The Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) is a Brussels-based stakeholder organisation active in the field of internationalisation of higher education. Since its launch, in 1993, the association has been combining a dual mission, namely that of being a membership platform – advocating for the interests of ACA member organisations, as well as a strong think tank, which caters to the needs of the (European) higher education community more generally.

ACA’s activities include research and analysis, evaluations, consultancy for private and public bodies, advocacy, publications and events. It is a not-for-profit organisation whose Secretariat is located in Brussels – a privileged position to create and maintain close working relations with the European Union institutions and the world beyond.

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ACA’s force as an association comes from the strong network of dynamic national-level member organisations that form its nucleus. The ACA members are involved in numerous activities in their respective countries in the support of internationalisation of (higher) education, and play various key roles in terms of research in internationalisation, programme delivery, policy formulation and implementation. ACA’s mission is to advance the interests of its members in EU policy circles, and to advocate, within the European higher education policy and research fora in ways that support the work of ACA members. For their part, ACA members are active in the governance, decision-making, planning and in the many activities of the association.

In 2017, two organisations — The Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training programmes (CMEPIUS), Slovenia and the International Education Center (IEC), Georgia — joined the ACA family.

**WHO WE ARE: OUR MEMBERS**

**MEMBERS**

- Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (OeAD), Austria
- Flanders Knowledge Area, Belgium
- Wallonia-Brussels Campus, Belgium
- Centre for International Cooperation in Education (DZS), Czech Republic
- Archimedes Foundation, Estonia
- Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI), Finland
- German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Germany
- State Scholarships Foundation (IKY), Greece
- Tempus Public Foundation (TPF), Hungary
- Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU), Norway
- Perspektywy Education Foundation, Poland
- Slovak Academic Information Agency (SAIA), Slovakia
- The Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training programmes (CMEPIUS), Slovenia
- Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR), Sweden
- Movetia – Swiss national Agency, Switzerland
- Rectors’ Conference of the Swiss Universities, Switzerland

**ASSOCIATE MEMBERS**

- Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie, (AUF), Canada/France/Belgium
- International Education Center (IEC), Georgia
- ETS Global, The Netherlands
- Institute of International Education (IIE), United States/Hungary
2017 was a landmark year for ACA, culminating – after almost a year of internal and external reflections and consultations – with the adoption of a new ACA Strategy for the period 2017 – 2021 and of a two-year Action Plan, marking the beginning of a new modus operandi for the association. These reflect ACA’s strive to stay ahead of trends in international higher education, and to serve its membership and the wider international higher education community as competently and as efficiently as possible.

STRATEGIC ENHANCEMENT: ACA STRATEGY 2017 – 2021 AND NEW WORKING GROUPS (WGS)

Under the new Strategy, ACA re-defines itself as “the European voice of national organisations for internationalisation of higher education” and as a “leading European association supporting research, innovative practice-development and smart policy-making in international higher education”.

ACA will continue addressing its double mission, under the following vision:

“As a member-driven platform, providing a shared voice to national agencies for internationalisation of higher education (HE), ACA is unique not only in Europe, but in the world. In the ACA framework, the ACA members enhance their capacities and join forces in supporting and ‘doing’ future-oriented and top-quality internationalisation.

ACA is equally a brain-trust, with an impeccable track record in conducting sound research and providing – through its active members and its very knowledgeable and well-linked Secretariat – expert advice on key developments in international higher education to universities, governments and supra-national organisations alike.

While ACA’s core membership and identity is distinctly European, and its key area of attention is European higher education, the association has an important outreach function, constantly monitoring Europe’s position in global higher education and aiming to shape global debates and developments.”

The Strategy is guided by 5 strategic goals, namely to:

2. Enhance ACA’s knowledge-production and policy-oriented research work in key areas of international education for the ACA members and the wider higher education community.
3. Diversify outreach and visibility activities, by establishing a more regular joint presence at core international higher education events, devising new forms of association to ACA and by collaborating more closely and more strategically with key players in the field.
4. Strengthen ACA’s membership base and representation.
5. Secure the financial viability of the association, by identifying new revenue streams and a revised funding model.

ACA’s agenda remains thus closely aligned to the European and EU agenda in higher education, as well as to its programmes (Erasmus+, Horizon 2020 and their successors).

