ECIU University Education Strategy 2025–2028

Version 5.1
Approved by the VP Education Group
(November 28, 2024) and the Board
(December 13, 2024)

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ECIU University Education Strategy

1. Background and Context

The ECIU member universities have been working collaboratively on creating ECIU University. During the pilot and start up years we have been experimenting with new educational elements at a European level and building our experience and capability. To ensure we develop a sustainable and robust model of European education, a comprehensive **strategy for education** is important, guided by ECIU's unique vision to deliver impactful, innovative, future-orientated education, and cognisant of challenges and trends in higher education. Delivering on the strategy will require a coherent approach that **integrates the different perspectives** and **capitalises on the strengths of each ECIU institution**.

The **scope of this document** is the education agenda of ECIU, in the timeframe **to 2028**. It will serve as a roadmap within the alliance, guiding the pursuit of our **goals** and **objectives** and development of the **instruments** we have or need to achieve them. The implementation of the objectives defined in the present document will be set out in a separate plan, the education action plan.

Key trends currently impact higher education in Europe: the advent of highly disruptive but exciting technologies; an imperative to deliver education for sustainable development; declining funding in many countries, and a strengthened political focus on education to support Europe's values and economic prosperity.

- Higher education providers are beginning to navigate a second wave of digital transformation. In the wake of the pandemic, the landscape of digitisation is uneven and the focus on digital resources and infrastructure across the EHEA insufficient[1]. It is clear that novel technologies (machine learning, Artificial Intelligence) will require a radical and rapid reimagining of how education is delivered and assessed.
- In a context of a climate emergency and threats to social cohesion, expectations that education support sustainable development are

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[1] EUA (2024). Trends 2024 European higher education institutions in times of transition. Available at: https://www.eua.eu/images/publications/Publication_PDFs/Trends_2024.pdf

deepening. The Council of the European Union has adopted a Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development[2] and many national authorities also have policies in this regard. An emphasis on this across European Alliances is to be expected.

- Despite the demands of these challenges, the EUA Trends 2024 report1 indicates concern about underfunding in European higher education. 70% of HEIs identified this as one of the top three obstacles for improving learning and teaching, and some ECIU members face challenges in this regard.

- The EU agenda emphasises creating a "union of skills" to address labour shortages and mainstream lifelong learning in education and work. The 'Draghi-report' highlights the need for stronger links between higher education and industry, greater investment in adult learning and better data on skills needs. These priorities are underscored in the mission of the Commission's Executive Vice-President for People, Skills and Preparedness which highlights the European Degree and Skills Portability Initiative as examples of how skills, mobility and career development across the EU will be promoted.

These trends point to the importance of ECIU prioritising **flexible education pathways**, teaching new types of skills and knowledge through challenge-based learning, and combining pedagogic innovation with digital infrastructure and tools while also ensuring the future viability of our approach. Flexible pathways can mean creating space within current programs for innovative learning approaches more apt for acquiring needed skills; it can mean leveraging our shared focus on horizontal competences to meet learning needs in a totally new context and facilitate recognition of learning at EU level through new awarding mechanisms; and it can mean facilitation of a highly personalised education journey focused on the individual learner, including addressing micro-learning needs of graduates.

Through this education strategy we aim to move forward our position as a leading innovative European Alliance, responding to multiple external changes and challenges but remaining true to our *dna* of innovation, skills development and flexibility.

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[2] Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development, 16 June 2022 (2022/C 243/01)
https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022H0627%2801%29

2. ECIU Education Vision

The education vision of ECIU University is to empower learners with specific, personalised skills and knowledge tailored to address Europe's societal challenges, while enhancing their own competencies in an international, often multi-disciplinary setting. This includes empowering learners to take control of their learning journeys and actively participate in shaping their educational experiences. ECIU learners benefit from **flexible educational pathways** with diversified mobility options beyond what typical education programs allow. With ECIU University's opportunities, education may be flexible as to time and place. They engage in **challenge-based learning**, addressing **real-life societal issues** from member university regions alongside external stakeholders, co-creating solutions with the potential to have immediate **impact** in their regions and beyond.

The **aim of ECIU University is to offer European education** that prepares learners as global citizens and responsible leaders capable of tackling the complex societal challenges of the 21st century. We do that by offering education with the following distinctive emphases.

- **ECIU Challenge-Based Approach**: Embrace ECIU's Challenge-based learning to encourage critical thinking, innovation, and practical and transversal skills development while working on real-life challenges in an international and interdisciplinary setting, provided mostly by external stakeholders.
- **Flexible Learning Pathway Approach**: Focus on flexibility in learning pathways, enabling learners to co-design some or all of their own educational pathways and tailor their learning experience according to their interests and career goals.
- **Impact-Driven Education**: Emphasise outcomes that contribute positively to society, addressing real-world challenges.
- **International and Interdisciplinary Focus**: Foster global perspectives and collaboration across disciplines to tackle complex issues effectively.
- **Learning for Life**: Promote lifelong learning and adaptability, preparing learners for lifelong personal and professional development.
- **Bridging the Education & Employment Gap**: Empower learners for flexible skill development through micro-credentials and educational pathways that align with the needs of modern learners and the dynamic job market.

- **Green and Digital Transitions**: Incorporate themes in the areas of green and digital transition into the ECIU portfolio, learner guidance, skills, and competencies frameworks.

Our target learners include:
1. Our universities' enrolled student learners who are in their penultimate or final year of a bachelor's or on a master's program.
2. Continuous Learners
   i. External - Professionals seeking up- and reskilling opportunities to meet evolving societal and personal needs, supported by their employers or self-motivated..
   ii. Internal - Academic and administrative staff seeking to enhance their expertise and adapt to advancements in their fields through ongoing professional development.

