

SOLVING CHALLENGES BEYOND THE HORIZON

Annual Report | 2023 – 2024





University of Glasgow

University of Warwick

King's College London

University of Oslo

Aarhus University

Uppsala University

University of Tartu

University of Groningen

Radboud University

Ghent University

UCLouvain

University of Göttingen

Jagiellonian University

Université Paris Cité

Université PSL

University of Tübingen

University of Bern

University of Vienna

Babeş-Bolyai University

University of Ljubljana

University of Bologna

Pompeu Fabra University



Table of contents

Foreword.....	P. 1
1. A moment for educational change.....	P. 3
2. The Twin Transitions.....	P. 8
3. Shaping European framework programmes for R&I.....	P. 13
4. European Research Area in action.....	P. 17
5. Making new forms of Africa-Europe research collaboration a reality.....	P. 21
6. The Guild network and working groups.....	P. 25
7. Governance.....	P. 31
8. The Guild at a glance.....	P. 34



Svein Stølen

Chair of The Guild

Rector of the University of Oslo



Global challenges and geopolitical tensions have once more highlighted the importance of research, innovation and education. Higher education institutions play a pivotal role in identifying and addressing major societal challenges and should, together with research organisations, be fully optimised to enhance Europe's competitiveness and build its resilience.

Throughout the year, we have worked tirelessly in advocating for increased investments in research and innovation. After the European Commission and the UK Government reached an agreement in principle for the UK's full association to Horizon Europe in September 2023, I am very pleased to report that as of January 2024, the UK is a fully associated member of the programme. I would like to acknowledge the support and engagement of all our members these past years to secure a viable association for the UK. Nevertheless, our work does not end here. Switzerland's association to the programme is finally making headway with negotiations starting in March 2024.

The next framework programme for research and innovation (FP10) is of paramount importance to The Guild's members and both the policy note co-authored with LERU and the more recent public debate on the link between research and innovation have been noticed in Brussels. To top it off, we shared our vision for FP10 urging for a future-oriented outlook on the framework programme to successfully boost Europe's competitiveness and resilience.

Additionally, it is greatly satisfying to see how the 20 Africa–Europe Clusters of Research Excellence (CoRE) are developing. It is truly heart-warming to see how this idea has been welcomed by the international community. As the clusters are taking shape, our partner – the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) is aiming to produce 1 000 PhD graduates annually in its strategic plan for 2022–27. This objective will be supported by the Mastercard Foundation. Our joint Clusters of Research Excellence will be part of the project through PhD students travelling to partner universities in Europe within the CoRE initiative. I cannot wait to see what the future holds for this groundbreaking collaboration.

I have been particularly pleased this year to welcome Université PSL as our new member; needless to say, an excellent university that certainly will contribute well to the further development of The Guild.

This summer my term as Chair of The Guild will come to an end. Uppermost in my mind at this personal crossroads is my gratitude towards my fellow Guild rectors, Presidents and Vice-Presidents, and towards the excellent staff in our Guild office and in our member universities, for enabling this incredible journey that The Guild is on. These are tumultuous times, and if ever there was a role for a fellowship of like-minded universities to harness knowledge for the greater good of society, it is now.

Svein Stølen

Ole Petter Ottersen

Acting Secretary-General of The Guild



This year has been marked by proactive engagement and the embracing of new challenges that have emerged at the intersection of academia and the rapidly evolving global landscape. The Guild has steadfastly upheld the principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, even as we navigated the increasing pressure on basic research. We have stood firm against the rising geopolitical turbulence that threatens to introduce protectionism and political interventions into our research and internationalisation agendas. In a time of democratic backsliding, both in Europe and globally, our commitment to the academic values has never been more critical.

Our focus has extended to the pressing global challenges of our time, including climate change, environmental sustainability, economic resilience, and the pursuit of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The Guild has been at the forefront of responding to the global trends that impact research and higher education through, among other activities, the publication of its vision paper for the next framework programme in research and innovation (FP10), in which we stress the need to increase and optimise investments in research and innovation for the benefit of Europe's competitiveness and resilience as a knowledge society.

The transformative power of artificial intelligence (AI) has been another area where The Guild has been actively engaged. We recognise the potential of AI to revolutionise research and education, and we have taken significant steps to ensure that our members are equipped to harness this technology responsibly and effectively. This past year The Guild has continued its efforts in advancing the European Education Area by providing extensive feedback for the interim Erasmus+ evaluation, contributing to discussions on the funding of the European Universities alliances and by looking into the triptych of transnational collaboration, innovation and policy implications.

Our collaboration with the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) has reached new heights. We inaugurated 20 Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence (CoREs) co-led by ARUA and The Guild, bringing together researchers from both Europe and Africa to address global societal challenges and striving for equitable partnerships in an unequal world.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to our member universities for their active engagement through working groups and task forces, and for their invaluable contributions to our statements and position papers. Your collective wisdom has been the bedrock of our success. The Guild's welcoming of a new member, Université Paris Sciences et Lettres (Université PSL), in December 2023, has further strengthened our network. Their addition promises to enrich our collective expertise and broaden our horizons. Our staff members deserve special recognition for their unwavering dedication to The Guild's mission. Your tireless efforts have been instrumental in advancing our objectives.

On a personal note, returning to The Guild as Acting Secretary-General, seven years after its foundation, has been a deeply gratifying experience. The opportunity to reconnect with this vibrant community and contribute to its mission has been a highlight of my professional journey.

As we look to the future, The Guild remains committed to fostering excellence in research and education. Together, we will continue to address the challenges of our time with determination and a collaborative spirit.



A moment for educational change

In anticipation of the higher education package published by the European Commission this year, The Guild members contributed to the discussions on reward and recognition system, the European degree and the role of universities in providing the “right” skills set in a rapidly changing world. The Guild also published recommendations for improving the current Erasmus+ programme, highlighting in particular its global dimension and the fact that Erasmus+ is needed more than ever in times of increased polarisation. After a yearlong consultation process with our members, we offered input to the wider sector on the Investment Pathway for the soon to be 60 European Universities alliances. We focused especially on levelling up universities’ R&I capacities through open competition.

“No pedagogic design, modality or policy can, in and by itself, provide the sole answer to the complex issues our societies are and will continue to face. We need diversity to meet the needs of our students, our regional, national and international contexts.

We have a ‘moment’ for educational change that will not come again soon. The sector’s current support and participation in international education activities shows the buy-in.”

