

# THE GUILD AT 21

Annual Report | 2020 – 2021





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# Foreword



**Vincent Blondel**

Chair of The Guild  
Rector UCLouvain

For more than a year, the coronavirus pandemic has affected universities in all their activities, as they have grappled with uncertainty, digital transformation, and challenges to health, wellbeing and digital poverty. Through these times universities have begun to think afresh about their mission and their communities. How can their excellence in research, education and innovation be reinforced with the experience that they have built up in the pandemic? What will change after the pandemic – and how will it change?

These discussions have come to be central to The Guild's activities in the past academic year, not least in discussions about the European Research and Education Areas. To be sure, our engagement with Horizon Europe and the new Erasmus+ programmes has continued with focus and dedication. Critical questions have still been decided about these programmes, including their budget, who was associated with them, and on what terms. The Guild has also continued to advocate the interests of its members in other arenas, including advocating for more sustainable partnerships with African universities, in partnership with the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA).

But beyond these critical strategic concerns, The Guild has engaged with core questions affecting the future of universities in Europe. The Guild has translated vibrant discussions on our campuses to the European policy arena. These include how we evaluate careers and academic performance, how we can become more inclusive communities, the future of research-led education post-pandemic, and how Europe's universities can be strengthened globally. The Guild's advocacy has been critical in enabling the voice and concerns of our communities to be heard, at a time of rapid change and uncertainty. This function will continue to be crucial in years ahead as we face challenging but exciting evolutions!

*Vincent Blondel*



**Jan Palmowski**

Secretary-General of The Guild

Four years in the making, Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ have become realities, despite the programmes being diminished by the continued uncertainty over Swiss association with Horizon Europe, the reduced access of associate countries to Horizon, and the absence of Switzerland and the UK from Erasmus+. Alongside these important discussions with the European Commission's Directorates-General for Research and for Education, we strengthened our involvement with those responsible for Health Policy, Digital Technology, and for Regional and Urban Policy. Together with our partners, the African Research Universities Alliance, we were also in close contact with the Directorate-General for International Partnerships.

In addition to our broad engagement with the Commission, we have developed outstanding relationships with the Council, including the Presidencies of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia. We have also sustained our strong links with the European Parliament, and – crucially – with the European Research Council.

The pandemic has increased the urgency of creating a more effective European Research Area (ERA) and realizing the European Education Area (EEA). The Guild has vigorously defended issues of critical importance to our members, such as the need to keep the ERA's focus on research, including the importance of frontier research. We have also put a significant focus on working with the Commission, the Council and other stakeholders in contributing to reformed career assessment systems. And finally, we have embraced the discussions around a Higher Education Transformation Agenda, not least through two Insight Papers – a broad Vision for Europe's Universities articulated by our Presidents, and a paper on research-led education in the digital age.

At The Guild, we are delighted that we can give a voice to all our members – whether they hail from the EU or not. United in our pursuit of excellence we gain strength from our different historical and cultural traditions. For this reason, Pompeu Fabra joining The Guild proved to be a particular highlight of the past year. Five years after its foundation, The Guild has now 21 members. It has been a privilege to be part of The Guild's journey, uniting voices from strong, outstanding – and committed – universities from all parts of Europe.

*Jan Palmowski*



# A year marked by the pandemic

## Working through the Covid-19 pandemic

Just as it affected almost every aspect of our member universities' work, the pandemic has had a fundamental impact on The Guild. The Guild office has developed ways of flourishing through online meeting spaces. Our internal meetings with members, and our external meetings with policy-makers, have all been held online.

Beyond transforming the ways in which we have worked, the pandemic has added another dimension to The Guild's work. Led by the General Assembly, many of our meetings have provided much-valued forums for exchanging ideas about how to respond to a challenging and constantly shifting environment for students and staff.

The pandemic – and the medical and societal responses to it – also reinvigorated our policy demands for the need for frontier research alongside application-oriented research. The speed with which vaccines were developed was only possible through knowledge generated through frontier research, which could be adapted quickly to this emergency.

Just as for our member universities, the pandemic has illustrated the value of physical and social interactions for The Guild. We look forward to resuming physical meetings when it is safe to do so. At the same time we will, over the coming year, look at how we can digitally support our physical interactions in new ways.

Vincent Blondel in the virtual setting of the honorary doctorate ceremony at the the University of Louvain (February 2021)



Alma Mater Fest, the welcome day for new students at the University of Bologna (October 2020)

Pharmacy students at Université de Paris learning how to conduct a PCR test (2020)



# Advocating for strong research policy

The past year has highlighted the need to make Europe's science more effective. The desire to overcome fragmentation made existing plans to revitalise the European Research Area and better integrate Europe's national research and innovation systems all the more pressing.

