

# European Bioeconomy University (EBU) – an alternative and innovative European University Alliance model

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The European Bioeconomy University (EBU) fully supports the key objectives of the European University Initiative and has been actively contributing to their implementation during the past three years. By joining forces with the European Commission on both the thematic area (Bioeconomy) as well as on the development of the European Higher Education Area, the EBU can increase its outreach and help to enforce the mechanisms to create a stronger European Union. In the current situation, a membership of a University in one of the European University Alliances excludes it from participation in thematically more specific alliances. Here, we offer an alternative approach to deliver structural long-term collaboration between universities within the European Higher Education Area. With this position paper we present reasons why the EBU should be included in the European University community as a recognised alliance.

## 1. The EBU and its goals

Through their joint commitment to the EBU, the six partner institutions of the EBU Alliance<sup>1</sup> agreed to take responsibility as leading intellectual institution for tackling the enormous environmental, economic and societal challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As **key actor for the green transition and for a more sustainable world**, the EBU joins European forces for conducting research to find solutions, in cooperation with industry and society to environmental degradation and climate change. The EBU also ensures to procure climate and environmental literacy for students across all levels and disciplines, as well as for the public at large through community engagement.

In order to **achieve the ambitious vision of an innovative, globally competitive and attractive European Education Area by 2025**, the EBU has realized from its start in July 2019 that the European excellence in the bioeconomy requires stronger and broader collaboration than usual university cooperation agreements. By bringing resources together both at the political and operational level and by connecting with further academic and business partners (Annex 1), the EBU intends to be a bioeconomy game-changer in the European Union (EU) and a lever for the full deployment of the bioeconomy.

## 2. Recognition of EBU as one of the flagship initiatives of the European University Strategy

In the wake of the new European Strategy for Universities, the EBU is increasing the visibility of its commitment to the European University Alliances initiative. We would like to point out very clearly that the EBU is ready to fully contribute to the future of higher education in Europe. A **statute for the EBU as “Recognised” European University** will put the alliance in the position to

- improve our processes for common strategic decisions,

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<sup>1</sup>The partners of the alliance are: Institut national des sciences et industries du vivant et de l’environnement (**AgroParisTech**), France; University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (**BOKU**), Austria; University of Eastern Finland (**UEF**), Finland; University of Hohenheim (**UHOH**), Germany; Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna (**UniBo**), Italy; and Wageningen University & Research (**WUR**), the Netherlands.

- develop further the alliance and our activities
- facilitate pooling together resources, activities and data
- contribute to the deployment of the European strategy by implementing its vision and sharing our best practices.

Such statute would facilitate deeper, long-term and flexible transnational cooperation, allowing the sharing of capacities, exchange of staff and the implementation of more joint programmes, with the aim to award joint degrees at the level of the alliance and to contribute to the development of a joint European degree and a European credentials portfolio for all (continuous) learners.

After almost three years, the EBU has reached a point where it both develops shorter-term activities and a longer-term strategy and governance model. While being fully aligned with the vision of the European University Alliances, protecting its integrity appeared as a priority for its founding members. Since the current EBU consortium includes three universities who are already members of existing alliances<sup>2</sup>, that do not share this bioeconomy focus with the EBU, we decided not to apply to become a selected European University Alliance. The EBU continues to foster its own innovative and flexible mode and seeks recognition as a European University Alliance. We are convinced that our collaboration will remain successful since it started from a common interest to strengthen the circular economy in Europe. The alliance remains open for incorporating additional competences through our collaboration strategy.

In the following, we will spell out the EBU's credentials for the recognition as a truly European University.

### 3. EBU's way of meeting the objectives of European Universities

With an already impressive set of projects and initiatives (Annex 2), the EBU significantly contributes to the two main objectives for European Universities and will continue to do so. These main objectives are (1) the promotion of common European values and (2) the strengthening of the European academic competitiveness. In the following, the EBU's contribution to meeting these objectives will be illustrated.