Key in the implementation of the new Strategy are ACA’s new Working Groups [WGs], formed of committed ACA members and staff of the ACA Secretariat:

- **WG Western Balkans** – aims to enhance cooperation between ACA members, national-level bodies and higher education institutions in the Western Balkans
- **WG Brussels Advocacy events** – aims to enhance ACA’s visibility as an expert membership platform amongst Brussels-based policy-makers and stakeholder organisations
- **WG ACA @ international events** – aims to plan joint presence and representation at key higher education events in Europe and the world.
- **WG Research in internationalisation** – aims to define main topics of interest for joint research between ACA members, topics that address key concerns for international higher education.
Beyond its members-only activities, ACA caters for the needs of the wider international higher education community. Via its public events, the association strives to bring this expert community together, to regularly discuss, debate and deliberate around current themes and emerging trends in international higher education. ACA’s flagship event series – the European Policy Seminars (EPSs) (counting over 50 editions) – offers participants the opportunity to exchange with policy-makers, lead experts and fellow practitioners on spot-on topics, on a relatively small scale (facilitating effective networking), and within a very collegial environment.

In 2017, ACA organised three EPSs, reaching the 54th event in the series.

**ACA EUROPEAN POLICY SEMINARS (EPSs) SERIES**

**EPS 1 – What’s new in Brussels? Recent developments in European policies and programmes**

Just like every year, ACA’s *What’s new in Brussels?* seminar marked, on 2 February 2017, the beginning of a new season of ACA European Policy Seminars. In line with tradition, the event focused on those developments in European programmes and policies deemed to be most relevant for the higher education community. To mark several anniversaries and the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+, the programme featured, in addition to seven speakers from the European Commission, representatives of relevant stakeholder organisations to present their views and experiences on pertinent developments in European higher education. During plenary sessions the audience had the opportunity to hear a variety of perspectives on the Erasmus+ review, to have a retrospective of the 30 years of Erasmus programme and 20 years of Marie-Sklodowska Curie Actions (MSCA), and to hear the latest news on the New Skills Agenda for Europe. The parallel sessions were dedicated to specific key actions under Erasmus+, with the speakers, coming from the European Commission, national agencies, universities and NGOs, sharing their experiences as programme administrators or beneficiaries. The programme was enriched by speakers from six ACA member organisations – EDUFI, SIU, OeAD, Flanders Knowledge Area, Tempus Public Foundation and DAAD.

**EPS 2 – The future of internationalisation in a world of populism, isolationism, and increased tension**

The second EPS of the year, held on 30 March 2017 in Brussels, was a result and ACA’s response to a series of recent political developments that have shaken the international higher education community and put a question mark on future cooperation opportunities in the field. The main foci of the seminar were the expected effects of Brexit on international higher education and the future of cooperation with the United States under the Trump administration. The programme was opened by the ACA President – Sijbolt Noorda – and covered important questions, such as whether the rise of populism and isolationism were to reduce the degree of international mobility and cooperation reached over the past decades, whether the UK were to be able to participate in the Erasmus+ and the Horizon 2020 programmes after Brexit, and whether the US were to continue to attract the best talent and the best researchers and scientists from around the globe. Key experts from both the US (e.g. from Fulbright Belgium) and the UK (e.g. Universities UK International) addressed these key concerns and shared their experiences and expectations.
EPS 3 – Quality in international university partnerships – newlyweds, happily married, in marital counselling or on the verge of divorce

The third EPS in 2017, held on 13 October in Brussels, provided a platform to reflect on and critically discuss the main trends in international partnership development within European higher education, with a particular focus on the role of quality-related considerations therein. The programme featured more than 20 speakers from different higher education institutions (most of them selected via a call for proposals), national agencies and the European Commission. Presentations and panel discussions revolved around the current state and future of strategic partnerships, the quality of joint study programmes and how to research new collaborations. The speakers also explored the links between the Strategic Partnerships (KA2) in Erasmus+ and strategic partnership projects funded via other instruments at the national or institutional level. Last but not least, the event benefited from contributions by ACA member organisations SIU and CMEPIUS.
ACA's project work in 2017 was carried out, like every year, by its highly qualified and multinational Brussels-based Secretariat, in collaboration with a strong network of expert staff of ACA member organisations, and of other stakeholder organisations, agencies, research centres and higher education institutions.

In 2017, ACA was substantially involved in five projects, with additional advisory and associate roles in several projects and boards of universities.

**MASTERMIND EUROPE**

In 2017, ACA concluded its three-year contribution to the first stage of the Mastermind Europe: Master’s admissions for a diverse international classroom project, under the coordination of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and involving nine other project partners. The project, funded under Erasmus+ KA2 in The Netherlands, strove to assist Master’s coordinators in Europe in the process of reforming their admissions processes towards making them more accessible and fairer for different types of applicants, including international students. In the year, ACA staff participated in a training seminar for assisting Master’s coordinators in their reform processes and in the final conference of the project, which took place on 5-7 July 2017 in Amsterdam.

