COLOURS
European University Alliance

COLOURS ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2026

Shaping the Future of European Universities: Innovation, Sustainability & Regional Impact

📍 University of Ferrara, Italy | 🗓️ 1–3 December 2026

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Event Overview

The 2026 edition of the COLOURS Annual Conference comes at a pivotal turning point for the European Universities Initiative.

Following years of experimentation, joint development, and institutional integration, European University Alliances are transitioning into a new phase of systemic maturity and long-term sustainability, set against the backdrop of the upcoming EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF 2028–2034).

Moving beyond the question of proof of concept, this conference provides a platform to explore how alliances can evolve from educational pilot projects into permanent, transformational ecosystems. By addressing future funding models, joint governance structures, and integrated strategies for education and research, the event will highlight the indispensable role of Alliances in driving Europe's green, digital, and social transitions while bolstering regional resilience and global competitiveness.

Core Themes:

- Future Governance & Funding (MFF 2028–2034): Defining long-term viability, institutional governance, and funding synergies across European, national, and regional levels.
- Regional Innovation Ecosystems: Connecting higher education institutions with regional innovation networks to foster cross-border collaboration and smart specialisation.
- Impact-Driven Higher Education: Transitioning toward challenge-based learning, student entrepreneurship, and international mobility that generate direct societal value.

About COLOURS

The COLOURS Alliance (*COLlaborative innOvative sUstainable Regional univerSities*) brings together 9 European universities firmly rooted in their respective regions, representing a vibrant community of over 126,000 students and 12,300 staff members, supported by more than 55 associated partners.

Driven by a shared commitment to redefine academic excellence, COLOURS aims to transform the European Education and Research Area by championing a challenge- and impact-driven approach to higher education, research, and innovation.

https://colours-alliance.eu/

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Detailed conference agenda

DAY 1:
Shaping the future of European universities: innovation, sustainability and regional impact

Tuesday 1st December 2026

📍 Location: Sala Estense (Piazza del Municipio 14): Open in Google Maps ↗
Also available on COLOURS Youtube channel

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* the working language of the event will be English

9.30-10.00 | Registration and coffee ☕

10.00-10.30 | Welcome address

Session Chair: Dr. Wael Mousa Managing Director - COLOURS European University Alliance

Laura Ramaciotti, Rector of the University of Ferrara, President of the National Rectors' Conference

Heike Trautmann, President of the COLOURS Alliance

10.30-11.15 | European University Alliances Beyond 2027: future funding models

The announcement of a forthcoming "European University Alliances 2.0" in the Commission's 2026 State of the Union package, alongside preparations for a 2028–2034 investment pathway, signals a new phase for the initiative, with growing attention to its long-term sustainability (and the potential for stronger complementarity between European, national and regional funding) and broader contribution to research, innovation, competitiveness and regional development.

Session Chair: Anneli Orrung Wallin, Deputy Rector University of Kristianstad, COLOURS Alliance

Shaping the Future of the European Universities Initiative – Policy Directions and Funding Models under the Next MFF (2028–2034)
Ioana Dewandeler, Policy officer, European Commission

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Sustaining the Momentum: Institutional Governance, Systemic Impact, and Long-Term Viability of European University Alliances

Thomas Estermann, Director for Governance, Funding and Public Policy Development, European University Association (EUA)

Beatrix Busse, Chair of FOREU4ALL board (pre-recorded video message)

11.15-13.00 | Roundtable: Strategies of the Alliances in the new EU programming framework

Session Chair: Catia Contado, Vice-Rector for Internationalisation University of Ferrara

Panelists:

Rita Cucchiara, Rector of University of Modena e Reggio Emilia, UNIgreen Alliance

Angelo Montanari, Rector of University of Udine, ACROSS Alliance

Alessandra Fiorio Pla, University of Turin, Rector's Delegate for the UNITA Alliance

Elisabetta Ragagnin, Ca Foscari University, Rector's Delegate for the EUTOPIA Alliance

Elisabetta Rocca, University of Pavia, Rector's Delegate for International Affairs, EC2U Alliance

Caroline Robertson- von Trotha, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), COLOURS External Advisory Board

Q&A session

13.00-14.30 |🍽 Networking Light Lunch.

