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 — that of being a membership platform (ACA’s ‘internal agenda’) and in parallel a strong ‘think tank’ (ACA’s ‘public agenda’), catering 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 strength as an organisation rests on the strong network of dynamic national-level bodies that comprise its membership. These organisations are involved in a broad range of activities in their respective countries in support of internationalisation of education, and play various key roles in terms of research, programme delivery, and policy formulation and implementation. ACA’s role is to promote the interests and needs of its members in EU policy circles, and to influence the European higher education policy and research agenda in ways that support the work of the members. For their part, the members participate actively in the governance, decision-making and programmatic activities of the Association.

In 2018, two new organisations joined the ACA family as full members. These were RANNIS from Iceland and NAWA from Poland. Georgia’s International Education Centre (IEC) joined as an associate member.

**FULL MEMBERS**

Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (ÖeAD), Austria
Flanders Knowledge Area (FKA), 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

The Icelandic Centre for Research (RANNIS), Iceland
Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education (Diku), Norway
Perspektywy Education Foundation, Poland
NAWA, 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

**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
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACA 2.0 INITIATIVE

One expression of the newly-gained cohesion of the association and the momentum this generated was the creation and operation of four working groups, each one of them led by a member organisation. All of these groups were active and had outputs to show. Another one were new and highly interactive meetings of the statutory bodies, i.e. the Administrative Council (Board) and the General Assembly.

WORKING GROUPS

As part of one of the Working Groups, ACA hosted an ACA Brussels Advocacy Event which, together with a reception on the occasion of ACA’s 25th anniversary, was held in Brussels on 28 February. Some 100 invited participants attended the event, which was preceded by a separate bilateral meeting between top representatives of DG Education and Culture and the ACA leadership. An input paper prepared largely by the ACA working group on Brussels advocacy events based on an online survey amongst members singled out the three thematic building blocks of the event, i.e. the successor programme of Erasmus+, the European Universities Initiative (which had a different name at the time) and the links between education and research. As a result of the success of the event, ACA decided to hold a similar one in early 2019.

The second working group, on the joint participation of ACA and ACA members in major international events, has as its main task to systematise and enhance such joint presence which has always existed, but in an ad-hoc form. The group organised participation at the 2018 conferences of NAFSA, AIEA, IEASA and the EAIE Annual Conference in Geneva, where ACA and MOVETIA also held a joint lunch for invited high-level guests. The working group was also active in preparing joint sessions at these and other conferences for the year 2019.

The major activity of the third working group, on the Western Balkans, was a networking event of National Erasmus+ Offices (NEOs) and Erasmus+ National Agencies (NAs) in Podgorica (Montenegro) with their counterparts in ACA member organisation and the ACA Secretariat. The networking event served a double purpose: for the ACA Secretariat and ACA members to learn more about higher education in the Western Balkans and for the organisations from the region to be informed about ACA’s activities and the benefits of ACA membership.

The working group dedicated to research [in the area of internationalisation] met various times physically and online to advance their agenda. One of the focal activities of the group in 2018 was the development and delivery of ACA’s second EPS in the year, of the title The impact of internationalisation – putting together the puzzle (see elsewhere in this report).

STATUTORY MEETINGS

As usual, ACA held two meetings each of its Administrative Council (Board) and its General Assembly. The Board, whose main function it is to prepare the General Assembly, met on 26 April and on 5 October. The General Assembly came together on 12 and 13 June (Brussels) and on 29 and 30 November in Vienna, on invitation of Austrian ACA member OeAD.

The decision to devote two days (rather than one, as was earlier the case) to each meeting of the General Assembly was a conscious one, intended to provide enough time for thorough interaction and discussions between the different members and between the members and the Secretariat. This new approach, which is just one aspect of the ACA 2.0 approach, has already yielded fruit. The business meetings have become far more than sober decision-taking exercises, but inspired brainstormings where many a project and event idea is born. The format has also contributed to enhance members’ commitment to ACA.
Bringing the expert community together for lively discussions, debates and deliberations on the current trends in innovation and internationalisation in higher education is one of ACA’s core activities. ACA’s flagship events – the European Policy Seminars (EPSs) – offer participants the opportunity to interact directly with colleagues and experts around a tightly defined topic, on a relatively small scale (facilitating effective networking) and in a highly collegial environment. In 2018 ACA has revived the tradition of hosting joint events with one of its members, typically in the country where the member is based.