Jo Angouri, University of Warwick,
Launch of The Guild insight paper “Transnational collaboration and mobility in higher education”, June 2023

 The Guild's Strategic Leads on Education and Innovation working groups meeting at Ghent University, November 2023

Insight paper on transnational collaboration and mobility

Last year The Guild's Strategic Leads on Education, led by Professor Jo Angouri, Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education and Internationalisation at the University of Warwick, published [a new insight paper](#) as a contribution to the debate on the European degree. It responds to the current emphasis on educational innovation, transcending barriers for programme-level collaboration and connectedness and the ambitious mobility targets. Based on evidence from literature and examples of Guild member universities, we emphasised that different designs need to continue to be supported to achieve scalability of opportunity. The paper calls for a conceptual shift to mobility. A shift that moves away from a 'singular' individual experience and 'state of being' to a process by which opportunities for international learning, short and longer term, are embedded in the curricular and co-curricular offering of an institution, and by which regional, national and international connectivity is enabled.

Different approaches to transnational education collaboration were explored in The Guild's #FutureofEducation seminar series as we wished to engage with the higher education sector on the key issues of resources, quality assurance processes and technological support.





Education and innovation experts meet at Ghent University

Last year our Strategic Leads on Education continued the discussion on educational innovation with colleagues from The Guild's Innovation working group. They identified differences in their respective activities but agreed that students need to be critical thinkers and citizens first and foremost.

Measures to strengthen the entrepreneurial mindset of students through challenge-based education initiatives were presented, focusing on how to scale up initiatives across institutions. European Universities alliances were mentioned as a possible vehicle for upscaling. Participants agreed that the change must come from within the sector itself. In times of shrinking resources, universities are more risk-averse and less keen on innovation. There are also self-imposed regulations within the university which limit flexibility and new types of collaboration.

Members also discussed how physical space affects the learning experience. Ghent University presented their vision for university infrastructure "UGent Verbeeldt 2050" that stimulates connections between education and innovation by bringing together several campuses into university clusters.

Finally, members agreed that we cannot leave social sciences, arts and humanities out of discussions on innovation. They noticed a disconnect between the narrative of European values and identity on one hand, and the focus on deep-tech talents on the other hand. The risk of polarisation and raising nationalism were seen as bigger threats than technology and artificial intelligence.

This spring our experts held a follow-up meeting with DG EAC's Innovation and EIT Unit focusing on the "right competencies" for innovation. They reiterated that our understanding of competitiveness cannot overlook its societal aspects.

Europe needs Erasmus+ more than ever

The Guild's members with expertise in the Erasmus+ programme [provided excellent input for the Erasmus+ interim evaluation](#). They highlighted the growing importance of the programme in times of increased polarisation. Ambitious mobility targets and inclusion rates, coupled with the calls for pedagogical innovation, will require an increased investment in Erasmus+. The paper provides insights into how the programme could be further developed based on the lessons learned and by identifying areas where additional efforts could create a distinctive impact.

Members proposed to reevaluate the current mobility models, stressing harmonisation across different types of mobility. Recommendations included refining eligibility criteria for blended intensive programmes, making short-term PhD mobility more attractive, and introducing more flexibility for teaching and training activities. To enhance inclusion, they called for greater transparency in defining the criteria for students with fewer opportunities to ensure that we support those who otherwise would not be able to go abroad.

Digitalisation of Erasmus+ presents an opportunity to simplify the administrative management of the programme, especially of new formats such as short-term mobility. Similarly, the introduction of the lump sum funding model has been welcomed by the sector, but more clarity is needed around reporting, audit procedures and quality assessment.

Our recommendations on the global dimension of Erasmus+ were an important contribution to the interim evaluation. Erasmus+ should respond better to the global ambitions of universities. Our proposals included aligning the intra-European and international dimensions of the programme, providing greater flexibility in International Credit Mobility, and introducing dedicated schemes to support students and researchers at risk.

The Guild was pleased to contribute to several important stakeholder meetings such as the flagship seminar of the Academic Cooperation Association and the student-led conference Erasmus Generation Meeting.

"Trust towards the universities and participants, transparency in making decisions and processing the feedback from universities are my main wishes for the future of the programme."

Jaanika Haljasmäe, Erasmus Programme Coordinator at the University of Tartu in The Guild's Erasmus video campaign, April 2024



The Guild's Strategic Leads on Education and Innovation working groups meeting at Ghent University, November 2023

"The alliances differ in scope and modus operandi. This is how it should be: there is not a single way forward, but many, and they should all be explored in the living experiment that the university alliances represent."

Ole Petter Ottersen, Acting Secretary-General of The Guild, February 2024

Investment Pathway for the European Universities alliances

Earlier this year The Guild published [concrete proposals](#) for the Investment Pathway of soon to be 60 alliances. As a strong supporter of the initiative since its beginning, we are pleased that all our members actively contribute to seven distinguished alliances - Circle U., CIVIS, EELISA, ENLIGHT, EUTOPIA, NeurotechEU, and Una Europa.

Recognizing the need for long-term funding with greater flexibility, we argued that European funding alone will not be enough. The sustainability of the initiative will require concerted efforts of national governments and institutional commitments.

The Investment Pathway should reinforce the research and innovation capacity of universities through competition open to all research actors with the necessary expertise to spur changes in their national and/or institutional context. Consortia should demonstrate commitment to implementing policies that can advance the European Research Area (ERA) and contribute to removing silos between education, research and innovation.

Appropriate funding of the alliances will need to ensure complementarities between the different EU instruments (Erasmus+, FP10, EU's external action funds, EU's structural funds) without compromising their key principles. We also called for more flexibility and bottom-up opportunities to ensure that the content of collaboration is led by the alliances.



Themis Christophidou
@ChristophidouEU

Replying to @janpalmowski @EUErasmusPlus and 9 others

In a room full of rectors, be sure discussions will be stimulating
& the @guildeu GA is no exception!

Thanks for the precious feedback on our #EuropeanEducationArea priorities
Your success through #EuropeanUniversities is the best illustration of need
for an ever stronger #Erasmus





The Twin Transitions

The academic year 2023-2024 was marked by the fast uptake of ChatGPT in universities as well as natural disasters caused by the accelerating climate change. Against this context, our network has renewed its strong commitment to institutional transformations to support the green transition. Our members reflected on how they can accelerate and shape the digital transition such that it can benefit universities in their higher education and research missions and contribute to the green transition.