The project team developed a set of six guiding tools to support and encourage a paradigm shift in the Master’s admission practice in Europe – from admission based on the “recognition of diplomas and grades” towards more competence-based admissions. The six guiding tools as well as all project materials can be accessed via the project’s website. Most of the project partners continue their collaboration and formed an expert pool to offer tailor-made support to interested programmes and institutions. To date, 19 different Master’s programmes in various European countries and in the United States have worked with Mastermind Europe and each identified their own quick wins, and gained a refreshingly new way to look at – and think about – their Master’s admission processes. The consortium coordinator – Kees Kouwenaar (VU) – can be contacted for further information on the types of services that can be provided by the Mastermind Europe expert pool.

**STUDY IN EUROPE**

In 2017 ACA also concluded its work in the first stage of the Study in Europe project [or Enhancing the attractiveness of European higher education in the world, in full]. This promotional campaign of Europe as a study destination was funded by the European Commission and coordinated by the British Council, in partnership with ACA, as well as Campus France, EP-Nuffic, DAAD and the Archimedes Foundation. All other ACA members contributed to the project in various ways, from providing information on higher education opportunities in their respective countries for the Study in Europe portal and the Study in Europe Facebook page, to attending various Study in Europe education fairs in the target countries. ACA’s role in the project related to the set up, training, and guidance of a Network of European Higher Education Experts [EHEEs] in five countries, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (i.e. the BRICS).

In 2017, ACA organised four face-to-face follow-up seminars with the networks of EHEEs in Cape Town (22-23 March 2017), Pune (12-13 April 2017), Rio de Janeiro (3-5 May 2017), and Moscow (28-29 May 2017). The events were a great opportunity to reconnect with the networks, to take stock of activities undertaken, share good practices, address common challenges and make plans for future cooperation. All in all, the networks of EHEEs reached via their information and promotion events over 15 000 students interested to learn more about higher education study opportunities in Europe.
IMPALA – INTERNATIONALISATION AND MODERNISATION PROGRAMME FOR ACADEMICS, LEADERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

IMPALA is an Erasmus+ KA2 project aiming to build (internationalisation) capacity of South African universities by means of peer-learning activities between them and with partner European universities. The project consortium is composed of four South African universities, four European universities, including the University of Antwerp, which is the project coordinator, and ACA. Last but not least, the International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA) is an associate partner. Out of the different project activities, ACA is involved, together with the Universities of Limpopo and Venda in one of five working groups (WG), namely the one dealing with strategy development and implementation.

In 2017, this WG organised: a meeting for the leadership of the partner universities to plan and prepare for the site visits in Europe (March 2017, Cape Town); site visits in Europe for university leadership from South Africa (at the University of Graz, University College Leuven-Limburg, University of Antwerp), as well as a high-level panel in Antwerp with the ACA President, EAIE President and a representative of the European Commission’s DG EAC; and started preparations for the follow-up workshop planned for February 2018.

CAMPUS MUNDI – INTERNATIONALISATION AUDITS OF HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITIES

In the period 2012-2015, the ACA Secretariat was involved in a series of international audits of Hungarian universities, under the Campus Hungary project, run by the Tempus Public Foundation (TPF). After the first round of successful cooperation, ACA has been again invited, in 2017, to join the continuation of the project, under the Campus Mundi project. In this new initiative, ACA’s role is to recruit, train and liaise with a pool of international higher education experts whose task will be to conduct and report on the audits in the course of the project. Most of the experts come from the ACA member organisations.

The project consists of peer assessments of the international strategies and activities of Hungarian universities, and has two ‘tracks’: full-scale quality assessments for higher education institutions participating for the first time, and a light-weight monitoring exercise for institutions already assessed during the Campus Hungary project. According to the project, funded via the European Social Fund, the experts will carry out approx. 15 assessments in the coming four years. The Hungarian version of the internationalisation quality assessment is characterised by a quality enhancement approach that takes into consideration the types of institutions and their specific characteristics and goals. Participating institutions are not benchmarked with their peers in the system, but are encouraged to set their own goals and benchmark against their own progress on a recurrent basis.

On 11 and 12 October 2017, TPF and ACA kick-started the work of the international and Hungarian experts, via a training seminar in Budapest.

