horizon Europe and Erasmus+. With that has also come the increasing salience of research, innovation and higher education in the politics of the EU. As members of The Guild we have experienced first-hand how research and innovation, as well as higher education, have become

central to a future vision of the EU. Accordingly, the research we produce and the skills we generate are central to the EU's ability to compete globally, and generate the social goods its citizens desire.

Ten years after its creation, The Guild has taken on an importance for us that we could not have imagined back then. It provides a direct forum for policy dialogue at a time of rapid change, when the research, innovation and higher education of universities, and our collaboration across borders, is as critical as it is under challenge. And it provides a strong, active defence of Academic Freedom against growing and multifaceted attacks within Europe and worldwide. In the coming years, the challenges we face will not diminish. I am pleased we can embrace them together, in the partnership of The Guild's member universities, in trusted dialogue with European policymakers.

Anders Hagfeldt

Rector of Uppsala University and Chair of The Guild



June 2026

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