“The urgency of the twin digital and green transitions stems from the stark reality of biodiversity loss and the lasting damage of climate change. These are not distant probabilities but here and now crises. They demand immediate and dedicated action.”

Morten Dæhlen, Centre Leader for Computational and Data Science and Professor in computational mathematics/informatics at the University of Oslo in Science Business Viewpoint, February 2024

A digital research agenda for the Twin Transition

[In an insight paper](#), Morten Dæhlen (University of Oslo) has formulated recommendations for a new digital research agenda to accelerate the green transition. He identifies research areas that deserve further investments to make the digital transition greener and to develop digital technologies that will contribute to achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal. The insight paper also calls for re-thinking research and innovation policy to give researchers better incentives to pursue high-risk-high-gain ideas and collaborate across disciplines and countries and with non-academic actors.

The paper was launched in September 2023 at an event organised at the Norway House in Brussels. Its recommendations were discussed by members of The Guild as well as representatives of the European Commission, research funding organisations and university leaderships. This was followed by a launch event at the University of Oslo with representatives of the Norwegian research and innovation communities.

In March 2024, Norway's Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Tore Hattrem, invited Morten Dæhlen and Marion Thain (King's College London) to present the insight paper and its recommendations in London. A panel, including representatives from both academic and industry communities, stressed their respective commitments to our insight paper's recommendations and highlighted the importance of collaborative research – across research disciplines, sectors and countries – to achieve the Twin Transition.

Professor Morten Dæhlen from the University of Oslo at the launch event for the insight paper "Twin Transition Century: The role of digital research for a successful green transition of society?", September 2023

Senior Policy Officer Julien Chicot at an event organised by the University of Oslo, King's College London and the Embassy of Norway to the United Kingdom, March 2024



Artificial intelligence in universities

AI technologies are becoming increasingly pervasive in our societies, including the higher education sector. The Guild has contributed to discussions on how institutions and policymakers should react to enable universities to reap the benefits of these technologies while preventing their potential negative effects.

During the General Assembly meeting of November 2023 at the University of Oslo, Toomas Asser and Gregor Majdič presented the guidelines developed by the University of Tartu and the University of Ljubljana for the use of AI in higher education and research. In the subsequent discussions, the presidents called for further engagement by The Guild in these questions and endorsed the creation of a task force to develop our position on measures to accelerate in a responsible manner the uptake of AI in research. Since then, a group of leading researchers with expertise in using AI tools in various fields of research, including Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, have been discussing this topic with, among others, the European Commission's new unit on AI in science.



Rector Toomas Asser from the University of Tartu and Rector Gregor Majdič from the University of Ljubljana presenting at the General Assembly in Oslo, November 2023



A comprehensive approach to sustainability at The Guild Universities

Despite vast efforts pursued by each of the institutions in the support of the green transition, The Guild members identified the need to exchange ideas and discuss best practices. To address this need, the working group on Strategic Leads of Sustainability started meeting regularly in 2022, and at the start of 2024 its members convened in-person to strive to achieve a joint position on success factors and bottlenecks in the green transition. Central to their discussions was the recognition of both achievements and impediments in current initiatives, alongside a shared acknowledgement of the pressing need to adopt more ambitious and bold strategies to propel further progress in the realm of sustainable transitions.



Our Sustainability working group met in-person for the first time since its creation at Pompeu Fabra University to discuss the inclusion of sustainability in different research fields e.g. research, education and international cooperation, February 2024



Launch event for the insight paper "Twin Transition Century: The role of digital research for a successful green transition of society?", September 2023



- Alexandr Hobza, Chief Economist at the DG RTD, European Commission
- Magda Chlebus, Executive Director of Science Policy & Regulatory Affairs at EFPIA
- Alberto Credi, Vice - Rector for Research at the University of Bologna
- Lars Frolund, Member of the Board of the European Innovation Council and Special Advisor to Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager



Shaping European framework programmes for R&I

This year has marked the acceleration of the planning for the tenth framework programme for R&I (FP10), running from 2028–2034. This development has taken place in parallel with the revision of the achievements of Horizon 2020, and the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe, the current programme, that runs until 2027. The developments in the wider policy context of the EU, such as the approaching EU elections in June 2024, have also set a demanding context for our work on articulating a new vision and narrative for the value of R&I when it comes to Europe's competitiveness and the pursuit of Europe's strategic autonomy. Likewise, questions around the increasing need to invest in research security and defence capabilities supported by innovative technologies posed new questions for universities on how to shape their role in a turbulent geopolitical environment.

All in all, our work on FP10 connected The Guild and its members more effectively to wider political questions, emphasising the importance of our community for representing a strong voice of research-intensive universities and for supporting our members in adapting to the changing geopolitical landscape.

"We need to avoid short-termism and have stable and predictable investments to better integrate R&I into the broader policy mix."

Alexandr Hobza, Chief Economist at DG RTD,
"Re-framing innovation policy: the dynamics between the R and I", March 2024

Panel discussion with Maria Leptin, President of the ERC; Magda Chlebus, Executive Director of EFPIA; Alberto Credi, Vice-Rector at the University of Bologna; Lars Frølund, Member of the Board of the EIC and Special Advisor to Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager at The Guild's event "Re-framing innovation policy: The dynamics between the R and I", March 2024

Expressing our views on FP10

The Guild and LERU, the League of European Research-Intensive Universities, and their CE7 partners opened the discussion on the future framework programme with a joint public event in June 2023. The event served as a launch of the two networks' joint statement, outlining our [10 recommendations for FP10](#), together with an ambitious call for a budget of EUR 200bn for the next 7 years. The collaboration represented the joining of the forces of 52 leading research universities for the first time. Marc Lemaître, the newly appointed Director-General for Research and Innovation (RTD) at the European Commission, shared his insights into the priorities related to FP10 in the invitation-only event hosted in Brussels.

After publishing our joint recommendations, The Guild's working groups proceeded to start building their more nuanced views on the individual policy aspects related to FP10. This work resulted in the publication of a detailed [FP10 vision paper](#) in May 2024, that will set the framework for our network's positioning in the coming years when the legislative base of the new programme will be created.

