

Reframing global science relations: ARUA and The Guild summit of university leaders meet in Cape Town

The African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) and The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities are intensifying their unique partnership, as Vice-Chancellors and Presidents of the two networks laid the foundations for new types of partnerships, grounded on equity and inclusion.

Meeting in Cape Town on 3-4 November, a summit of over 30 university leaders from across Africa and Europe reflected on how to develop new types of institutional partnerships that will build long-term research capacity in African universities. They agreed that this requires a long-term vision around commonly identified research challenges that are of shared urgency.

University leaders from both networks agreed that we needed to find new ways to collaborate to unlock human potential for the greater good. This needed to inform how we do research together, and how we ensure research questions are not dominated by the global north.

ARUA and The Guild universities also expressed a joint commitment that their practical collaboration must be underpinned by a vision that makes a difference to lives - through supporting and training future researchers, the expertise our graduates bring into their communities, and the economic and social impact of our cutting-edge collaborative research.

Discussions were framed by the draft AU-EU Innovation Agenda, as Vice-Chancellors, Rectors and their deputies agreed to work towards the creation of Clusters of Excellence, with an ambition to strengthen Africa's research capacities based on the principle of equity. This would include the creation of joint doctoral schools, and developing new ideas on making a difference to society through research, teaching and public engagement. The meeting also agreed on the importance of developing a long-term vision for long-term world-class infrastructure investment; a key ambition of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda.

To put the joint vision for the Clusters of Excellence into practice, the summit agreed on the critical need that researchers from member universities would now be invited to identify together, across the two continents, key challenges of mutual interest within the broad framework for collaboration agreed at the meeting.

Within this context, the university leaders exchanged views with **Maria Cristina Russo**, Director for Global Approach and International Collaboration at the European Commission, on how universities need to be central to the implementation of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda. They emphasised that investing in the science capacity of Africa's public universities would be key to achieving the African Union's vision to become a knowledge society by 2063. The meeting welcomed the joint vision agreed by political leaders at the 2022 EU-AU summit, to 'step up' 'scientific cooperation between researchers' based on the AU-EU Innovation Agenda.

Noting that many of the solutions to our common global challenges would come from Africa, Vice-Chancellors and Presidents underlined an urgency in boosting Africa's science capacity, urging policy-makers now to put in place means to enable universities and researchers to achieve this vision for the long term. In the words of **Barnabas Nawangwe**, Chair of ARUA: 'We must do more!'

Barnabas Nawangwe, Chair of ARUA, said: "Our joint meeting in Cape Town gave us an opportunity to reflect together on how we could develop mutually beneficial systems as we grow research and graduate training programmes. The need for African universities to undertake research that helps their countries to tackle the Sustainable Development Goals is worth noting. The AU-EU Innovation Agenda is aligned to that ideal. The Cape Town meeting helped us to agree on how to prioritise our joint activities as we move in this direction. We were able to verbalise our commitment to working together to tackle the most significant development challenges of our time."

Svein Stølen, Chair of The Guild, said: "After intense discussions in Cape Town, Vice-Chancellors and Rectors have agreed on a new approach towards the creation of Clusters of Excellence that will identify and address common societal challenges. We will now bring our researchers together to identify the scientific frontiers we must overcome, in our mutual interests. Our joint endeavour requires long-term commitment from our universities, and the passion and expertise of our researchers."

Ernest Aryeetey, Secretary-General of ARUA, commented: "ARUA universities are strongly committed to collaboration, first with one another and then with The Guild. This arrangement should lead to a departure from the 'business-as-usual' approach to university partnerships. Working together, it is intended to confront all the obstacles to enhanced research capacity and graduate training in Africa. This arrangement should help tackle the 'brain drain' in an innovative way with a much higher likelihood of success. The AU-EU Innovation Agenda provides a very useful framework for planning our engagements in a very structured manner. The operationalisation of the programme is being pursued in a very equitable manner, emphasising mutual respect."

Jan Palmowski, Secretary-General of The Guild, commented: "At the meeting in Cape Town, university leaders from ARUA and The Guild affirmed their support for the draft AU-EU Innovation Agenda by identifying practical ways about how they could help to implement it. Perhaps the most important source of agreement in Cape Town was the transformative nature of how we can build up science capacities in Africa, in close collaboration with European partners. To achieve this, we need the active support of policy-makers at the national levels as well as in the EU and the AU, and it is now essential that we reflect together on what it will take to turn the draft AU-EU Innovation Agenda into reality."