#### (1) The promotion of common European values

In times of multiple sustainability crises, the fundamental European values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and human rights are complemented by the strong commitment to the green transition for a more sustainable world. This is not least reflected by the aims of the [European Green Deal](#) or the five [EU missions](#) recently announced by the European Commission (EC) that address many of the sustainability challenges. The EBU fully endorses this approach.

As one powerful motor for a **green transition**, the bioeconomy has been highlighted before by the EU via high-level commission communications and actions. Aiming at the collaborative advancement of the bioeconomy, which is by nature multi-disciplinary and indispensably requires cooperation, the EBU thus provides an ideal arena for innovative international cooperation models and interdisciplinary skills training. Accordingly, the six alliance partners have developed a common long-term vision and mission reflecting the values shared by the EBU (Annex 3). Their integrated strategy determines the roles and responsibilities to ensure the achievement of their goals towards the development of a sustainable and competitive knowledge-based bioeconomy in Europe.

Since its launch, the EBU has successfully improved academic mobility, enhanced scientific exchange, and established programmes and structures that encourage and facilitate student mobility (Annex 3,

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<sup>2</sup> Università di Bologna in [UNAEUROPA](#), University of Eastern Finland in [YUFE](#), and Universität für Bodenkultur Wien in [EPICUR](#)

more specific actions listed in Annex 5). These actions all contribute to build a European sense of belonging and identity.

## (2) The quality and competitiveness of European higher education

Apart from its tremendous potential for sustainable development and climate change mitigation, the bioeconomy strongly contributes to socio-economic wellbeing across the EU. It is a proven means to safeguard food supply, provide a “buffer role” for employment – which can be realised in times of crisis – and to provide important potential for the transition to an innovative, resource-efficient, and competitive economy<sup>3</sup>. The EBU’s aim is to provide an internationally unique and competitive model for a theme-based, system- and future-oriented university that focuses on inter- and transdisciplinary as well as sectoral and European collaboration, which would support the development of bioeconomy in Europe and enhance Europe academic leadership and attractiveness in this sector worldwide.

The EBU has thus become a reference point for European bioeconomy studies internationally and is evolving to a knowledge hub for all issues concerning the transformation to a sustainable knowledge-based and circular bioeconomy. The upgrade of European bioeconomy studies to a highly relevant and attractive future-oriented discipline will inspire young people to enter the academic bioeconomy career.

The EBU offers the required diversity and the necessary commitment to unite the relevant disciplines, as well as a dynamic collaboration model for connecting transnationally education, research and innovation activities. At the same time, the geographical diversity of its partner institutions facilitates its outreach towards national and local societies and economies. The EBU thus provides an encompassing excellence-based offer to the society, including education, research, innovation, entrepreneurship, science & society activities (more concrete examples in Annex 4, more specific actions listed in Annex 5).

## 4. Contact

If you wish to get in touch with the EBU, please contact the Secretariat: [ebu@uni-hohenheim.de](mailto:ebu@uni-hohenheim.de)

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<sup>3</sup> Ronzon, Tévécia; Piotrowski, Stephan; Tamosiunas, Saulius; Dammer, Lara; Carus, Michael; M’barek, Robert (2020): Developments of Economic Growth and Employment in Bioeconomy Sectors across the EU. In Sustainability 12 (11). DOI: 10.3390/su12114507

## 5. Annex

### Annex 1: The EBU at a glance



## european bioeconomy university

### ... at a glance

#### Our Vision

Creating Europe's leading intellectual institution for tackling the enormous environmental, economic and societal challenges of the 21st century, by:

- Covering the entire spectrum of bioeconomy dimensions
- Providing a theme-based, system- and future-oriented university
- Taking university collaboration to a higher level of joint strategy development

#### Our Mission

The empowerment of the European knowledge-based bioeconomy by:

- Educating a new generation of truly European experts
- Fostering rigorous, relevant and responsible research
- Transferring knowledge into society and the economy

#### Governance

The European Bioeconomy University is internally governed by the EBU presidents board, the scientific coordinators group and the operational coordinators group. The presidency shifts every two years.

