



2023 – 2027
ACA STRATEGY



I. PREAMBLE

The Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) is a central voice and platform for national organisations that support, fund, promote and co-shape the internationalisation of higher education. For nearly three decades, ACA has hosted a vibrant and growing community of unique and diverse members, produced essential knowledge, connected global experts, and actively advocated the benefits of international collaboration in higher education, in all its varied forms.

ACA has established itself as an influential and highly respected international higher education actor and a long-standing, content-driven partner for a wide variety of stakeholders active in this field. Focusing on network building and knowledge production, it has positioned itself as a key European platform for fostering discussions on the present and future of internationalisation – a topic that is ever more important in a world characterised by the growing influence and role of technology, increasing societal and political challenges, multiplying geopolitical complexities, and a widespread sense of uncertainty.

To further build upon its strengths, meet and anticipate the challenges of tomorrow, ACA has updated its goals and key themes through extensive member and external stakeholder consultations. This new strategy paves ACA's way to 2027, by ensuring ongoing development and the delivery of value to its members and partners, while anticipating the need for constant flexibility.

II. VISION AND MISSION

The best way to meet the challenges of the future, adapt to global instability, and develop sustainability and inclusivity in our societies is through international collaboration within Europe, and between Europe and the wider world.

ACA seeks to be the platform of choice for national-level internationalisation organisations and their higher education communities, serving societal needs directly, and via international cooperation, enhancing the quality of education and research.

In the face of multiple challenges, national organisations that promote and fund higher education internationalisation need to work more and more closely together to provide joint responses, enhance their roles as expert centres and enablers for the institutions they serve. By providing a collaborative platform for honest discussions and expertise, ACA strives to serve its members and through them the higher education institutions and wider systems in their respective countries. The association therefore tangibly contributes to the development of inclusive and sustainable higher education in Europe, and inspires global developments, fostering an overall shift towards more inclusive and sustainable societies.

ACA's **vision** is of a closely interconnected world of thriving, fair societies, empowered by international higher education. To achieve this, ACA's **mission** is to serve as a **sound, future-oriented and collaborative European platform for national organisations active in international higher education**, empowering its members, supporting their higher education systems, and working closely with strategic partners to maximise the potential of internationalisation.

III. GOALS

To achieve this vision and fulfil its mission, ACA seeks to enhance and use its sound reputation as a centre of expertise and a platform for critical discussions and peer-to-peer exchanges, to support Europe-wide cooperation, while maintaining a global outlook, and building on global connections. The association will do so by fostering valuable activities and forms of engagement, and by responding flexibly to and anticipating its members' needs – both full members (from geographical Europe) and associate members (from outside of Europe) –, in close collaboration with external partners.

Most of Europe's national-level internationalisation agencies are already full ACA members; the association aims to **gradually expand its representation and bring together all of Europe's national organisations and agencies promoting and funding internationalisation in higher education as full members by 2027.**

A Europe-wide membership base will allow the association and its members to fully benefit from the variety of practices, enriching dialogues, and shared knowledge. It will give ACA a stronger voice, speaking on behalf of all national-level organisations in the sector.

Under the new strategy, beyond full and associate members, ACA aims to gradually start targeted collaborations with interested regional affiliates from other parts of the world, i.e. representative, umbrella organisations active in international higher education, supporting cooperation and exchange outside of geographical Europe.

ACA has established the following **goals** for the next five years:

GOAL 1: Strengthen ACA as THE European platform for national-level international education organisations and agencies

To achieve this, ACA will:

1. **Develop a 'Team ACA' approach** by identifying and fostering synergies between member activities, facilitating joint initiatives, and increasing ACA members' and Europe's appeal as a cooperation partner and destination for students and staff.
2. **Create a pool of experts** based on existing expertise in national organisations, to be used in the delivery of joint and bilateral activities.
3. **Build members' capacity** by sharing new trends, expertise, and innovative practice; and support them with foresight exercises and future thinking.
4. **Contribute to the wider ecosystem of like-minded organisations** by identifying and engaging organisations working in key theme areas, and by working together to advance common themes.

GOAL 2: Strengthen ACA's role as an advisor to the EU and European institutions

ACA will further position itself as a key partner in providing knowledge, insight and legitimacy in its focus areas to national and European policy-makers to support evidence-based policy-making in line with ACA members' interests. ACA will expand its outreach and input to the European Commission and its relevant Directorates and increase its work with the other EU and European institutions.