Jan Palmowski, Secretary-General of The Guild,  
in *Research Europe*, March 2021

## The Guild's engagement with the ERA: strengthening Europe's research systems

Autumn 2020 saw the first key milestones in the renewing of the strategy for the European Research Area (ERA), that sets a common direction for both the EU's and its Member States' research and innovation policies for the foreseeable future. Both in the public discussion and in the informal meetings with decision-makers, The Guild presented itself as a firm defender of maintaining the ERA's focus on increasing Europe's research capacities. The Guild was proactive in attracting attention to issues that directly affect researchers' realities: how to ensure that universities have sufficient competitive and institutional

funding in the next decade? How to make sure they have adequate resources and capacities for implementing Open Science policies? Why is it important to invest in fundamental research in order to increase Europe's ability to respond to global challenges?

Beyond addressing these central challenges, The Guild has firmly advocated that it is essential to include academic communities in the decision-making structures of the ERA, and truly to strengthen Europe's capacity for research excellence and to improve modalities for evidence-based decision-making.

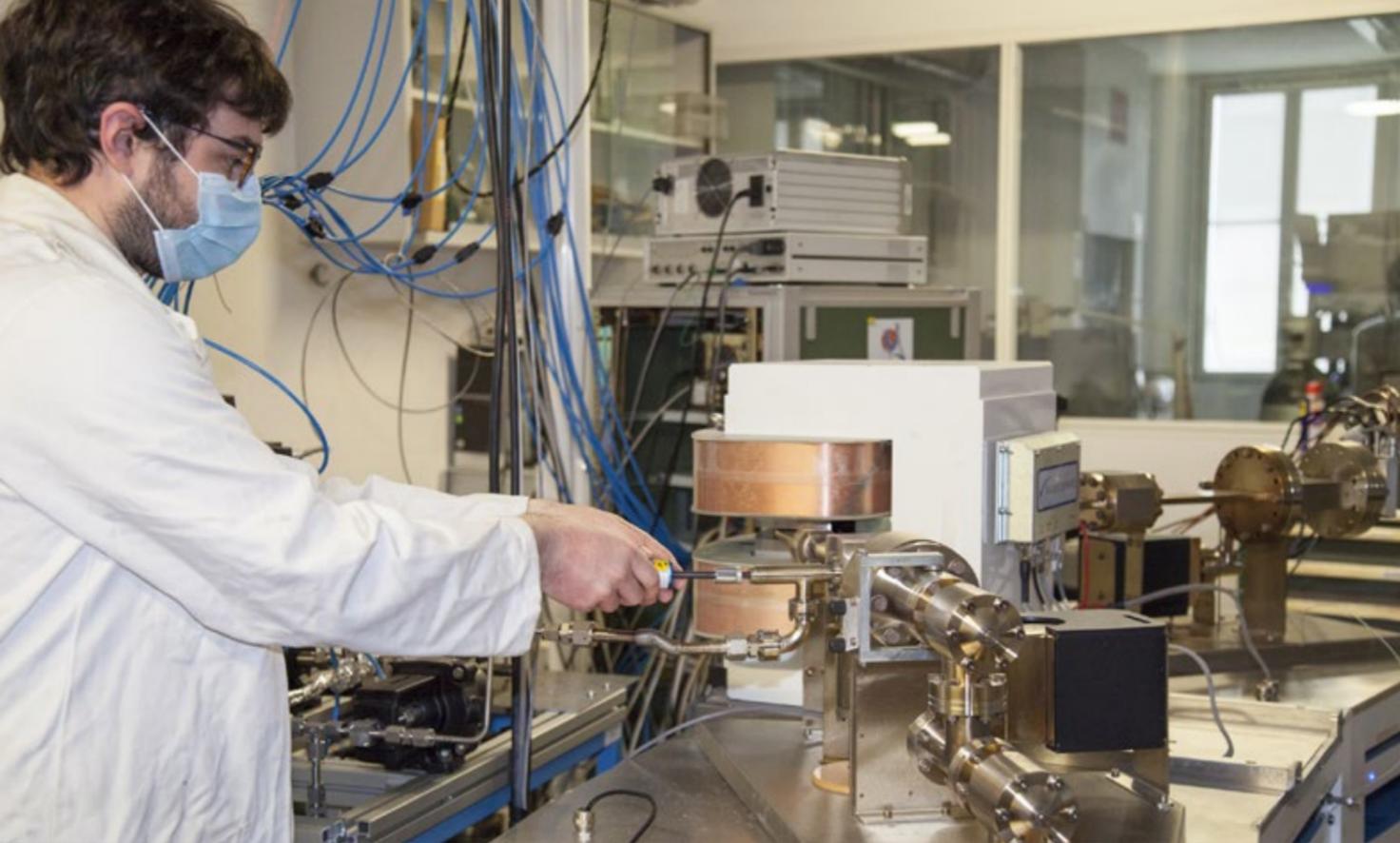


Presidents of The Guild exchanged views with Jean-Eric Paquet (Director-General, DG RTD - European Commission) and Jean-Pierre Bourguignon (Interim President of the ERC) on Horizon Europe and the European Research Area during the General Assembly (October 2020)