#### Network



##### Circle 1: EBU Alliance

... comprises the six founding members AgroParisTech, BOKU, UEF, UHOH, UniBo and WUR.

##### Circle 2: Affiliated Partners

... provide an intensive, middle- to long-term cooperation in research, teaching and transfer.

##### Circle 3: The EBU Network

... establishes ties to stakeholders in policy, research, education, industry and society.

## Annex 2: EBU achievements

After two and a half years of its existence and despite the difficulties of social distancing, the EBU can already look back at a large portfolio of achievements:

- Launch of 3 EU-funded projects : [FOEBE](#) and [EBU Label](#) in 2020, [BIObec](#) in 2021. Both FOEBE and EBU Label are currently recruiting their first cohorts of students.
- Organisation of the first (virtual) [Scientific Forum](#) of the Alliance in September 2021, which attracted 312 participants, 65 speakers in 8 parallel and 2 plenary sessions, as well as 3 workshops.
- Organisation of a first (virtual) thematic workshop on bioeconomy [foresight](#) by UEF in June 2021
- Organisation of the [workshop](#) "How to shape education for a sustainable circular bioeconomy" of the Global Bioeconomy Summit 2020
- Invitation of EBU as speaker in multiple European events including the [European Research and Innovation Days 2021](#) and the European Commission's workshop "Promoting education, training and skills across the EU bioeconomy"
- Publication of 3 Position and Opinion [Papers](#)

## Annex 3: Contributions to European values

**The EBU contributes to the promotion of common European values with the following activities:**

- Improved academic **mobility**, which facilitates knowledge exchange and contact of researchers to peers and to the community.
- The creation of thematic **networks** through activities such as the Scientific Forum and thematic research workshops resulting in reinforced scientific collaboration within and beyond the EBU.
- **Enhanced Student exchange**, including through the EBU Label and FOEBE joint education projects. Two cohorts of students from the partner institutions are joining these hybrid programmes, enabling them to develop both their technical and **intercultural** skills. It will contribute to create a sense of belonging to the EBU, both at the teachers' and students' levels, and to the promotion of EU values. It is expected to further develop mobility in between partner institutions and education activities which will foster the development of the EBU as a truly European University.

## Annex 4: Contributions to the quality of Higher Education

**The EBU contributes to the quality of Higher Education in Europe with the following activities:**

- The generation of new and highly relevant **knowledge** on the technological, social, economic, and ecological aspects of the bioeconomy and their interconnection.
- The **regional outreach** via several bioeconomy knowledge hubs across the EU by way of the establishment of bioeconomy education centres ([BIObec project](#)).
- A **pan-European** Bioeconomy qualification program for Master students ([EBU Label](#)).
- A strong connection with stakeholders through dedicated collaboration agreements with other academic and business partners (second and third circle collaborations, see Annex 1), and beyond, ensuring connection of what is being developed to the needs of the bioeconomy as well as its impact beyond the six founding members.
- A [think-tank](#) contributing to the dissemination of knowledge, stronger public awareness and improved policies to implement the Green Deal.

## Annex 5: EBU's response to the European Universities' specific objectives

1. Develop and implement an integrated long-term joint strategy for education with, where possible, links to research and innovation, and service to society, that is responsive to the digital and green transition and key socio economic challenges, while remaining committed to excellence.

Required activities	EBU Response	Timeline
Develop a common vision and shared values	Realised (see <a href="#">here</a> )	2019
Establish joint management and governance structures	Realised/started (see <a href="#">here</a> ). Strategic decision meeting is undertaken by Presidents' Group. Operational management is undertaken by EBU coordination group. The EBU secretariat is run and financially supported by the university that holds the presidency (changing every two years).	Ongoing
Pool resources and – where appropriate – create a legal statute for the alliance.	EBU already pool resources by implementing a coordination group, with 1 academic and 1 administrative representative, meeting at least monthly and jointly piloting activities. Additionally, a significant number of actors from each university contribute to the working group, activities and projects. The opportunity for "other types of alliances" to receive acknowledged statute is new. EBU is seriously considering this opportunity.	Ongoing