In parallel, since the beginning of 2024, The Guild has joined the fast-evolving political debate on how to articulate Europe's competitiveness and the role of R&I and universities within it. The Guild fed into the report of Professor Mario Draghi, the former Prime Minister of Italy, by providing views on the types of investments that would further boost the competitiveness of universities. This topic was also high on the agenda of our public event "[Re-Framing Innovation Policy: The Dynamics Between the R&I](#)", where a panel of thought leaders representing the European Research Council (ERC), European Innovation Council (EIC), the pharmaceutical industry and our member universities fostered a debate on the need to look at our innovation policies from a new perspective. The panel called for more trust-based and tailored cooperation between academia and industry, as well as empowering research funding from the bottom-up perspective to maximise innovation outcomes.



The Guild and LERU organised a high-level event to present their key messages for FP10, June 2023

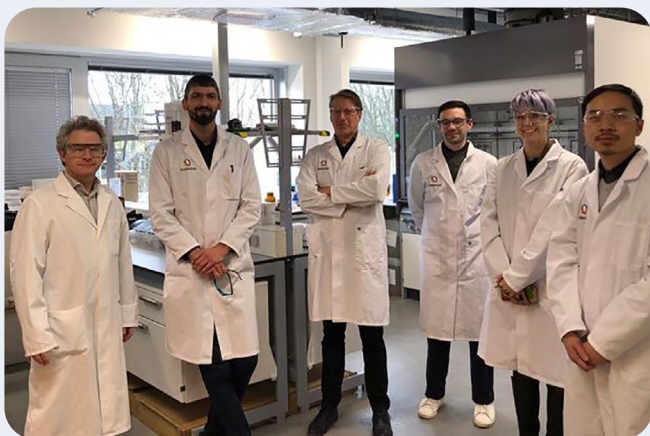
Marc Lemaître, Director-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD) shared his reflections on the key messages for FP10, June 2023

Developing Europe's innovation ecosystem

The Guild pursued its activities to promote a European framework conducive to a better exploitation of research outcomes. As an active member of the ERA Action 7 on Knowledge Valorisation, we provided inputs to new codes of practice on academia-industry collaboration and citizen engagement.

We continued our campaign to revise the intellectual property (IP) rules applicable to EIC Pathfinder and Transition projects. [With nine other associations of research stakeholders](#), we liaised with the EIC Board, stressing the need for IP rules that promote collaboration between EIC inventors and their universities' knowledge valorisation services. We welcomed the statement of the Board endorsing our position, which resulted in amendments to the IP rules in the EIC work programme 2024.

In January 2024, Ghent University invited Julien Chicot to participate in the visit of Michiel Scheffer, the President of the EIC Board. This visit provided an opportunity to meet EIC grantees, better understand the challenges they face, and re-assert the need for the EIC to adopt a more comprehensive definition of innovation and to be more than a mere instrument of industrial policies.



The Guild's SSAH Deans gathered at the University of Glasgow to discuss SSAH research in Horizon Europe (HE) and the UK & Switzerland's (re)association to HE and had the pleasure to welcome Pedro Serrano, EU Ambassador to the UK, April 2024

Securing the UK's association to Horizon Europe

After nearly three years of delay, the Government of the United Kingdom and the European Commission announced on 7 September at the The University of Warwick that an agreement for the UK's full association to Horizon Europe and Copernicus had been agreed and came into force on 1 January 2024. The Guild had the pleasure to welcome Pedro Serrano, European Union Ambassador to the United Kingdom, at our Deans of Social Science, Arts and Humanities meeting at the University of Glasgow, just one of the many occasions in which The Guild's academics and institutions stressed the importance making the most of this restored ability to collaborate. Meanwhile, The Guild [continues to call for Swiss association](#) welcoming the reignition of this process in 2024 and highlighting that an agreement needs to be concluded as soon as possible.

Michiel Scheffer, President of the EIC and Senior Policy Officer Julien Chicot at QustomDot, a spin-off of Ghent University, January 2024



The Guild's member universities in Horizon Europe



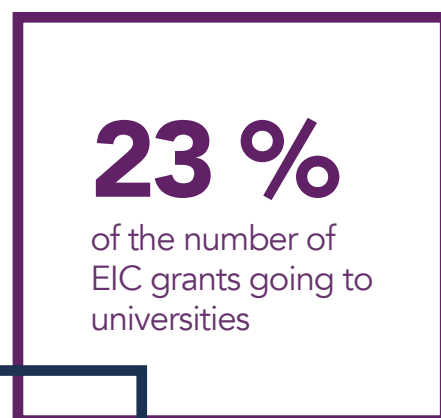
Around

1,159 m

grant capture

16 %

of the number of
Horizon Europe
grants going to
universities



23 %

of the number of
EIC grants going to
universities



Around

545 m

in ERC grants, accounting
for 11% of university share



18 %

of MSCA grants
going to universities

European Research Area in action

The academic year was dominated by deepening dialogues within the current policy actions of the ERA, as well as forward-looking discussions on which topics should form the basis of the next policy cycle of the ERA in 2025–27. Our participation in the working groups of ERA actions provides us with a direct contact and voice among representatives of EU Member States and Associated Countries, European Commission and other stakeholders. The ERA has proven to be a fruitful ground for the preparation of future policy approaches in a spirit of co-creation. The dialogues have increased our interaction with and understanding of national contexts and the objectives of the European Commission in different policy areas. The following sections describe our work in the most important ERA actions we have participated in.

Empower higher education institutions

This action has focused on the European excellence initiative as a funding instrument in Horizon Europe/FP10. The Guild has been involved in the development of the topic since 2019 when, as the first stakeholder, it published a position paper on this initiative. Within the ERA Action the topic was connected to the theme of European University alliances, and The Guild consulted its R&I Policy Group as well as the European Universities working group in preparing the Commission's approach to supporting excellence in Europe's universities. As a result, a call was created which reflected openness to different types of collaborations, in line with our position. Work is still ongoing to further shape support for excellence in universities and to identify funding opportunities for the European University alliances.

Promote attractive research careers

With four other university networks, [The Guild reacted](#) to the European Commission's proposal for a Council recommendation for a European framework for research careers. We acknowledged the need to make research careers more attractive to strengthen Europe's scientific leadership. Stronger commitment from the Member States is needed to empower universities to provide suitable working conditions, including better career security.

In a panel about research careers at the 2024 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Conference, Julien Chicot re-asserted, on behalf of The Guild, the positive effects of MSCA on research careers. To uphold these effects there is a need to preserve the MSCA model and strengthen its financial base.