In 2018, ACA organised three EPSs and the ACA-IKY seminar, co-organised with IKY – the Greek National Erasmus+ Agency and ACA’s member in Greece. The event was hosted in Athens.

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

**EPS1 – What’s new in Brussels? Recent developments in European policies and programmes**

The 2018 cycle of ACA public events was once again opened by What’s new in Brussels? Recent developments in European policies and programmes. This first ACA European Policy Seminar of the year was held on 9 February 2018 in Brussels. The ACA ‘classic’ once again drew an audience of nearly 100. The programme concentrated on the European education and research programmes, both in their present phase and in the future (2021-2027). High-level representatives of the European Commission (DGs for Education and Culture and for Research and Innovation) once again used this popular event to showcase past achievements and future ambitions. The event got outstanding ratings in an evaluation by participants.

**EPS2 – The impact of internationalisation – putting together the puzzle**

The second European Policy Seminar of the year was held on 11 June 2018. The seminar entitled The impact of internationalisation – putting together the puzzle, had been developed and - to a good deal also delivered – by members of the ACA working group on research, many of whom acted as speakers and/or moderators. In the light of rising scepticism about the impact of internationalisation measures, the event took stock of the existing body of knowledge, data and other evidence on internationalisation of higher education. The aim was to jointly discuss and conclude what kind of impact-related questions can be answered with certainty, as well as to identify remaining knowledge gaps, to be filled by relevant research and data collection. Inclusive of speakers and ACA staff, the seminar had over 90 mostly very satisfied participants.

**EPS3 – Mobility-migration nexus: policies, practices, discourses and evidence**

The third European Policy Seminar of 2018 was held on 9 November, again in Brussels. The seminar explored the “mobility-migration nexus”. Looking at such diverse but still related phenomena as public diplomacy, alumni engagement and talent attraction measures, the seminar featured recent research on international mobility and migration and trends over years. It also provided the opportunity for lively discussions on how different actors can work better together and what is needed for effective cooperation. The seminar drew a modestly sided audience of between 50 and 60, almost all of whom were very engaged, however.

**ACA-IKY seminar – Internationalisation and academic freedom**

Also mainly a member-focused event with Greek higher education representatives as guests and Greek ACA member IKY as the host, Internationalisation and academic freedom took place on 27 April 2018 in Athens, immediately after the spring meeting of ACA’s Board. The event, which was addressed by Greek education minister Kostas Gavroglu, concentrated on academic freedom in times of populism and anti-intellectualism. Speakers and discussants came predominantly from AC member organisations: Among guest speakers were such celebrities as Sijbolt Noorda, Alan Goodman and Marijk van der Wende. The participants’ list counted over 90.
Every year, ACA pursues – and is invited to take part in – a broad range of research projects, studies, consultancy work and other activities related to its core areas of expertise in the field of internationalisation of higher education. ACA is renowned in European higher education policy circles for the top quality and relevance of its work, its ability to communicate rather technical information [e.g. related to international student mobility terminology] to non-specialist audiences, as well as its interest and capacity to follow and bring clarity to ongoing policy discourses at European level.

ACA’s research work is carried out by a highly qualified and multinational Brussels-based Secretariat staff and in close partnership with a strong network of very qualified and knowledgeable professionals and academics from Europe and beyond, and many of whom come from ACA member organisations.

In 2018, ACA was involved in eight projects, with additional advisory roles in stakeholder meetings and speaking engagements at international conferences globally.

**IMPALA – INTERNATIONALISATION AND MODERNISATION PROGRAMME FOR ACADEMICS, LEADERS AND ADMINISTRATORS**

IMPALA was an Erasmus+ Key Action 2 project aiming to build capacity at South African universities through various peer-learning activities in the area of internationalisation. The IMPALA consortium consisted of four South African universities, four European universities, amongst whom the University of Antwerp as coordinator, and ACA. The International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA) took part as an associate partner. Together with the University of Limpopo and the University of Venda, ACA was in charge of the Working Group on strategy development and implementation, tasked with organising and conducting a 2-3 days training session with senior university leadership in South Africa and organising site visits to a number of European universities for the same target audience. All members of the consortium contributed to the IMPALA Toolbox with articles on good practice, advice on different aspects of internationalisation and opinion pieces as food for thought for practitioners in the field.