## Engaging with European research assessment reform

Spring 2021 marked the start of the preparation of concrete priorities within the new ERA. In October 2020 The Guild had established a new working group focused on research careers and assessment, which played a crucial role in feeding into our network's engagement with this topic as a key priority of the ERA. As many of The Guild's members were in the process of revising their assessment frameworks for researchers, they combined the exchange on institutional strategies with a profound dialogue on what could be the features of a common European assessment framework that recognizes quality and diversity of talent in novel ways, and rewards researchers for all aspects of their work.

The Guild started engaging with the topic proactively with the Commission and the Council, emphasizing the importance of a framework that provides enough flexibility to accommodate the institutional and national contexts, but at the same time presents a step towards a more harmonized assessment landscape for researchers. The Guild members saw value in achieving a European approach that would address the shortcomings of the current systems and improve opportunities for mobility and interoperability in Europe. Besides the newly established working group, this process engaged all of The Guild's governance bodies in intense and fruitful exchanges, due to be concluded by the end of 2021.



## Addressing the reduction of the ERDF's support to universities' research capacities and the R&I divide



*Faculty of Science - Laboratory of Molecular Electrochemistry, Université de Paris (2020)*

Ahead of the final negotiations on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), The Guild was the first university network to warn against ending ERDF-based funding for basic research, research infrastructure, capacity building activities or mobility of young researchers. DG Regional and Urban Policy's (DG REGIO) new approach to the implementation of Structural Funds leaves universities in lower performing countries without significant research funds, and risks further deepening the R&I divide.

Our concerns were widely amplified by the press, and our Widening Participation working group voiced them directly in meetings with representatives of DG REGIO and DG RTD, and in a public statement issued in October 2020. Our members emphasized that involving universities only in activities where demand is driven by the private sector severely harms the regional innovation

ecosystems in EU-13 countries. These ecosystems depend on universities' capacity to attract international researchers and invest in research facilities.

During a high-level meeting with the Slovenian Minister of Education, Science and Sport and the Cabinet of Commissioner Gabriel, Rectors of The Guild reiterated these concerns while discussing the Commission's plans to renew the European Research Area where Cohesion policy is expected to complement EU and national R&I programmes. The Guild will continue to raise awareness about this issue and insist that universities are strengthened in their core missions that the ecosystems depend on.

## Strengthening Health Research across Europe

In 2020–2021, the Health Deans group continued its proactive engagement with timely health policy priorities of the EU. It succeeded in contributing its views to policy discussions with the European Commission, and highlighted the important role the EU should have in overcoming current barriers to medical research across national borders.

In September 2020, The Guild published its recommendations for the Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe, calling for an improved framework and financial support for multinational clinical studies and trials. The position paper also highlights the need to increase collaboration between EU regulators and researchers. Our Deans emphasized that the EU has an important role in facilitating the sharing of health data for scientific purposes, and signaled that researchers need support in overcoming significant challenges in conducting

multinational clinical studies. In response, the European Commission invited The Guild to bring the voice of researchers to two expert groups on related topics: complex clinical trials and modifications to the Clinical Trials Regulation.

During their annual meeting in March 2021, our Health Deans discussed the European Commission's forthcoming proposal for a European Health Data Space. Identifying the issue of data accessibility as a key priority for research, the Deans agreed on formulating, in a position paper, solutions to the challenges currently impeding the share and re-use of health data for research purposes, such as data altruism. They called for clear and constructive guidance on how to interpret provisions in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). And, finally, they advocated for the development and uptake of new technologies for creating synthetic data.

**The Commission department for regional policy intends to cut off direct support for university research through the European Regional Development Fund in the 2021-27 EU budget period, the Guild of European Research Intensive Universities warned on 30 October. "It is worrying that in [the department's] approach to the implementation of [regional] funds universities are viewed only as service providers to private businesses, rather than independent public actors that play a crucial role in the development of knowledge-based economies," the Guild said, calling for the policy to be reversed.**

*Research Professional, November 2020*

Sometimes, if you start from completely new ideas coming from fundamental research, you will not only satisfy people's demands, you change the values and the demands of the people. You change the market and you create new markets. This is coming mainly from fundamental research which changes the paradigm.