POLICY ANALYSIS ON THE MODERNISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION (EP)

ACA was commissioned in May 2017 by the European Parliament’s Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, to do a short, but important study, analysing the European Commission’s Communication of May 2017 – Renewed EU agenda for higher education – as well as the previous policy developments in the area of higher education modernisation (Communications of 2006 and 2011, and related initiatives). The report – Modernisation of higher education – was finalised in October 2017 and presented at a meeting of the CULT committee in the European Parliament. It received extremely favourable feedback from the MEPs and the (international) higher education stakeholders present at the meeting.

impala

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OTHER ADVISORY ACTIVITIES AND ASSOCIATIONS

ACA staff are regularly involved in offering advice on projects and partners’ activities (as members of Advisory Boards, Quality Councils, etc.). In 2017, ACA served in the Advisory Boards of two projects – CALOHEE and HousErasmus+. The former focuses on measuring learning outcomes in a bottom-up way, the latter focuses on international student housing issues and solutions in Europe. In CALOHEE, ACA worked closely with its member ETS Global. HousErasmus+, coordinated by Erasmus Student Network, reached its final year in 2017. ACA provided scientific and research support, and participated in the final project conference, in Brussels.

ACA also joined in 2017 as associate partner and together with its member organisations – SAIA, FKA and DZS – the eQuATIC project (Assessing quality of partnerships amongst Higher Education Institutions), coordinated by Ghent University.

In addition, ACA staff are on the advisory boards of two universities: ITMO University (St. Petersburg, Russia) and Friedrich Schiller University (Jena, Germany). In 2017, ACA took part in the board meetings in Russia and Germany.

For the past few years, the ACA Secretariat has also taken part in the selection committees for several Flemish scholarship programmes that support international student exchanges.
Apart from project-related missions, the ACA Secretariat staff regularly present at third-party events, i.e. at international conferences and seminars, organised by ACA members or other stakeholders in the international higher education community. Here are some of the 2017 highlights:

- Keynote speaker at the Conference of rectors and presidents of European universities of technology (15 September 2017, Graz, Austria)
- Speaker at the European Parliament, CULT Committee hearing: Study on the renewed EU agenda for HE (19 October 2017, Brussels, Belgium)
- Moderator at the IAU International conference & Global Meeting of Associations (GMA) (16-20 October 2017, Accra, Ghana)
- Speaker at the “Midi de l’ARES” on language policy (14 November 2017, Brussels, Belgium)
- Speaker at the Study in the Czech Republic – Contact networking meeting by DZS (15 November 2017, Prague, Czech Republic)
- Speaker at Archimedes Foundation event on Mobility Windows (22 November 2017, Tallinn, Estonia)
- Keynote speaker at the Day of Academic Mobility and Internationalisation VI – SAIA (30 November 2017, Bratislava, Slovakia)
- Keynote speaker at OeAD event on mobility windows (14 December 2017, Vienna, Austria)
The ACA Newsletter – Education Europe is one of the association’s flagship products, being published once a month and distributed to approx. 25,000 professionals in Europe, as well as around the world with responsibilities for Europeanisation and internationalisation of higher education, and based in international and supranational organisations, ministries, national, European and international associations, as well as, importantly, universities and university colleges.

In 2017, the newsletter reached its 200th edition and featured a total of: 47 articles with news about ACA and ACA member organisations, 54 articles about EU and European-level developments, 75 about national-level trends and events, 68 articles about (ongoing) calls for proposals and for tenders, and 90 articles about relevant higher education publications. The newsletter also featured an overview of over 50 important higher education events.

Beyond the newsletter, its website and mailing list, ACA’s dissemination activities are increasingly carried via different social media channels: Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook.
The highest governing body of the association is its General Assembly (GA), where all ACA members are represented. The decisions of the GA are based on proposals put forward by ACA’s Administrative Council (AC), which is the equivalent of a Board. The AC consists of up to seven members who are elected for three-year mandates by the GA from amongst the senior staff of ACA member organisations. Additional responsibilities within the AC hold the ACA Vice-President and the ACA Treasurer.

Very importantly, the association is typically represented externally by a key figure – the ACA President – who is elected from amongst the top leadership of ACA member organisations for a mandate of three years as well. The ACA President is also an ex officio member of the AC, as is the ACA Director.

The ACA Secretariat, which is based in Brussels, handles the day-to-day activities of the association, with a high priority placed on professionalism, cost efficiency, and high-quality service delivery.