The Guild's Gender & Diversity working group met in Brussels to exchange best practices and discuss Gender Equality Plans and ERA Action 5, November 2023



Promote gender equality and foster inclusiveness

The Guild Gender and Diversity working group has been regularly engaged throughout 2023–24 on topics stemming from the ERA Action 5 Subgroup on inclusive gender equality. The Guild was involved in the Subgroup's task force to discuss the Zero-Tolerance Code of Conduct to counteract gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, in the EU Research and Innovation ecosystem. While emphasising the importance of establishing a shared understanding of these issues and fostering safe academic environments, The Guild underscored the need to critically assess the limitations inherent in a strict zero-tolerance approach. For the upcoming year, The Guild will continue to provide support through a newly established task force that will focus on principles for the integration and evaluation of the gender dimension in R&I.

Finally, The Guild's Gender and Diversity working group's highlight of the year was an in-person meeting organised in Brussels where members addressed the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality in research and innovation, and exchanged practices on how to foster intersectional gender equality measures at universities, including topics such as inclusive and innovative pedagogies, work-(self-)care reconciliation and measures to address gender inequality and precarity in academia.

Improve EU-wide access to excellence

This action brings together the R&I and Cohesion policy communities to increase synergies between the different EU programmes and help bridge the research and innovation gap across Europe. The Guild has emphasized the crucial role of investments from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in lower R&I performing countries in increasing the quality of their research and higher education sector. We are pleased to participate in the ERA subgroup and provide examples of how synergies are implemented at member universities. In the current programming period synergies have focused more on innovation activities, in particular demands driven by the private sector needs. However, it is impossible to strengthen universities' place in the regional innovation ecosystem without better supporting their research capacities.

Promote a positive environment and level field for international cooperation based on reciprocity

The Guild's Responsible Internationalisation statement, [published](#) in November 2023, provides a positive perspective about international cooperation in research and innovation. It sets out principles that underpin the potential of universities on the global stage, while acknowledging risks that must be assessed and mitigated proportionally.

Our network strongly believes that the most effective form of security depends on institutional autonomy and academic freedom and the statement shows our willingness to take on this responsibility. It calls on policymakers at the European and national levels to engage efficiently to find the right balance and trust between governments, funders, institutions and academics to build a culture of responsibility.

In recent years, The Guild has [contributed](#) to an understanding of how research security strategies can impact performance of our members in practice to Member State representatives in the ERA Forum Subgroup on the Global Approach. Our contribution has already had an impact as a submission to the European Commission's consultation on Enhancing Research Security. This was a key input for the drafting of the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on enhancing research security which eventually incorporated a responsible internationalisation heading.

The Guild's Responsible Internationalisation Task Force convened in Brussels for a workshop in February to engage in a policy dialogue with Mirko van Muijen, from the European Commission's International Cooperation Directorate about the rationale of the Commission's proposal and process that followed as the policy was passed on to the Member States and the Council. The group had a follow-up workshop to explore the heterogeneity of research security contexts across Europe and shared best practices and lessons learned.

In April, Sean Rowlands participated in a panel discussion on research security organised by the Norwegian Contact Office for Research, Innovation and Education in Brussels (Norcore). Panellists included Ministry representatives from the Netherlands and Norway, expert advisors supporting researchers in Germany through a dedicated international cooperation agency within the DAAD and funding agencies from Sweden, Flanders and Norway.



The Guild at the high-level Multilateral Dialogue on principles and values meeting in Paris, June 2023



Senior Policy Officer Sean Rowlands at NorCore event on research security, April 2024

The multilateral dialogue on principles and values for international research

The ERA subgroup on the Global Approach has been a venue for strategic discussion by European Member States and stakeholders about how it can best coordinate with counterparts in third countries. To this end, The Guild volunteered to co-organise the final multi-lateral dialogue in January on equitable partnerships with Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC). We ensured special invitations were extended for the Secretary-General and incoming Secretary-General from ARUA to participate. They influenced common values and practices for international cooperation that European, American and Asian actors may adopt, in line with The Guild's position on strengthening the African knowledge society.

The Guild's proposal for an ERA Action on fundamental research

In the summer of 2023, a process was launched to propose new policy actions for ERA for the years 2025-27. In 2019, The Guild had successfully advocated for fundamental research and the scientific leadership of Europe to become a priority in the Pact for R&I that outlines the long-term objectives of the renewed ERA, and now was the time to propose an activity implementing this priority that was endorsed by the Member States. The Guild led the creation of a coalition consisting of university networks, researcher associations and R&I funders at European and national levels (from Sweden and Norway) to develop a policy action corresponding to the ambition for pursuing strengthened scientific leadership in Europe, in line with the Pact for R&I. This work resulted in a process where, by Spring 2024, the action has been discussed several times with all Member States and the Commission. The next step would include gathering interested Member States to join forces to create a concrete work plan for the action.



Sarika Wilson
@sarika_vij

Very interesting discussion at the [#ERAForum](#) today. Inspired by the feedback on a new action on fundamental research & scientific leadership of Europe. Hopefully we will get to join forces with [@EUScienceInnov](#), Member States and stakeholders to create an ambitious policy action!





Making new forms of Africa-Europe research collaboration a reality

The Guild and the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) reached significant milestones together in 2023–24 as we [launched](#) a unique initiative for collaboration between the continents.

As Europe and Africa both stand at a crossroads, with very important shared challenges ahead, the preparation, advocacy and vision of our university networks puts us in a unique position to contribute to the AU–EU Innovation Agenda.

Our initiative represents a new way of collaborating in intercontinental clusters, on our own terms with academic freedom, with a form and commitments that put into practice the equitable partnerships we believe to be essential for excellent research and innovation.

The partnership between ARUA and The Guild and our joint CoRE initiative was a prominent topic of discussion at the ARUA biennial conference hosted at the University of Lagos in November 2023. The Guild was represented by Peter Maassen who gave a keynote speech, various CoRE co-leads presented and organised workshops and The Guild lead on Africa-Europe CoRE Jan Palmowski and Senior Policy Officer Sean Rowlands. Pictured is Senior Policy Officer Sean Rowlands with the ARUA Secretariat, November 2023

A coalition of organisations calls for a new Africa-EU funding programme for R&I

In June 2023, organisations representing more than 2 000 universities and research organisation in Africa and Europe were united by [our joint call for action](#) towards an Africa–Europe science, technology, and innovation (STI) programme.