Daniel David, Rector of the Babeş-Bolyai University

### Horizon Europe is launched

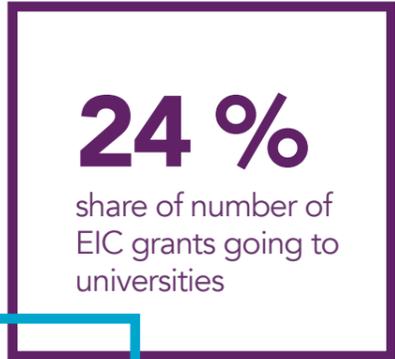
The end of 2020 marked a special milestone in The Guild's four-year journey in advocating for Horizon Europe. The network's policy work was launched in 2017 with early visions of what the EU's next Framework Programme for research and innovation should look like. As months and years passed with proactive engagement in its planning process, The Guild argued for optimizing the balance between research and innovation focused pillars and funding instruments; and it contributed to the key research themes reflecting Europe's pressing needs. Our network was also active in shaping the rules of participation as well as the evaluation criteria of the programme. Last but not least, we took a strong stance on the allocation of the €95.5bn budget between the various funding instruments. This process mobilized nine of The Guild's working groups to feed into the design of the programme, as well as numerous discussions with the Vice-Presidents and Presidents of The Guild.

Along the way, several burning questions in research policy were discussed that had relevance also for national and institutional policy debates. These included, for example, the question of how universities can best

respond to the increasing focus on application-oriented and challenge-driven research and innovation, coupled with a demand for a solution-oriented and predictable impact within a limited time frame.

In terms of visible results of our advocacy work, The Guild managed to successfully promote wording in the Horizon Europe legislation ensuring that a balance between research and innovation activities would be guaranteed in the challenge-driven pillar. Likewise, it succeeded in advocating for a notion securing the integration of Social Sciences and Humanities in the same pillar. When it comes to advocacy regarding challenge-driven research priorities, the work of our Deans Groups paid off in several themes being taken up by the Commission. Our budget lobbying also proved to be critical. From the summer of 2020, The Guild advocated for a budget increase for excellent science, despite the difficult impasse that prolonged the negotiations of the EU institutions. In the end, an additional €1bn was allocated to the European Research Council, that acknowledged the role of The Guild in achieving the positive outcome.

# The Guild in Horizon 2014 - 2019



# Shaping the future for Europe's universities

## Looking to the Future – The Guild's Vision for Europe's Universities

In October 2020, The Guild published its second Insight Paper, a reflection by our Presidents on key trends and challenges facing Europe's universities in the coming decade. How can our universities become more competitive globally? How can they strengthen their research base and respond to the challenges of digitalization?

Any changes that universities undertake, our Presidents insist, must be grounded on fundamental values and principles beginning with the Magna Charta Universitatum and the European values expressed in Art. 2 of the Treaty of the European Union. The integrity that universities build on must be founded on academic freedom and the integrity of the researcher, as well as greater financial and regulatory autonomy, which universities will use with utmost responsibility.

In their vision, our Presidents call for universities to be strengthened in their capacities to address societal challenges according to their distinctive strengths, within their specific regional settings. While universities will be key to addressing societal challenges through challenge-

led research, fundamental and frontier-led research will always be key to their capacity to generate breakthrough discoveries.

The pandemic has reinforced a sense of possibility for digitalization in education, but our Presidents see digitalization always as a means to an end. The key challenge of future education lies in deepening disciplinary education while widening our students' capacity for interdisciplinary enquiry and strengthening their transferable skills. Universities must produce not just graduates for tomorrow's labour market, but graduates capable of adjusting to change and transformation for decades.

Finally, our Presidents see a major opportunity in Europe's capacity to foster collaboration internally and with international partners around the world. To enable Europe's universities to benefit from this, it is essential that our universities become more diverse, as outstanding places to study and work.



## Contributing to the European Higher Education Transformation Agenda

The Guild's second Insight Paper, along with other positions developed by our working groups, have informed our input to the Higher Education Transformation Agenda (HETA). In March 2021, the European Commission invited stakeholder groups such as The Guild, alongside European University alliances, to co-create a common vision for Europe's universities.

Core questions raised by the Commission were how universities could strengthen 1. inclusiveness and access to excellence; 2. innovation and transfer of knowledge to society; 3. the European knowledge society while deepening collaboration; 4. the green and digital transition; and 5. their international competitiveness.

In these discussions, The Guild argued for focusing on HETA's specific added value to universities. We emphasized our concerns for the Sustainable Development Goals, of which the Green and Digital transition form just one aspect. We highlighted the importance of frontier-led research for enabling universities to address societal challenges, and insisted that policy-makers have a crucial

role to play in strengthening our global competitiveness by reducing regulation and reversing real-term declines in funding.

One strand of HETA sought to develop a joint vision for European University alliances, as the pilot stage for the first alliances is due to end in 2022. The Guild argued consistently for the setting of realistic expectations. Alliances should not be seen as 'test-beds' for every transformation, but only for transformations that could best be achieved in collaboration. We also argued that funding should be proportionate to what was achievable.