In February 2018 ACA coordinated a set of training workshops in South Africa, on the development of internationalisation strategy and strategic planning at higher education institutions. The preparation and development of the workshop was coordinated by the ACA and ACA’s member UHR, who delegated one of the two workshop facilitators and experts on strategies.

IMPALA was in its third and final year in 2018. The project was closed at the final event in Cape Town on 8-10 November 2018.

**CAMPUS MUNDI**

ACA was invited again, 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 approximately 15 assessments until 2021. 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. In 2018 ACA and ACA experts conducted reviews at ELTE, Corvinus University, Eger and Miskolc.
STUDY IN EUROPE 2

The same consortium (ACA, Archimedes Foundation, British Council, Campus France, DAAD and Nuffic) won the proposal for Study in Europe II – global promotion of Europe as a study destination. The project will last three years, until 2020. ACA is responsible for delivering 4 peer education webinars for promotion agencies and higher education institutions – HEIs. In 2018, ACA conducted a survey of national promotion agencies mapping out their needs and expectations vis-à-vis the webinars. Based on the received suggestions, ACA organised the 1st webinar with national-level promotion agencies, on 19 November 2018, themed “How to maximise promotion impact via social media” (including info on use of webinars, Facebook live sessions and student generated content). Two other webinars for promotion agencies are to be delivered in the Study in Europe 2 project – one in 2019 and one in 2020, as well as a webinar for HEIs.

GREET – GUIDING REFUGEES VIA EUROPEAN EXCHANGE AND TRAINING

In April 2018 ACA, DAAD and EDUFI started a Horizon 2020 project focusing on the integration of refugee students and scholars in European higher education. GREET targets national bodies (ACA members and the likes) and HEIs in 9 European countries [Austria, Belgium/Flanders, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Norway, Sweden and the UK], with the aim to facilitate peer learning and exchange among institutions responsible for or active in the integration of highly skilled refugees in higher education systems. The members of the Advisory Board were Scholars at Risk represented by Sinead O’Gorman, Director of the European office, IIE’s Scholar Rescue Fund, represented by Associate Director – James King, and VUB, represented by Mohammad Salman, coordinator of the Student Refugee Welcome Programme.

The first major – GREET Peer Learning Activity [PLA] - took place in Brussels on 24-25 September 2018, gathering around 40 ACA members, partners and HEIs for two days of exchange on the topic of refugee integration.

DATA-DRIVEN COMPARATIVE MARKET ANALYSIS FOR STUDY IN ESTONIA

In February 2018 ACA won a call for tenders of the Archimedes Foundation for a comparative study on selected markets for study in Estonia. The project, delivered between May and November, resulted in a ranking of the 11 chosen target countries and detailed country analyses based on quantitative and qualitative data collected in the project. Recommendations on national-level strategisation targeting each of the countries and the improvement of the methodology have also been made. The project was led by ACA Secretariat, supported by an external statistician and 11 country experts in the target markets [for identifying national data sources, overcoming language barriers, and providing contextual information for the country analysis]. The project results were presented by ACA experts in Tallinn to Estonian higher education institutions and key stakeholders [including participants from Tartu via video conferencing] on 23 November, 2018.
DATA-DRIVEN COMPARATIVE MARKET ANALYSIS FOR STUDY IN SLOVENIA

In early November 2018, a contract was signed with ACA’s Slovenian member CMEPIUS for a preparatory study towards a data-driven strategy for Study in Slovenia. The project, delivered between November and December, was based on a revised and reduced methodology tested in a more elaborate study in Estonia. The short study returned a ranking of 16 chosen countries and recommendations on the collection of Slovenian and target country data to fully exploit the potential of the data-driven methodology used in the study. An ACA expert presented the project results and potential application of the methodology for national and institutional level strategisation in a workshop to higher education institutions and representatives from the ministry and national agency in Ljubljana on 20 September, 2019.

