Bundesministerium
Frauen, Wissenschaft
und Forschung

FUTURE4ALLIANCES

Future4Alliances: Peer-Learning-Visit

Vienna – Klosterneuburg/ St. Pölten – Leoben

Date: 24-26 March 2026 (hybrid)

From Vision to Viability: How to Build Sustainable Funding for European University Alliances

Within the framework of the EU-funded project *Future4Alliances*, Work Package 2 *Sustainability of Funding*, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Women, Science and Research organized the peer-learning visit **"From Vision to Viability: How to Build Sustainable Funding for European Universities Alliances"**, held from **24 to 26 March 2026** in **Vienna, Klosterneuburg, St. Pölten and Leoben** in a hybrid format.

The event brought together project partners, associated partners and representatives of ministries to explore in greater depth the different aspects of sustainable funding models for European Universities Alliances. Over three days, participants engaged in presentations, peer exchange and site visits, gaining insights into both strategic and practical dimensions of long-term financial sustainability.

Day 1 in Vienna: Support and Funding for Cross-Border University Cooperation

The visit opened in Vienna with a welcome and introductory session, followed by a keynote presentation on the main findings of the EUA report. A central takeaway was that financial sustainability is only partly a question of funding. Rather, it is fundamentally linked to the institutional purpose of alliances and the added value they create.

Discussions highlighted several core pillars for the financial and organisational viability of alliances. An important conclusion was that European Universities Alliances differ significantly from one another, meaning there is no one-size-fits-all solution to sustainable funding.
To broaden the perspective, participants engaged with representatives from key Austrian agencies, including the Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD), the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG) and the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), who shared insights into national and European funding opportunities.

The perspective of alliances themselves was equally central to the discussions. Valuable contributions came from representatives of:

- EPICUR (University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences)

- ENGAGE.EU (Vienna University of Economics and Business)
- IN.TUNE (University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna)
- Circle U. (University of Vienna)

These exchanges demonstrated that alliances are at different stages of development, which strongly influences their funding needs and expectations. While alliances in early phases often rely heavily on external funding to establish cooperation and structures, more mature alliances may face growing complexity in funding arrangements, which can reduce flexibility and potentially limit the achievement of original objectives.

A recurring theme was the challenge of balancing differing interests among partners. While some favour continued European-level funding, others advocate stronger reliance on national funding systems, complemented by competitive and self-generated resources.

Day 2 in Klosterneuburg and St. Pölten: Excellence, Innovation and Regional Cooperation

The second day began at the Institute of Science and Technology Austria (ISTA), founded in 2009 as an internationally oriented, independent PhD-awarding research institute. Participants gained insights into ISTA's model of excellence and the role of performance-based funding in building international visibility.

A keynote on *The Path to Excellence and International Visibility with Performance-Based Funding*, explained the interaction of the three main financing resources: local level for infrastructure, federal level for the basic financing to run the university and EU funding for research with the specificity that for each EU fund Euro gained, the federal level puts another Euro into research.

The keynote was followed by a Grants Office presentation, discussions and a guided exhibition tour, provided valuable input on linking funding mechanisms to institutional performance and strategic development.

The programme continued at the University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten (USTP), coordinator of the E³UDRES² alliance. A major focus was the **Europa-Campus Hainburg**, a cross-border education and research initiative currently under development and planned to open in summer 2028.

The campus is envisioned as an international hub for green technologies, artificial intelligence and sustainable innovation in Lower Austria, connecting higher education institutions with industry. Key partners include Vienna University of Technology (EULiST) and the USTP (E³UDRES²), with strong industry involvement foreseen.

Discussions also addressed how provinces can strategically empower higher education institutions to grow, innovate and strengthen their institutional capacity, as well as ideas for possible evaluation procedures for European Universities.

Day 3 in Leoben: Models for Sustainable Cooperation

The final day focused on successful models of long-term institutional cooperation at the Technical University of Leoben, coordinator of the EURECA-PRO alliance.

Participants explored two established Austrian cooperation models:

TU Austria, founded in 2010, brings together Austria's three major universities of technology — TU Wien, Graz University of Technology and the University of Leoben — to combine resources in research, teaching and policy, while strengthening Austria's technical universities nationally and internationally.

NAWI Graz was presented as another strong example of sustainable institutional cooperation. This comprehensive partnership between the University of Graz and Graz University of Technology combines resources from more than 60 institutes and expands study opportunities in chemistry, molecular biosciences, mathematics, physics and geosciences.

Discussions on the final day focused on key drivers of transformative change in universities and addressed a central question for the entire peer-learning visit: **How can funding be secured for enduring and sustainable university cooperation?**

A Shared Commitment to Long-Term Sustainability

The peer-learning visit demonstrated that sustainable funding for European Universities Alliances cannot be reduced to financial instruments alone. It requires strategic clarity, institutional commitment, diversified funding approaches and governance models that support long-term cooperation.

Through exchanges with ministries, funding agencies, alliances and higher education institutions, participants gained valuable insights into different pathways from vision to viability — and reinforced a shared commitment to strengthening the sustainability of European Universities Alliances for the future.

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