At the core of the EU's articulation of its vision for the sector, we maintained, should be an appreciation of where its added value lay. The EU has a unique set of funding instruments at its disposal, and it can support cross-border discussions about changes in higher education. But the EU also has significant global weight with which it can help strengthen the global competitiveness of its universities, including by strengthening the case for sufficient national funding.

# Towards an ambitious European Education Area

## The Guild's response to the European Education Area

The Guild welcomed the Communication on achieving the European Education Area (EEA) by 2025 as it articulates a core ambition for excellence in teaching and learning. It raises the EU's ambition in pedagogy and provides incentives to universities for transformation in areas currently being discussed on campuses across Europe.

In July 2020, based on the input of The Guild's Strategic Leads on Education group, we published Recommendations for developing the EAA in which we argued that in promoting lifelong learning, universities should build on their particular strengths, and focus on areas where there is a distinctive need for research-led education. We emphasized that learning is a social experience and that the interaction among students, and between students and teachers, is a distinctive feature of any university experience. And it is the coherence of the learning experience that will attract students to pursue a university degree in the future, as compared to other education providers. Although the current crisis has strengthened the challenge-based orientation in research and education, we argued that all learning is challenge-based. We should take advantage of a full

range of learning and teaching practices, which our research-intensive universities have a strong record in evolving and innovating.

The Guild also responded to the consultations organized by the European Parliament, stressing that European cooperation in higher education requires continuous dialogue with the university sector. Securing academic buy-in has proven to be crucial also in the Commission's consultations on the Higher Education Transformation Agenda where The Guild actively contributed the views of its member universities.

Members of our Strategic Leads on Education group, led by prof. Jo Angouri (University of Warwick), have developed The Guild's Insight paper dedicated to reimagining research-led education in a digital age. Informed by the pedagogical expertise of our members, the paper invites the sector and policy-makers to problematize the discourse of change in pedagogy. It builds a vision for higher education which must not be all digital, and where education innovation is valued alongside research, supported by innovation in regulatory frameworks.



*Chemistry lecture at the University of Bologna. The university has organised blended lessons where some of the students join the lectures at the university and some virtually (October 2020)*

**We should welcome the EEA communication as a facilitator for a richer cross-border debate about higher education in a digital age. Universities must lead this debate and articulate what they need from policymakers to ensure higher education across Europe is as good as it can be.**

Jan Palmowski, Secretary-General of The Guild,  
in *Research Europe*, October 2020

# Reinforcing Africa's R&I capacity

Capacity-building in a new way in international collaborations between European and African institutions will be extremely important. To make these kind of connections sustainable and to have investments in African higher education, will be important for the future of European universities.

Åse Gornitzka, Vice-Rector of the University of Oslo



## The Guild-ARUA initiative to strengthen African R&I capacity

*North-South Dialogue group meeting with Nienke Buisman (Head of Unit for International Cooperation, DG RTD - European Commission) and Piero Venturi (Research counsellor to the African Union, EEAS) (May 2021)*

In collaboration with the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) in 2020/2021, The Guild continued to advocate for substantial investments in African R&I capacity as a priority in the new European Union-African Union strategy.

Following consultations with the representatives of relevant Directorates-General (DG Education and Culture, DG Research and Innovation, DG International Partnerships), we developed further our ideas leading to a concept note prepared ahead of the first ever EU-AU research and innovation ministers' meeting. In it, we called for the creation of 40 Clusters of Excellence to focus on five societal challenges identified by the EU and the AU, to be awarded on a competitive basis. These Clusters would be built on sustainable networks of African and European universities, and would seek to boost long-term capacity in research – from research Master's level onwards – in tackling a major societal challenge.

Our continuous engagement has led to The Guild and ARUA being recognized as important stakeholders in this area, and we aim to be part of evolving discussions within the EU and the AU, as well as at the national level in both continents. We have initiated a discussion with the German Rectors' Conference on research excellence where Prof. Peter Maassen (University of Oslo, author

of The Guild's Insight Paper) and Prof. Ernest Aryeetey (Secretary-General of ARUA) presented the key trends at African universities. As a result, organizations representing national rectors' conferences signed a joint statement in support of our initiative to establish Clusters of Research Excellence in Africa. Signatories called on the EU to strengthen research collaboration between African and European universities and make investment in research capacities of African universities a key component of the new EU-AU partnership.

We also continued our dialogue with representatives of Member States in the Strategic Forum for International Science and Technology Cooperation (SFIC), while case studies from Guild member universities on addressing SDGs through research collaboration have featured in the discussions of the Africa-Europe Innovation Partnership (AEIP).

ARUA and The Guild welcomed the launch of the African Research Initiative for Scientific Excellence (ARISE) pilot programme, and we will continue to develop further initiatives to address key areas where capacity building is needed. Policy advocacy has strengthened our partnership with ARUA and encouraged our members to establish institutional and national strategies which complement our policy efforts.