Sir **Anton Muscatelli**, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, University of Glasgow, commented: "The highly successful ARUA-The Guild joint meeting in Cape Town has further consolidated our collective commitment to African-European engagement in order to respond to the most pressing challenges facing humanity. The creation of Clusters of Excellence will require approaches that are sustainable, equitable and interdisciplinary with a focus on delivering truly transformational impact for the communities that we serve and beyond. Engaging researchers across both continents, alongside a

favourable policy and funding framework, will be vital to ensure that we can deliver the ambitious goals set out in the AU-EU Innovation Agenda.”

Stephan van Galen, Secretary-General, University of Groningen said: “On Friday 4 November 2022, ARUA and The Guild reached an important agreement on higher education collaboration within the framework of the African Union and European Union Innovation Agenda. We laid the groundwork for mutually beneficial cooperation in an unequal world, and stated our intention to work on topics that concern all of humanity. Building on long standing cooperation and fostering new initiatives, we want to develop new ways to cooperate. The University of Groningen is pleased to be able to participate in this important endeavor based on co-creation and equity.”

Professor **Sizwe Mabizela**, Vice-Chancellor, Rhodes University, said: “Rhodes University strongly endorses this mutually beneficial cooperation between ARUA and The Guild. It will contribute to the building, strengthening and sustaining of research capacity and capability which will unlock the incredible human talent in the African continent for the benefit of its people and humanity. Rhodes University is excited to be an active player in this initiative which will not only further strengthen its preeminent position as a research-intensive university but will take us a step forward in building a better, inclusive and sustainable future for the African continent, in particular, and humanity, in general.”

Anders Hagfeldt, Vice-Chancellor, Uppsala University, commented: “We have had intense and exciting discussions in Cape Town between the ARUA and The Guild networks, laying the ground for new ways of working together. Building on several long-standing collaborations with different universities in Africa across the continent, Uppsala University is excited to develop these further as well as participating in new initiatives. Through the co-creation of Clusters of Excellence we will be able to develop new tools for collaborations that will be built on equity, mutual capacity building, sustainability and long-term commitment.”

Professor **Guido Van Huylenbroeck**, Academic Director for Internationalisation, Ghent University, stated: “Ghent University is committed to high-level research collaboration with African partners. This agreement will give us the tools to intensify collaborative research with Africa and on the African continent, against the background of some of Ghent University’s cherished values: inclusiveness, equity, mutual respect, innovation, research excellence, jointly tackling the challenges of tomorrow. This ARUA-The Guild agreement fills us with hope and excitement and we are proud to be part of this endeavour.”

Monique Scheer, Vice-Rector for International Affairs and Diversity, University of Tübingen, said: “The Guild and ARUA are demonstrating how combining our efforts in a network-to-network initiative can make all our partnerships more effective. The University of Tübingen is very excited to be part of this endeavor to create more career opportunities for young scientists in Africa, to intensify academic exchange between our two continents, and to tackle together the most burning issues and challenges of our times.”

Professor **Hugues Abriel**, Vice-Rector for Research, University of Bern, said: “This meeting gave us a unique opportunity to share our excitement for the co-creation of new Clusters of Excellence co-led by ARUA and The Guild Universities. These Clusters of Excellence should allow the University of Bern to pursue its long-term collaborations with African universities on the topics of “Sustainable Development,” “Climate,” and “Health.” We should follow the advice of Dr. Mamphele Ramphele to achieve, with this ambitious project, Ubuntu-infused excellence on both continents.”

Professor **Mike Shipman**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International), University of Warwick, said “We are excited to be developing our African strategy and exploring opportunities with African partners. The Guild-ARUA meeting in South Africa provided an excellent platform for discussing collaboration with many outstanding African and European universities that we hope will lead to exciting mutually beneficial partnerships for capacity building.”

About The African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA)

Composed of sixteen leading universities in Africa, ARUA aims to enhance research and graduate training in member universities through a number of channels, including the setting up of Centres of Excellence (CoEs) at its member universities. Addressing key challenges of Africa’s sustainable development, ARUA CoEs are intended to be focal points for aggregating world-class researchers from member universities and elsewhere to undertake collaborative research in priority thematic areas while providing opportunities for graduate students from the region and elsewhere to work with the researchers.

About The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities

Founded in 2016, The Guild comprises twenty-one of Europe’s most distinguished research-intensive universities in sixteen countries and is dedicated to enhancing the voice of academic institutions, their researchers, and their students. The Guild is committed to the pursuit of excellence, the importance of truth-seeking and trust-building as the foundation of public life, and the creation of new knowledge for the benefit of society, culture, and economic growth.

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