The call for action came at a crucial moment when the adoption of the AU–EU Innovation Agenda was imminent. By welcoming this framework as a key step towards strengthening the African knowledge society, our broad coalition of stakeholders signalled its encouragement and wish to contribute. The Agenda recognises the key role that research will play in overcoming challenges in our societies. Nevertheless, in our call we highlighted that a thriving ecosystem for research in Africa needs systematic investments, best provided through better integration of Europe’s Global Gateway and African research funding institutions with Horizon Europe and Erasmus+.

Our coalition’s key demands were to enhance and extend the ARISE programme, funding and synergies to enable collaborative ‘centres of excellence’ and investment in African R&I infrastructure.

Our coalition remains active, and the joint call provides strategic guidance to The Guild’s ongoing advocacy with European institutions to better enable equitable partnerships between African and European researchers. Our sectoral call on funders to take an integrated approach sets the scene for the [Africa–Europe Clusters of Research Excellence \(CoRE\)](#). These clusters should be bold, fostering new forms of collaboration that are more resilient and driven by excellence, They should be able to address major disparities between Africa and Europe in a systemic way for the long-term benefit of science and society.





Launch of the Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence

Presidents and Vice-Chancellors of The Guild and ARUA's member institutions came together for a summit in Brussels on 8 June 2023 with Koen Doens, Director-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) and Maria Cristina Russo, Director for Global Approach Partnerships at the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD), who gave encouraging keynote speeches at the event.

By launching [20 Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence \(CoRE\)](#), the institutional leaders of our research-intensive networks have demonstrated the strong relationship that binds them. This relationship will be able to sustain their ambition to demonstrate new ways of collaborating between our continents. They made significant commitments to the CoRE initiative by recognising the paradigm-changing potential of multilateral, long-term collaborations between Africa and Europe. The crucial support and resources committed by their institutions will ensure sustainable collaborations in a policy context that promises increasing and improving funding opportunities between the regions.

Excellent academics across our networks and beyond responded to this significant position with their vision for achieving excellence, embodying equitable partnership, and addressing our shared societal challenges in the realms of health, climate, technology transformation, and resilience in the face of conflict and geopolitical turbulence.

Across the [20 CoREs](#), 250 excellent researchers from 42 countries have co-created their respective ten-year agendas for collaborative research, education and capacity building activities. ARUA and The Guild are leading this initiative, but each Cluster has academic freedom, which means that many include partners from beyond the two networks.

The AU-EU Innovation Agenda was adopted on 18 July 2023. With their innovative collaborative format and established alignment to the Agenda's priorities, CoRE partners are uniquely prepared for this significant step change in the funding landscape. The bottom-up development and establishment of the CoRE initiative, fostered by ARUA and The Guild and funded by our own institutions, has drawn on our joint policy analysis and collective experiences. Indeed, this initiative marks a turning point in The Guild's advocacy. We are not any longer just advocating for new policies – we are implementing the practices we advocate to demonstrate and enhance the policies once they are in place. Our institutions, academics and secretariats have a vision of how to achieve more effective and equitable research collaboration in an inequitable world, and we have stepped up to make it a reality.

By March 2024, the CoRE Initiative was listed on the official AU-EU at [Innovation Agenda Dashboard](#) launched at the European Commission's flagship R&I week event in Brussels. The CoRE initiative stands out on that list as the only bottom-up, academic-led and university-funded initiative.

CoRE activities in their first year

There are diverse constellations of collaborators across the Africa–Europe CoRE. The number and type of partners, as well as the nature of their cluster theme and multilateral links to one another, have contributed to producing a varied array of activities since their establishment. While some of the activities have been public, including online masterclasses and webinars, others have been more internal activities among collaborators to build their mutual understanding and governance, take on specific roles and in some cases apply for funding.

The Guild and ARUA have also been convening two series of regular cross-cluster meetings: the steering group and the academic co-leads, each participating remotely from the two continents. These meetings have been used to discuss how equitable partnerships can best be guaranteed across the CoRE, refining expectations of how the CoREs should operate and be supported, while maintaining each Cluster’s academic freedom.

In February 2024, The Guild co-organised the NEXUS conference in Brussels with the Pan-European GÉANT network and NORDUnet, the National Research and Education Network that represents more than 400 research & education institutions in the Nordics serving over 1.2 million digital service users. The event focused on the value of research and education infrastructure in enabling scientists, educators, and students to work and share knowledge globally. This theme was very much in line with the third demand in The Guild’s joint call for action towards an integrated Africa–Europe STI programme published in June 2023. The importance of this topic was exemplified in concrete and ambitious terms by the panel of research infrastructure users made up of partners in the Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, and Theoretical and Computational Thinking CoRE from Uppsala, Stellenbosch and Makerere, moderated by Jan Palmowski. The participants at the conference included European Commission officials, African national embassy representatives, multilateral organisations such as UNESCO, and members of the digitalisation and R&I sectors. This conference was an opportunity to learn across divides and emphasise the need for a stronger Africa–Europe cooperation enabling and enabled by excellent R&I, in an era of unprecedented societal challenges.



The Guild Presidents and ARUA Vice-Chancellors gathered in Brussels to launch the Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence, June 2023



The Guild network

As of 2024, The Guild consists of [twenty working groups](#) and four task forces.

We would like to thank all our working group members for the work they have done, not only this past year, but throughout the years. We are immensely grateful for their expertise, advice and support in formulating The Guild's position.

A special thank you also to our institutional liaisons, as the backbone of the organisation, they are key actors in our operations.

The Guild again had the pleasure to host a student from our member universities. Henrique Santos joined us in September as Junior Policy Officer. He obtained a bachelor's in Law at the University of Lisbon and is currently pursuing a master's degree in international relations at the University of Groningen and shares his experience on p.28.

The Guild would not be where it is today without its office. This year we had the pleasure to welcome Senior Policy Officer Sean Rowlands and had to say goodbye to Senior Policy Officer Laura Royer, Communications Officer Elisa Collomp and Head of Policy Sarika Wilson. Sarika shares her experience in working for The Guild for over eight years on p.29.

The Guild's working groups



Research, Education & Innovation Policy:

Erasmus
European Universities
Innovation
Open Science
R&I Policy
Research Careers & Assessment
Strategic Leads on Education
Widening Participation



Research & Academic Collaboration:

Deans of Health
Deans of Law
Deans of Social Sciences,
Arts & Humanities
Deans of Theology
Heads of Digital Research
North-South Dialogue



Institutional Enhancement:

Gender and Diversity
Quality Assurance in Research
Heads of Communications
Research Support Offices
Digital transformation
Sustainability



Task Forces:

AI in Research
Academic Freedom
Societal Readiness
Responsible Internationalisation

Université PSL joins The Guild

On 1 December 2023, The Guild had the pleasure of welcoming [Université PSL](#) as its 22nd member. Founded in 2010, Université PSL (Paris Sciences et Lettres University) is a leading French research institution known for its interdisciplinary approach and commitment to fostering innovation. Ranked among the world's top 50 universities, Université PSL draws directly from research to train researchers, artists, engineers, entrepreneurs and managers, giving them the opportunity to develop their creativity, critical thinking and entrepreneurial skills.