# Fostering collaboration with associated countries

## Agreement on the UK's association to Horizon Europe

In late December 2020, the scientific community welcomed the UK's decision to associate to Horizon Europe. For the past four years, The Guild has been advocating for a continued close science relationship between the UK and the EU through full UK association to Horizon Europe. This commitment was essential not only for strengthening the European R&I, but also for the Framework Programme's ability to continue attracting the best researchers.

The Guild had closely engaged with the Wellcome Trust, the Russell Group, Universities UK and other stakeholders to facilitate a mutual understanding about the key concerns of the future EU-UK relationship, including the

free flow of talent and the UK's fair financial contribution to the programme. We have been successful in calling for the Council and the European Parliament to introduce a guideline in the Horizon Europe legislation that ensures transparency and fairness in the allocation of the shares of Associated Countries across Horizon Europe, so that programmes such as ERC and MSCA would not lose on their budget share as a result of reallocation of the Associated Countries' contributions.

Although outside of the EU, our UK member universities remain even more committed to foster collaboration with European partners. Together we must now do everything we can to support Swiss association to Horizon Europe.

## Advocating for Swiss association to Horizon Europe

Our policy efforts have also focused on ensuring Switzerland's participation in Horizon Europe, which builds on a strong history of research collaboration. Despite the Swiss commitment to associate, the decision of the legislators to place Switzerland in the same category as other third countries meant that association will be part of the wider negotiations on the future relationship between the EU and Switzerland, posing a risk that Swiss researchers won't be able to participate in the first calls of the programme. For that reason, The Guild has engaged with the Mission of Switzerland to the EU and supported calls by Swiss universities to maintain close links with European partners in both education and research.

In April 2021, we joined the Russell Group, the German U15, Udice (France) and LERU in calling for Associated Countries' full access to Horizon Europe – including quantum and space research projects. Our call, which highlighted especially the need for Switzerland to associate, was highly resonant in the press, including a front-page headline article in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

Universities can be a part of keeping the borders open, that knowledge doesn't know any borders and that we continue to have international partnerships and work with mobility. Even in nations, if they try to close, the academia should actually guarantee an openness within Europe but also worldwide. It is an extremely important role we have as universities and also within academia.

Eva Åkesson, former Vice-Chancellor of Uppsala University



The Neue Zürcher Zeitung front-page referring to the joint statement of The Guild, the Russell Group, the German U15, Udice and LERU (May 2021)

The EU's success in bringing on board Switzerland, the UK and other third countries in a timely way will be pivotal to Horizon Europe's depth and breadth.

Jan Palmowski, Secretary-General of The Guild, in *Times Higher Education*, November 2020

# The Guild network

## Pompeu Fabra University joins The Guild

On 1 January 2021 we welcomed our 21st member – Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. The most highly ranked university on the Iberian Peninsula, Pompeu Fabra is as distinguished in research as it is in education. Founded as recently as 1990, the university has won more ERC grants than any other university in Spain since 2014, and most of its undergraduate courses evaluated by 'El Mundo' were in the top five in Spain.

Pompeu Fabra University adds a distinctive perspective from Spain and Catalonia to The Guild's activities. Their

university having developed excellence very rapidly across all its activities, colleagues from Pompeu Fabra also bring unique experience in what it takes to create an excellent university. Pompeu Fabra University brings great strengths in fundamental research, application-oriented enquiry, innovation, and education, which it is currently harnessing in an ambitious cross-institutional project to strengthen planetary wellbeing. We are delighted that the university agreed to join our network!

Being part of The Guild is a clear statement of UPF's drive to internationalisation and cooperation with some of Europe's leading universities. Through The Guild we will leverage our excellence in teaching and research – both crucial to enhancing UPF's capacity to address societal challenges – by sitting at the heart of social and cultural progress and policy debates that shape the future of Europe's Higher Education research and innovation landscape.

Jaume Casals, former Rector of the University  
Pompeu Fabra

## Heads of AI/Digital Research

President Ursula von der Leyen put the 'twin transition' both towards "a healthy planet and a new digital world" high on the European Commission's policy agenda. In 2020–2021, multiple strategies and other policy initiatives have therefore been aiming to make "Europe fit for the digital age". The strong impetus given to the development of human-centric and trustworthy digital solutions have translated in measures to support research and innovation.

In this context, The Guild decided to set up the Heads of AI/Digital Research group with the ambitions to strengthen its engagement with policy discussion on European research in the digital fields and to bring the insights of universities into policies rather targeted towards industrial actors. During its first meeting in May 2021, the group discussed with Kilian Gross, the European Commission's head of the Intelligence Policy Development and Coordination unit, the proposal for a Regulation laying down harmonized rules on artificial intelligence and its expected implications for research. The Guild highlighted that such a regulation should not stifle research and create excessive burden on researchers. It supported the idea of regulatory sandboxes whereby universities could conduct research aimed at testing and improving regulatory frameworks.