MICHE - MONITORING INTERNATIONALISATION OF CZECH HIGHER EDUCATION

ACA Secretariat was invited to participate in a pilot project until the end of 2018 in Czech Republic, run by ACA’s member DZS, very similar in nature to the Campus Mundi Audit project in Hungary. ACA Secretariat was involved in two of the four university visits foreseen in the project at the University of Chemistry and Technology Prague (VSCHT) and Palacky University Olomouc.

The MICHE initiative is funded by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in Czech Republic, while organised and supervised by ACA member organisation – DZS (Centre for International Cooperation in Education). The main objective of the project is to increase the quality of internationalisation and global attractiveness and competitiveness of Czech higher education, by providing policy makers with information on the state of internationalisation at Czech HEIs and by equipping Czech HEIs with a complex tool to reflect, analyse, and improve internationalisation at the institutional level.

TRAINING ON INTERNATIONALISATION @ HOME (TPF)

ACA won a tender procedure for holding a training course on internationalisation at home for international officers and academic staff of Hungarian universities. The session took place in Budapest on 12 and 13 December 2018. The participants of the two-day workshops were international office staff and academics of Hungarian higher education institutions. The tools and strategies presented and discussed were aimed at empowering and inspiring participants to find their role in the process of IaH and help them to develop the steps for their own implementation process.

PARTICIPATION IN STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

ACA actively participates in policy-oriented meetings by other sister organisations and partners in the field, as well as in the working groups steered by the European Commission, contributing to the European-level discussion in the field of international higher education and research, EU programmes and policies and the future of education and research in Europe.

- EU universities expert meeting hosted by the European Commission, DG EAC
- Meeting on EU Public Diplomacy initiative and alumni engagement “Alumni and EU Delgations working together”, DG EAC and EEAS
- IGLO HE Working Group – Debriefing from the EYCS council during the Austrian presidency and input on advanced digital skills (DG CONNECT)
- Erasmus+ Coalition meetings hosted by the Lifelong Learning Platform
- 7th Ministerial Meeting of the Western Balkans Platform, DG EAC and RTD
Apart from project-related missions, staff of the ACA Secretariat regularly present at international events, organised by ACA members and other stakeholders in the higher education community, as panellists, advisors or trainers. 2018 was another busy year for the Secretariat, also in terms of presence at third-party events. These are some of the highlights of the year:

- Scholars at Risk Global Congress, Berlin – speaker, presenting GREET project
- TPF Mobility Windows seminar - opening keynote speaker
- Bologna Ministerial conference, Paris – delegates
- DG EAC 4th Policy Dialogue on Higher Education with Southern Mediterranean countries - chair of the HE parallel session
- EU-organised consultancy project on internationalisation for the Cypriot government (Ministry of Education) – expert and presenter
- International week of the Rīga Stradiņš University (RSU) – keynote speaker on Internationalisation in European higher education – trends, engagement, facilitators
- Seminar of the German Rectors’ Conference (HRK) on mobility windows – keynote speaker on Mobility windows – from concept to practice
- NAFSA, AIEA, IEASA and EAIA - speakers, moderators and workshop facilitators

ACA POSITIONS

In 2018 ACA issued a position paper on the European University Networks initiative, welcoming the proposal by the European Commission and the European Council to create 20 European university networks (EUNs) and regarding this initiative as an important step in strengthening Europe’s higher education and as a contribution to European cohesion in difficult times. ACA position paper states ACA’s support for the European Union’s approach for this initiative to be based on the principles of excellence, as well as inclusiveness, diversity, and regional balance. The paper further welcomes the fact that the initiative is to cover education, research and the ‘third missions’ of higher education institutions (HEIs).
ACA NEWSLETTER – EDUCATION EUROPE

One of the ACA flagship products, the monthly electronic news service ACA Newsletter – Education Europe, is provided to more than 25,000 recipients in Europe and beyond with responsibilities for Europeanisation and internationalisation of higher education, working in international and supranational organisations, ministries, national, European and international associations, as well as, importantly, universities and colleges. In 2018, the newsletter featured a total of 293 articles on national, European and international developments, in the area of higher education and research. Out of this number, more than 50 articles features news from the ACA Secretariat and ACA members, around 30 articles on European policy developments and 70 articles with a national focus. Around 50 publications were featured in the newsletter in 2018 and more than 60 calls for funding. ACA continues to receive congratulations and applause for this very well received news service. ACA would like to thank the loyal readers in France, Belgium, US, Germany and the Netherlands – the countries which top the list by the numbers of visits to the ACA Newsletter.

SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITIES

In 2018 ACA intensified its online activities, increasing promotion and dissemination on its social media channels – Facebook (1012 followers, 960 likes), Twitter (1606 followers) and LinkedIn [ACA group of over 1200 members]. It regularly shares news from its members’ activities, the activities of the ACA Secretariat and updates from the international higher education field. In relation to GREET and Study in Europe projects activities, ACA featured a number of webinars on its Youtube channel, which reached around 900 views.
ACA is governed by its General Assembly (GA), its highest body on which all ACA members are represented. The decisions of the GA are based on proposals of the Administrative Council (AC). The AC consists of up to seven elected members who are elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly from amongst the senior staff of ACA member organisations. The Brussels-based ACA Secretariat handles the day-to-day affairs of the association, with a high priority placed on professionalism, cost efficiency, and high-quality service delivery. Very importantly, the association is represented externally by a key figure – the ACA President – who is elected for a 3-year mandate, once renewable.

**ACU LEADERSHIP**

During the whole of 2018, the ACA President was Ulrich Grothus, who took office in late 2017 for a 3-year term.

The following elected Administrators served on the ACA Administrative Council from the beginning of the year until the autumn General Assembly in Vienna in late November. This General Assembly saw new elections in the case of those Administrators whose mandate had come to an end.

- **Stefan Zotti**, CEO of OeAD and ACA Vice-President. Stefan did not stand for re-election again for he left OeAD at the end of 2018.

- **Katrin Kiisler** (Archimedes Foundation): Katrin stood again for election, and was re-elected ACA Administrator, as well as ACA Vice President.

- **Ragnhild Solvi Berg** (Diku, ACA Treasurer): Ragnhild stood again and was re-elected as the ACA Treasurer for three more years.

- **Peter Tordai**, of the Tempus Public Foundation in Hungary, stood again and was re-elected ACA Administrator. Dana Petrova (DZS), Christian Müller (DAAD) and Olivier Tschopp (Mobvetia) stayed on as Administrators, since their term had not come to a close yet.

**ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

As usual, ACA held two meetings each of its Administrative Council (Board) and its General Assembly. The Board, whose main function it is to prepare the General Assembly, met on 26 April and on 5 October. The General Assembly came together on 12 and 13 June (Brussels) and on 29 and 30 November (in Vienna), on invitation of Austrian ACA member OeAD.
The ACA team continued to be formed of Bernd Wächter (Director), Irina Ferencz (Deputy Director), Marija Mitic (Policy Officer) and Irina Malai (Office Manager). Project Manager Queenie K.H. Lam, who had been on a career break, started to work for ACA again, on a part-time basis and from her home in Trier/Germany. ACA also had the privilege to host two excellent trainees, who contributed in a major way to the production of the much-cherished online news service, the ACA Newsletter – Education Europe and ACA’s online presence overall. The ACA trainees in 2018 were Chiara Colella and Lorenza Spoltore, both from Italy.
## FINANCIAL INFORMATION

ACA Accounts 2018, 2017 and 2016 (EUR)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expenditure</strong></td>
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<td>Staff costs</td>
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<td>767,159</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                      |          |          |           |
| **Income**           |          |          |           |
| Membership Fees      | 234,025  | 220,814  | 314,726   |
| Project Income       | 471,388  | 512,320  | 392,563   |
| Other Income         | 9,356    | 3,000    | 7,574     |
| **Total**            | 714,769  | 736,134  | 714,863   |

|                      |          |          |           |
| **Net Result**       | -48,423  | -51,493  | -52,296   |

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
Promoting Innovation and Internationalisation

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Brussels, 2018
Editing: ACA Secretariat
Design: Impact Communication