Through these activities, ACA will:

1. **Reinforce the perception of ACA member organisations** as key international higher education experts and policy actors at national and European level.
2. **Position ACA more strongly and visibly** as the go-to organisation for policy and expert input, channelling its members' views and expertise into EU and European policy processes, while feeding information on relevant developments back to ACA members.

GOAL 3: Reinforcing ACA's position as one of the main international higher education knowledge providers in Europe

Historically, knowledge production has been a key strength and great value offered by ACA. The next five years aim to further develop and expand ACA's expertise, to firmly position the association as an expert centre in internationalisation.

To achieve this ACA will:

1. **Enhance knowledge production and policy-oriented research** in key focus areas for ACA members and the international higher education community.
2. **Prioritise projects that closely align with the association's and members' goals**, and the sector's needs, **while retaining the flexibility** to delve into and become a trend-setter in new critical areas as they emerge (and possibly in unforeseen crisis situations).
3. **Foster project-based collaboration involving ACA members**, to expand members' areas of expertise and portfolios of services.

GOAL 4: Become an information gateway on trends and developments in European higher education internationalisation

translating European developments for the higher education community worldwide. Through this global outlook, ACA aims to support Europe's changing role in the world, deliver key updates from across Europe globally, and build on global developments to support the work of the association, its members, and European higher education more broadly.

To achieve this ACA will:

1. **Strengthen cooperation with associate members** (i.e. national internationalisation agencies from outside Europe) for mutual learning and development.
2. **Gradually and structurally cooperate with a new type of external partners – regional affiliates**, (i.e. representative organisations – for example, university networks and other types of umbrella organisations) acting at regional level in different parts of the world and working on similar topics with ACA members. ACA will build on current formats and activities (e.g. events, projects,) to strive to create synergies in delivering key European updates to affiliates' audiences, and will provide global updates to its members and the wider European higher education community, bringing the best innovations and success stories from the global arena to its European members.
3. **Support activities and services to foster the perception of ACA members as strong cooperation partners**, and Europe and members' countries' attractiveness as quality study and research destinations, showcasing European higher education success stories to the world.

IV. FOCUS AREAS

As the internationalisation of higher education encompasses many different topics with varying degrees of relevance to ACA members, the association will prioritise **five** horizontal themes that cut across members' core activities in this strategic period (i.e. across mobility funding – for students and staff, the diversification of mobility and international education formats, joint educational delivery, and partnerships, etc.). This list is not exhaustive, nor conclusive, and may be adapted in response to new trends and unforeseen developments.

The following are the **five focus areas** that will guide ACA's activities until 2027:

- a) **Role of higher education cooperation in times of crisis – science and education diplomacy**, through a pragmatic, mission-driven approach, informed by fundamental values.
- b) **Societal relevance of internationalisation**, with a focus on better capturing and maximising the impact of internationalisation and its related activities on the higher education sector, society and the economy, to **tackle global challenges in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, and build support and commitment to internationalisation within society, at institutional, national and European levels.
- c) **Supporting inclusive and diverse internationalisation**, through the development of national strategies and actions, making inclusive mobility a reality, and exploring a comprehensive approach to inclusion and diversity in international higher education collaboration.
- d) **Sustained digitalisation of international education formats and activities**, with a focus on evolving mobility options with digital components and the digitalisation of international cooperation and mobility administration, including the greening of mobility.
- e) **Future-oriented institutional transformations**, supporting institutional change, sustainability, and resilience at national internationalisation agencies, as well as higher education institution transformations (through international collaboration and strategic partnerships).

ACA seeks to be a frontrunner in these focus areas, starting conversations, creating knowledge, undertaking joint projects with members and partners, supporting

V. IMPLEMENTATION PRINCIPLES

This strategy will be implemented through two-year implementation plans (work programmes). ACA will deliver value to its members and partners through activities and services that are:

- **Impactful.** ACA's activities will continue to be highly relevant for members, European policy-makers and the international higher education sector, and will further influence higher education policy and practice.
- **Sound.** ACA's activities are built on **the wealth of its members expertise**, networks and relevant expert pools.
- **Practical.** ACA's positions, activities and events will deliver both strategic insight and tangible input to members and partners.
- **Collaborative.** The ACA Secretariat will initiate and nurture discussions, and foster peer learning between members and partners. Key external partners and their focus areas will be identified to turn potential overlaps into collaboration.
- **Visible.** ACA's activities will be increasingly visible, and the value offered through full and associate membership, or regional affiliation will be clear.



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