*Mar Campus, Pompeu Fabra University*

## Innovation Working Group

Throughout the year, The Guild has demonstrated its commitment to promoting research-based innovation and strengthening the role of universities within innovation ecosystems. In October 2020, its dedicated working group discussed the EU knowledge valorization policy, including the development of the Code of Practice for smart use of intellectual property (IP) announced in the European Commission's 2020 Communication for a new ERA for Research and Innovation. They highlighted the need for an appropriate framework and universities' IP strategies that would facilitate and encourage knowledge exchange and combine open science practices with IP management. They called also for new metrics which would go beyond patent applications and spin-offs to measure the societal impacts of universities. Guild members subsequently provided input to the European Commission's ongoing work on the development of the Code of Practice for a smart use of IP, envisaged for 2021–2022.

The Guild contributed its views on the new regulation and strategic research and innovation agenda of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), calling for the Knowledge and Innovation Communities to be more open, inclusive and centred on universities. It participated also in the consultation on the EIT action to support the innovation capacity of Higher Education Institutions. It welcomed the openness of the new scheme to all universities and the tailoring of the support to the actual needs of the participating universities.





## Open Science Working Group

In 2020–2021, The Guild has pursued its engagement with policy discussions on Open Science. In addition to good practice exchanges, the dedicated working group proactively discussed the Open Research Platform and the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) during its meeting in December 2020.

The Guild also demonstrated its commitment to accelerating open science in Europe through its engagement in the EOSC Association formally established in July 2020 and operational since January 2021. With its observer status, it publicly supported the election of Professor Karel Luyben as the first President of the EOSC Association, with a view to ensuring the representation of universities in the governance of the association. The Open Science working group was pleased to welcome Professor Luyben to its meeting in May 2021 to discuss the establishment of the EOSC Association and how universities could engage further.

Another important topic of discussion was the implementation of Open Science principles in Horizon Europe in order to make it the new *modus operandi* of research. In particular, the Open Science working group warned that the Open Science requirements in Horizon Europe under discussion should not create additional burden on researchers.

▲  
*Konstantinos Glinos (Head of Unit for Open Science, DG RTD - European Commission) interviewed by Prof Antonino Rotolo (Vice-Rector for Research, Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna) and Silvia Bottaro (Senior Policy Officer, The Guild) on how Open Science will be mainstreamed in Horizon Europe (July 2020)*

▲  
*Eleven Guild members were selected among the new European University alliances in July 2020, among them Radboud University to the NeurotechEU - European University of Brain and Technology (January 2020)*

## Strategic Leads on Education Working Group

Soon after universities across Europe went fully digital, The Guild formed a new working group demonstrating the importance of pedagogy for our institutions and policy discussions. The group served as a forum to share plans for organizing the academic year, whether blended or face-to-face, and institutional approaches to issues such as online assessment, international mobility, student and staff support.

Based on inspiring discussions among the members, The Guild published its first paper on the European Education Area in summer of 2020 as a contribution to the upcoming Commission's Communication and the Digital Education Action Plan. Members of the group agreed that The Guild had an important role in standing up for effective, cutting-edge pedagogy while critically challenging concepts that were often assumed to be best practice, but lacked scientific evidence. They suggested making a more sustained intervention on behalf of the sector which resulted in The Guild's third Insight paper published in early June this year.

The group continues to provide strategic input on EU policy initiatives such as the European Degree, micro-credentials and the Higher Education Transformation Agenda, drawing on the rich experience of Guild member universities.

## European Universities Working Group

As one of the first university networks to support the European Universities initiative, The Guild is delighted that following two pilot calls the majority of our members are full partners in six European University alliances: *Circle U.*, *CIVIS*, *ENLIGHT*, *EUTOPIA*, *NeurotechEU* and *Una Europa*. Given the extensive efforts that are being devoted to this initiative and its transformative potential, in early 2021 we established a working group to openly discuss the opportunities and challenges offered by this initiative. Next to informing The Guild's position on its future direction, the group offers an opportunity to share information about the activities of each alliance and encourage collaboration between alliances and those members who are yet to join the initiative. It has been a trusted space to share questions of academic concern thanks to the continuous engagement of our members.

In May 2021 the group contributed to the consultations on the next phase of the European Universities initiative. Our members emphasized that collaboration needs to grow bottom-up based on the alliances' distinctive strategies and with appropriate funding. We highlighted the need to keep the initiative open to new partners in Europe and globally - including UK and Swiss partners.