**ACA Leadership**

In June 2017, the ACA General Assembly elected Ulrich Grothus, Deputy Secretary-General of DAAD (Germany) as ACA President. The three-year presidential term of Mr Grothus officially started in November 2017, tacking over this responsibility from former ACA President – Prof. Sijbolt Noorda – who served in this capacity for two mandates [six years]. ACA is very grateful to Prof. Noorda for his remarkable leadership, vision and charm.

In total, ten elected Administrators served on the ACA Administrative Council in 2017, three of them only until the AC elections that took place in November 2017, and seven (also) after. They were:

- **Anette Pieper** (DAAD – Germany) [up to November 2017]
- **Bianka Siwinska** (Perspektywy Education Foundation – Poland) [up to November 2017]
- **Piet van Hove** (Flanders Knowledge Area – Belgium/Flemish-speaking community) [up to November 2017]
- **Stefan Zotti** (OeAD – Austria and ACA Vice-President) [full year, re-elected in November 2017]
- **Ragnhild Solvi Berg** (SIU – Norway and ACA Treasurer) [full year]
- **Katrin Kiisler** (Archimedes Foundation – Estonia) [full year]
- **Peter Tordai** (Tempus Public Foundation – Hungary) [full year]
- **Dana Petrova** (DZS – Czech Republic) [elected in November 2017]
- **Christian Müller** (DAAD – Germany) [elected in November 2017]
- **Olivier Tschopp** (Movetia – Switzerland) [elected in November 2017]

**Administrative Council and General Assembly**

The Administrative Council (AC) and the ACA General Assembly (GA) each convened three times in 2017 – twice for the regular statutory meetings, and once for an extraordinary meeting to discuss ACA’s strategic reorientation. The culminating points of these six gatherings were the adoption of ACA’s Strategy 2017 – 2021 and of the Action Plan 2017 – 2018, together with the aforementioned elections.
ACA SECRETARIAT

The Brussels-based ACA team continues to be formed of Bernd Wächter (Director), Irina Ferencz (Deputy Director), Marija Mitić (Project Officer), and Project Manager Queenie K.H. Lam, who has returned to a part-time position after a career break of two years. Several changes occurred to the Office Manager position due to the absence of ACA’s Office Manager, Natalia Tarachi, on medical grounds. The position was filled by Karim El Idrissi until November 2017, and from then onwards by Irina Malai.

ACA also benefitted from the work of two excellent stagiaires, who contributed significantly to the quality and relevance of the monthly ACA Newsletter – Education Europe, among other projects and tasks. Indra Weber, from Germany, completed her traineeship in August 2017. She was then followed in October by Chiara Colella, from Italy, who had earlier completed a traineeship at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels.
### FINANCIAL INFORMATION

ACA Accounts 2016 (EUR)

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<td>413,665</td>
<td>440,261</td>
<td>413,821</td>
<td>402,327</td>
<td>414,613</td>
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<td>Secretariat running costs/ infrastructure &amp; equipment</td>
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<td>165,376</td>
<td>170,829</td>
<td>117,943</td>
<td>115,244</td>
<td>118,134</td>
<td>117,523</td>
<td>146,196</td>
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<td>Project expenditure</td>
<td>206,428</td>
<td>172,606</td>
<td>164,285</td>
<td>243,330</td>
<td>228,447</td>
<td>280,288</td>
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<td>Travel, meeting &amp; subs.</td>
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<td>15,512</td>
<td>12,993</td>
<td>10,835</td>
<td>3,352</td>
<td>7,545</td>
<td>8,400</td>
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<td><strong>Total Expenditure</strong></td>
<td>787,627</td>
<td>767,159</td>
<td>788,368</td>
<td>785,930</td>
<td>749,370</td>
<td>820,580</td>
<td>787,847</td>
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<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
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<td>Membership fees</td>
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<td>314,726</td>
<td>315,634</td>
<td>307,090</td>
<td>278,597</td>
<td>303,957</td>
<td>274,498</td>
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<td>Project income</td>
<td>512,320</td>
<td>392,563</td>
<td>468,658</td>
<td>453,967</td>
<td>466,567</td>
<td>492,408</td>
<td>482,185</td>
<td>451,803</td>
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<td>Other income</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>7,574</td>
<td>122,346</td>
<td>12,538</td>
<td>16,700</td>
<td>16,893</td>
<td>27,233</td>
<td>26,736</td>
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<td><strong>Total Income</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Net Result</strong></td>
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<td>-52,296</td>
<td>118,270</td>
<td>12,333</td>
<td>12,494</td>
<td>-7,322</td>
<td>-3,930</td>
<td>-59,301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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