3. ECIU University Education Goals

In consultation with the VP Education group three strategic goals, aligning with the above education vision of ECIU University, and their objectives were developed.

Goal 1

It is our strategic intent to deliver distinctive, high-quality, research-led, impactful, challenge-based education at a European level.

This goal aligns with ECIU University's values of academic quality, entrepreneurial mindset, and impact on society and the thrust of Vision 2030.

Objectives for goal 1 include:

1. Build a portfolio of Challenge-Based educational offerings in which learners are working with researchers, professionals from business and society and teachers from across Europe to solve multidisciplinary challenges in entrepreneurial, innovative ways and which align with education for sustainable development principles.
2. Develop frameworks to support our individual and collective societal stakeholders to engage with CBL in an effective, efficient and scaffolded manner, ensuring that authentic challenges and partnership are at the heart of ECIU educational offerings.

3. Develop excellent capability and strong capacity in Challenge-Based education among teaching staff across ECIU member institutions.
4. Develop a framework aimed at aligning the nature and quality of the ECIU educational offerings.
5. Widen the current[3] thematic scope of the Education Portfolio to include themes relating to Green and Digital Transition more broadly.

Goal 2

It is our strategic intent to provide an engaging educational journey that reshapes learners' knowledge and skill set empowering them to think critically, adapt, innovate and lead responsibly in a rapidly changing global landscape.

This goal aligns with the Vision 2030 assertion that "We believe that the role of the university is to empower …. its learners to reach their best".

Objectives for goal 2 include
1. Enhance opportunities for all types of ECIU learners by providing an international, multidisciplinary experience, fostering the development of subject specific and complementary transversal skills, through a portfolio of offerings either designed and delivered by individual members or in partnership.
2. Create space for flexibility in our home universities' study programs and realise ECIU framed (short-term) mobility in study programs and schedules for some learners.
3. Evolve processes in each of our institutions to recognise ECTS and micro-credentials from across ECIU as evidence of learning outcomes (alongside home universities' grades), based on principles of quality, transparency, cross-border comparability, recognition and transferability.
4. Support learners before, during and after their engagement with ECIU University through learner guidance, and follow-up analysis and opportunities designed for them.
5. Offer career-enhancing evidence of learning through recognition via micro-credentials, other forms of digital credentials and potentially via innovative models of awarding such as the emerging European Degree.

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[3] From the ECIU paper "A SMART REGIONS AGENDA FOR EUROPE" from Oct 2019: ▪ Energy and sustainability, ▪ Circular economy, ▪ Transport and mobility, ▪ Resilient communities

Goal 3

It is our strategic intent to attain a sustainable model of European education across ECIU University.

This goal links to the value of 'resilience into the future' and is intended to capture the need to tackle all of the practical barriers we are encountering to ECIU education at scale, and on a long-term basis.

Objectives for goal 3 include

1. Overcome identified challenges related to the timeliness, wealth and sustained provision of ECIU University's educational offerings.
2. Establish an efficient, seamless and learner-centered approach to the development of processes and instruments that optimise access, participation, and recognition of ECIU learning experiences, including more flexible timing and location options.
3. Direct the development of digital tools (including the DXP) in line with the education strategy and with a view to sustainability and inter-operability with the tools and systems of the member universities.
4. Build towards a financial sustainability model for the education portfolio and supporting systems incl. digital tools and service support.
5. Develop and apply a model designed specifically to foster cooperation among academic and administrative staff across the ECIU network.

Appendix

I Authors and Feedback Providers

Primary Authors

The primary authors were responsible for the main drafting, development, and integration of feedback for the ECIU University Education Strategy.

- 2024 ECIU VP Education Group
- Silvia Perzolli
- Andrea Brose

Feedback Providers

Stakeholders who engaged in review processes, discussions, or workshops to provide feedback on earlier drafts and contribute to refinements.

- Central Office
- ECIU member universities through their VP Education and institutional coordinator
- Project Coordination Team
- Education Team
- Relevant ECIUn+ Work Packages members
- Students
- Presidium members

II Version History

Date	Version	Who	What
2024-01-26	1.0	Andrea	First draft
2024-04-28	1.1	Andrea	Second draft
2024-05-27	1.2	Silvia P., Sander, Jorien	Input
2024-06-19	2.0	VP Edu group	First input
2024-07-04	2.0	Silvia P.	Input + target groups + draft for implementation strategy
2024-07-12	2.1	Andrea	Version 2 to be shared with VP Edu including VP Edu's input
2024-08-15	2.2	Andrea	Rephrasing the paragraph on FLP & European degree in section 8 on page 3.
2024-08-21	2.3	Andrea	Renumbering of section 6 including added comment, page 8.
2024-09-04	3.1	VP Edu group	2nd input from DCU, LiU, TAU, UNITN, TUHH
2024-09-22	3.2	Kristina Ukvalbergiene	2nd input received from KTU
2024-10-02	4.0	VP Edu group	3rd input, F2F meeting in Stavanger (not complete yet)
2024-10-05	4.1	VP Edu group	3rd input, shortening of the document
2024-11-11	4.2	VP Edu working group	Background statement brought up to date, minor refinements to Goals
2024-11-15	4.3	Andrea	Including input from Presidium
2024-11-18	5.0	VP Edu working group	Final response from working group
2024-11-28	**5.0**	**VP Edu group**	**The ECIU VP Education Group expresses its unanimous approval of the Education Strategy.**
2024-12-13	**5.1**	**Board**	**The ECIU Board approves the strategy with the addition of "research-led" to goal 1, which has been incorporated.**