2. Establish a European higher education inter-university 'campus'.

Required activities	EBU Response	Timeline
Seamless mobility opportunities (physical, blended mobility or virtual learning)	Even though we are not there yet and the Covid context haven't helped, we already organise joint hybrid educational activities + Scientific Forum. Erasmus+ bilateral agreements exist between all EBU members. Building of an online learning platform as part of the <a href="#">EBU label</a> project. It will also include open access material, such as the Bioeconomy MOOC resulting from the <a href="#">ABBEE</a> project. EBU also aims at developing young researchers' mobility.	Ongoing
New joint, flexible and innovative curricula	5 out of 6 EBU members already signed a framework Co-tutelle agreement which will facilitate joint PhD supervision and training within the alliance. The alliance is also working on the development of a joint doctorate programme. Joint education project (master-level): EBU Label Joint education project (entrepreneurship): FOEBE	Signed end of 2021  Ongoing First cohort recruited First cohort recruited
Other flexible learning opportunities and alternative learning pathways	LLL joint activities currently being developed. Application to Erasmus+ calls like 'Alliances for Innovation' together with second and third circle partners is being considered to enhance full adoption of a European approach to micro-credentials in the evolving field of bioeconomy, where number of professionals need to update their competences to fill gaps between their previous formal degrees and the needs of a fast-changing society.	Next application round: September 2022



Practical and work-based experience and traineeships	Cooperation with third circle industrial partners in capacity building and education activities.	2022/23
Promote knowledge transfer with surrounding ecosystems	The <a href="#">BIObec project</a> aims to build bridges between the bio-based industry and the education system by interlinking universities, innovation labs, and R&D centres with industrial actors and regions. BIObec merges the traditional idea of an education centre, with that of a knowledge hub.	2021-2024
Other creative and innovative activities that are key to reach the joint long-term strategy are implemented	Establishment of 'EBU chapters', i.e. thematic cross-institutional researchers' groups on relevant topics (e.g., foresight; digitalization in agriculture and forestry; communication and awareness; ...). One suitable instrument to pitch new EBU chapters has been the organisation of thematic workshops during the EBU Scientific Forum in 2021.	started 2021

### 3. Build European knowledge-creating teams ("challenge-based approach").

Required activities	EBU Response	Timeline
Challenge-based and interdisciplinary approaches in mixed teams	The EBU student Journey consists of a series of activities especially designed for the master students to become the professionals that are needed for the transformation towards a bioeconomy. This involves the acquisition of academic knowledge as well as soft-skills in an international context. The competences and skills that the students will develop through this journey are intended to be aligned with the labour market needs such as the identification of new opportunities, interdisciplinarity, systemic thinking, among others.	First journey will be in June 2022
Innovative learning and training for critical thinking, entrepreneurial, creative and transversal skills, and innovative spirit.	FOEBE: Training of tailor-made sustainable entrepreneurship skills and qualification portfolios; blended learning format with an emphasis on innovative pedagogical practices to offer a suite of modules in order to become a game-changer for the bioeconomy entrepreneurship education in Europe.	Started 2021
Innovative solutions adaptable to different regions in Europe.	Beyond its founding members, EBU collaborate with other higher education institutions from other regions, covering Western, Northern, Southern and Eastern Europe (second circle).	Ongoing

### 4. Act as models of good practice to further increase the quality, international competitiveness and attractiveness of the European higher education landscape.

Required activities	EBU Response	Timeline
Models of good practices	EBU is willing to share its experience and disseminated them accordingly during European workshops or by organising a workshop during 2020 Global Bioeconomy Summit	Ongoing
The implementation of a whole institutional approach to sustainability and climate literacy and mainstreaming of education for sustainable development across all levels and disciplines.	Sustainability and climate literacy is at the heart of bioeconomy higher education. EBU will work on a whole institution approach to implement these values across the alliance	long-term