Université PSL is composed of 11 distinguished institutions: the Collège de France; Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique – PSL; Paris-Dauphine – PSL; École nationale des chartes – PSL; École nationale supérieure de Chimie de Paris – PSL; École normale supérieure – PSL; École Pratique des Hautes Études – PSL; École Supérieure de Physique et de Chimie Industrielles de la Ville de Paris – PSL ; Institut Curie; École nationale supérieure des Mines de Paris – PSL; and Observatoire de Paris – PSL.

In addition to its member institutions, PSL benefits from the support of three prominent research organisations: CNRS, Inria and Inserm. This unique collaborative ecosystem positions PSL as a hub for groundbreaking interdisciplinary research. PSL gathers scientific knowledge from its wide variety of schools to foster unique opportunities for its communities in education, research, technology transfer, and industrial and academic partnerships at national, European and international levels.

"The internationalisation of the university landscape calls for a concerted European approach to the major issues involved. Université PSL is very honoured to join The Guild and looks forward to contributing to this truly impactful network. Indeed, it not only shares the profile of The Guild's Members (intensive research, multidisciplinary), it also fully embraces its values and is truly committed to carrying them within and beyond Europe."

Alain Fuchs, President of Université PSL, December 2023



Henrique Santos' experience as Junior Policy Officer at The Guild



What encouraged you to apply to the position of Junior Policy Officer at The Guild?

After visiting Africa on multiple occasions, I became increasingly interested in the continent's cultural diversity and political dynamics. During my master's I researched Africa's Green Transition, the political economy of nuclear energy and the flow of technology transfers between Europe and Africa. Being innately concerned with equity and sustainability issues I saw in the innovative Clusters of Research Excellence a unique opportunity to stimulate cooperation between the two continents, and to jointly address the common global challenges faced by the two continents. This 10-month traineeship, as I saw it, seemed like the perfect opportunity to grow personally and professionally, allowing me to further develop my interest in, and knowledge of, EU-Africa relations, from a different perspective (R&I).

Did you have any knowledge of the research and innovation sector prior to joining The Guild?

The existence and relevance of research and innovation was ever-present in my thinking... after all, it is evident and undeniable that we are surrounded by its outputs and products. However, I cannot say that I was aware of the sector's internal dynamics or of its interconnections with virtually all other sectors. In fact, my understanding of the workings of universities was constrained: I was generally aware of their broader educational activities but not of their research endeavours. Despite my sound understanding of international cooperation, I was mostly unaware of the complex, multilateral and multidisciplinary initiatives developed in and between universities.

What was your experience working on the different portfolios: Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence, research security and responsible internationalisation?

Simply put: it has been great! It provided me with the opportunity to work in the development of an innovative approach to international R&I collaboration, all alongside Africa and Europe's leading researchers and the institutions they represent. I have grown committed to an equitable implementation of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda, after becoming aware of the existing potential for success of the CoRE in that challenging process.

The current geopolitical scenario predicts a future in which international R&I cooperation will be essential to address expected and unforeseen events. Working in The Guild's Responsible Internationalisation taskforce, I have learned about the risks of non-cooperation. With the knowledge acquired during an MA in International Security, I have expanded my understanding of securitisation processes to the field of R&I. Engaging with this taskforce has enlightened me on the need to secure freedom/openness in research while dealing with perceived threats and political tensions.

What are your main takeaways from this traineeship?

Having the opportunity to learn alongside The Guild's team and their expertise has proved to be an amazing and unforgettable experience. I have gained a good understanding of the EU's policymaking process and of the variety of stakeholders involved in the research sector. I have also developed my communication capabilities and time-management skills. By assisting in the planning and delivery of The Guild's events, I have taken part in the in vivo work done by our network – from which I have gained invaluable insights from the sector's leading experts. It has been an immense pleasure to help support the early implementation of the CoRE, and I am eager to know how they will perform in their long-term commitments.

To all The Guild's staff, thank you.

Interview with Sarika Wilson

Sarika Wilson joined The Guild shortly after its creation in January 2017 as Senior Policy Officer before being promoted to Head of Policy. She was responsible for coordinating the policy team and network collaborations. Her policy topics included the EU framework programmes for research and innovation and the European Research Area. She also coordinated the R&I Policy and Research Support Offices working groups. After more than eight years with The Guild, she has left The Guild to return to Finland to work for her Alma Mater the University of Helsinki.

What inspired you to work in the research & innovation policy sector?/ How did you end up working in the R&I policy sector?

My first Policy Officer job in Brussels 12 years ago was in a regional representation, where I got my first experience in advocating for the interests of universities. This is where I got to know the Framework Programmes for R&I, and I was fascinated by the cultural differences between the research community's and the Commissions' expectations when it comes to the funding for R&I. It was about the sensitive relationship between research and policy, and how to make them relevant and understandable to each other. I was also fascinated by how R&I and education policies are increasingly connected to other policy priorities, from competitiveness to employment, green and digital and security. Working with universities in these areas has enabled a wide perspective into the whole range of policies the EU is working with.

Looking at your impressive portfolio, what is your crown achievement at The Guild?

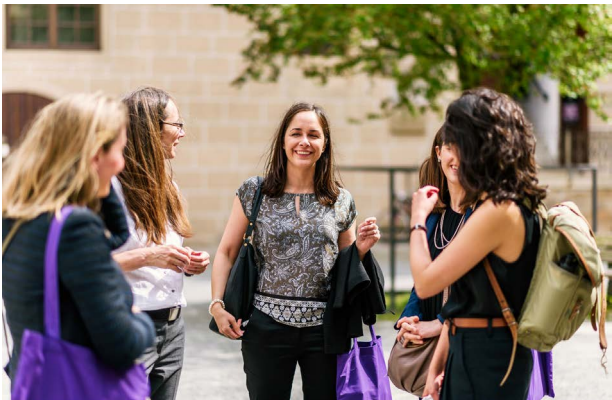
My perspective was truly revolutionised when I started to work for The Guild as its first Policy team member in 2017. I stepped into an empty office space and it was a fantastic challenge to participate in the building of a new kind of a network, that had its own structure, identity and sense of community to be created. The Guild provided me with an insight into the diversity of institutions we have in our network, but at the same time a strong understanding of the distinctive role of research-intensive universities in Europe and what is common for them all. Learning about the differences in their national political contexts has also been a valuable aspect of the work at The Guild. Looking back, I feel privileged to have been part of the journey of a network that acts as a strong voice for its members and that is now considered one of the most appreciated and agile actors in Brussels in our field.