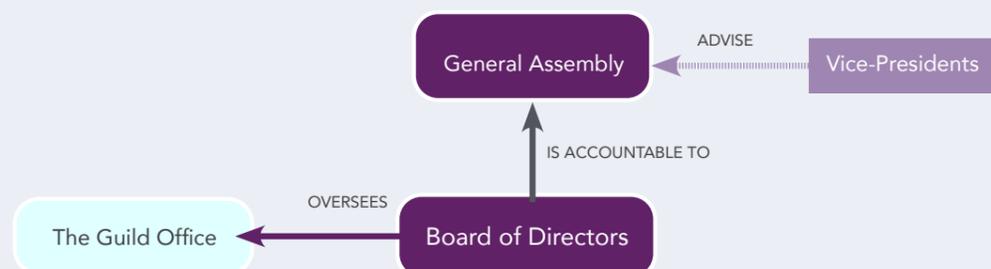
## The Guild Governance

The Guild is driven by the active engagement of its members, and this includes the Presidents. Our General Assembly, which meets twice per year, determines the strategic direction of The Guild, and sets the objectives for our work. Our Presidents make attendance at the General Assembly a priority, with around 90% of our Presidents personally attending them in the past year. In between the meetings, our Presidents have provided critical input, for instance to ongoing discussions about the future of Europe's Universities, or in high-level meetings with the European Commission and Council.

The Board meets formally seven times per year and provides direction to The Guild office. The institutions of the Presidents represented in the Board have also provided generous additional assistance. For instance, the University of Glasgow accords visiting status to our

office staff, while the University of Oslo continues to host our website. The Board makes decisions on behalf of the General Assembly, in accordance with the priorities it set out.

Finally, Vice-Presidents have emerged as a critical strategic body for The Guild. They meet regularly three times per year, and the personal commitment of Vice-Presidents is as high as that of Presidents, with equally strong attendance rates. In addition to the meetings, where strategic items (including position papers) are discussed in detail, Vice-Presidents are also active in strategic task forces. In the past year, they have been particularly engaged in developing our position on research assessment reform within the European Research Area, which they discussed intensively in two specially convened meetings.



## The Guild's Working Groups



The Guild Board of Directors: Vincent Blondel (UCLouvain), Svein Stølen (University of Oslo), Toomas Asser (University of Tartu) and Rachel Sandison (University of Glasgow)

Law Deans meeting with Filomena Chirico (Head of Unit for Programme Analysis and Regulatory Reform, DG RTD - European Commission) at The Guild office (September 2019)

Quality Assurance in Research meeting at Radboud University (November 2019)

Gender & Diversity working group kick-off meeting at the University of Bern (November 2019)

# The Guild at a glance



**21**

members



**35K**

academic staff



**630K**

students



**49**

internal meetings



**119**

media features



**125**

meetings with policy-makers  
and key influencers



**≈ 101K**

website views



**≈ 1400**

new social media followers



**≈ 1,337K**

social media impressions



*The Guild staff at the office on the last day before the lockdown. Throughout 2020 and the first half of 2021, The Guild office has developed ways of flourishing through online meeting spaces, and has welcomed also three new staff members to the team.*



## Looking forward

It has been a remarkable year for science. New vaccines from ERC awardees Prof. Uğur Şahin and Prof. Adrian Hill enabled the rapid development and testing of the BioNTech and Astra Zeneca vaccines in months rather than years. Frontier research has transformed our emotional, social, cultural and economic well-being.

At the same time Universities are facing another year of uncertainty as it is far from clear what mobility will look like in the next academic year. Universities will continue to do their utmost to support students through difficult times, pressing on with new forms of educational delivery and welfare support.

The coming year will continue be dominated by discussions, at the EU level, about how we can strengthen

the European Research Area, and how we can achieve the European Education Area, as part of an ambition to strengthen Europe's universities. In these debates, we will be guided by a strong conviction that we need to focus on the core strengths of universities.

What makes comprehensive universities so distinctive is their unique capacity – in education and research – to bring disciplines together, and to identify and address complex challenges. Universities have a unique capacity for breakthrough frontier research, and they have a huge capacity for pedagogical innovation that has never been more apparent than in the pandemic. It is these strengths of our member universities that will guide our input. And it is these strengths that deserve to be fostered, and that make our work so important.

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- Susanne Goldschmid/keystone (2019): The Guild Gender & Diversity kick-off meeting, p. 24.
- **The Guild (2020-2021):** The Guild General Assembly, p. 6; North-South Dialogue group, p. 16; Konstantinos Glinos, Antonino Rotolo and Silvia Bottaro, p. 21; The Guild staff, p. 26; Law Deans meeting, p. 24.
- **Università di Bologna (2019-2020):** Alma Mater Fest, p. 4; university lecture, p. 14; General Assembly meeting, p. 27.
- **Université de Paris – Direction de la communication (2020):** university photo, p. 8.
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- **University of Tartu:** Toomas Asser, p. 23.



Rue du Trône 98, 3rd floor  
B - 1050 Brussels, Belgium

+32 (0)2 274 05 00  
office@the-guild.eu  
www.the-guild.eu



 [Gildeu](#)

 [/company/the-guild-eu](#)

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