What is on your wish list for the European Research and Education Area?

Reflecting on the recent policy developments, my wish list includes that universities could take the driving seat in the coming years on the priorities for FP10, ERA and EEA. We're the ones who will implement the policies, so the development of new policies should more clearly reflect our needs and ambitions, which also requires proactiveness from the side of universities. This is particularly important when it comes to the roles of fundamental research and research on global challenges, but also when it comes to capacity building and the definition of areas where universities are expected to develop faster in the coming years. The questions of institutional and research excellence as well as excellence in education and skills development are also crucial questions for the coming years.

What do you envision for the future of The Guild?

I'm convinced that The Guild will continue its fast development as a community and as a policy actor in the coming years, given how dynamically the network has evolved in the past 7,5 years since it was established. It now covers 22 members and roughly the same number of working groups, which reflects the wide range of activities it fosters. At the same time, the policy landscape is getting more complex and the community will need to prioritise well its activities, also considering the forward-looking priorities of The Guild's members. The future looks extremely bright for The Guild, considering the members we have in the network and the value they give to European engagement, and the fantastic team that the network has in Brussels!



Governance

Interview with outgoing Chair Svein Stølen

How has the European research and innovation policy landscape changed compared to when you first joined The Guild?

I believe the political and societal engagement is more intense – the interest in universities' role for the development of Europe has increased. We should applaud this although we, to some extent, may feel that the interest in the sector is unwieldy. The overload of expectations can translate into wrong actions/policies. Still, indifference would have been much more of a problem. We need to take advantage of the interest to secure trust and further investments in universities and research.

The many accelerating policy processes directed at universities has brought research policy closer to the primary activities of the university. It really affects us: Plan S, reform of research assessment and a string of other issues. In 2017 open science and the sustainable development goals were central topics. Today the agenda is dominated by research security and geopolitical challenges, which makes the prioritisation between different interests and concerns even more challenging. Thus, we need to be active as universities and make sure that the voice of universities such as ours is heard.

What have been the crown achievements of The Guild since you entered office as Chair?

First and foremost, we have consolidated the position of The Guild as a constructive, dynamic and influential alliance. I am very happy that the situation for UK and Swiss research has been improved and I believe we have contributed from our side in the political processes and to the dialogue. Furthermore, the work we have done on the Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence (CoREs) with ARUA is clearly influential and important. We are also more active in educational policy issues.

What has the University of Oslo been able to achieve through its membership with The Guild?

The University of Oslo (UiO) is a globally oriented European university. The bonds we have created within The Guild are of utmost importance to us. Norway not being a member of the EU furthermore gives UiO special challenges. Because we are outsiders, The Guild is even more important to us than it is to many other universities in the network. We gain knowledge about EU policy development and influence and are included in the early stages of policy processes as stakeholders. We are very happy that The Guild covers and puts emphasis on north-south and west-east dimensions of Europe.

What is your vision for the University of Oslo as a member of The Guild?

Increased interaction and collaboration within and outside the university has, for me, been a guiding principle as rector for seven years. Internally, we have worked on our own system for research, higher education, innovation and outreach. Externally, we have worked in and with Oslo, nationally, in Europe, and we have used our European alliances – The Guild and Circle U. – as platforms for global collaboration. As a university, we must develop, handle change, and be active at the crossroads we know are ahead of us. The Guild really makes a difference to UiO and helps us to be prepared and agile.



The Guild's Board of Directors



The Guild's Board of Directors: Svein Stølen (University of Oslo), Toomas Asser (University of Tartu), Rachel Sandison (University of Glasgow), Anders Hagfeldt (Uppsala University), and Daniel David (Babeş-Bolyai University)

We are grateful to the leadership and continued support of our presidents and rectors. This year we had the pleasure to welcome new Board member Daniel David, Rector of The Babeş-Bolyai University who provides us with his expertise on EU R&I topics from a widening perspective.

Through Board and General Assembly meetings, The Guild's Presidents have provided critical advice to The Guild office in identifying Europe's most pressing challenges and how universities can best support the EU in addressing societal challenges. From fostering equitable international partnerships through the launch of the Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence (CoRE) to the use of artificial intelligence in universities. We want to thank our members for their valuable input and contributions to enriching The Guild's position.

Last but certainly not least, we extend our gratitude to our Vice-Presidents and would like to highlight their outstanding commitment throughout this year. This year they have been crucial in guiding The Guild's activities concerning FP10, the higher education package and the Africa-Europe CoRE initiative.

Photo credits:

African Research Universities Alliance (2023): ARUA Biennial Conference 2023, p.21

Babeş-Bolyai University: Daniel David, p.32

Christoffer Hals (2024): Julien Chicot at event in London, p.9

ERA subgroup on Global Approach (2023): The Guild at the Multilateral Dialogue meeting on principles and values in Paris, p.19

Geoffrey Fritsch (2023): The Guild and ARUA Presidents and Vice-Chancellors' summit in Brussels, p.23

Geoffrey Fritsch (2024): Panel at The Guild's event "Re-framing innovation policy: The dynamics between the R and I", p.13

Jacky Delorme // UCLouvain (2019): The Guild General Assembly, p.30

Joseph Krpelan // University of Vienna (2018): The Guild General Assembly, p.30

University of Glasgow (2024): The Guild's Deans of SSAH, p.15; Rachel Sandison, p.32

University of Oslo: cover image; group photo General Assembly, p.31; Svein Stølen p.1 & 32

University of Tartu: Toomas Asser, p.32

Uppsala University: Anders Hagfeldt, p.32

Valentin Marquardt // University of Tübingen (2019): The Guild General Assembly, p.30

The Guild at a glance



22

members



16

countries



38K

academic staff



650K

students



49

internal meetings



116

meetings with policymakers
and key influencers



219

media features



≈ 100K

website views



≈ 9610

social media followers

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

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