📍Location Istituto Vergani (via Sogari 3): Open in Google Maps ↗

14.30-17.00 | Roundtable: Alliances, regions and innovation Ecosystem - IMPACT & Best Practices

European University Alliances are emerging as new actors in regional innovation and development, connecting universities and their regional ecosystems across Europe. This session will explore how alliances engage with businesses, public authorities and civil society, strengthen collaboration across regions, and create opportunities for skills, knowledge exchange and innovation. Particular attention will be given to the conditions that enable alliances to generate lasting regional impact and contribute to European cohesion and competitiveness.

Session Chair: Sandrine Labory, University of Ferrara, Rector's Delegate for the COLOURS Alliance

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The regional engagement of European Universities Alliances: EUAs as bridging regional innovation ecosystems
Alessio Cavicchi, University of Pisa, Coordinator of Societal Engagement – Circle U. Alliance
Siobhan Moane, Chief Operations Officer, RUN-EU Alliance

Impact of EUAs through entrepreneurship programmes: the COLOURS open innovation model
Enrico Bracci, Vice-Rector for Technology Transfer and Innovation University of Ferrara, COLOURS Alliance

What does the participation of regional universities in European Alliances change for regional stakeholders
Roberto Righetti: Director of Art-ER (Attractiveness Research Territory) Emilia-Romagna Region Joint Stock Consortium

Q&A session

Conclusive remarks
Sally Hardy, Regional Studies Association Europe and COLOURS External Advisory Board

15.30-18.00 | COLOURS Students ambassador meeting
📍 Location: Palazzo Bevilacqua Costabili (via Voltapaletto 11) - Room EC5: Open in Google Maps ↗

Evening:

19.30 |🍽️ Dinner (for COLOURS members)

📍 Location: Palazzo Roverella (Corso della Giovecca 47): Open in Google Maps ↗

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DAY 2:
COLOURS Alliance session

Wednesday 2nd December 2026

📍 Location: Palazzo Bevilacqua Costabili (via Voltapaletto 11): Open in Google Maps ↗

9.00-12.00 | Parallel Sessions:

- ✔ Topical meetings
  Drawing on key insights and outcomes, these parallel sessions aim to assess the consolidation of the COLOURS model.
  - COLOURS Shared Priorities for long-term sustainability (session chair: Milos Borozan, Le Mans Université,)
  - COLOURS learning pathways (session chair: Gosia Kurek, Jan Długosz University and Sandrine Labory, University of Ferrara)
  - Building bridges between regional innovation ecosystems (session chair: Manuel Esteban Lucas, University of Castilla La Mancha)
  - COLOURS as an inclusive Alliance (session chair: Martin Persson, University of Kristianstad)
- ✔ Strategic Board + External advisory board Meeting
  - 9.30-10.30 | Strategic Board Meeting
  - 10.45-11.45 | Strategic Board Meeting + External advisory board

10.30-10.45 | ☕ Coffee break

11.50 | COLOURS group picture

12.00-13.00 | 🍽️ Networking Light Lunch

12.30-21.00 | Stakeholder Engagement & Innovation Field Study.

- ✔ 🚌 Site Visit: Exploring local excellence in innovation. Visiting Motor Valley- Dallara Academy experience *(limited - reservation is needed):* Bus Pick-up Point *(close to Hotel Touring Ferrara*)

Immerse yourself in the world of Italian automotive excellence with an exclusive visit to Dallara Academy, Composite Materials Research Center, Aerodynamics Department

14.30- 16.30 | Guided Tour of Ferrara's Historic Centre *(Alternative activity for participants not attending the field study)*: Tour Guide Meeting Point (*Inner courtyard of the Castello Estense)*

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DAY 3:

Wrap up session

Thursday 3rd December 2026

📍 Location: Palazzo Bevilacqua Costabili (via Voltapaletto 11):Open in Google Maps ↗

9.00-10.30 | Parallel Sessions:

- ✔ Steering Committee Meeting
- ✔ Cospace officer meeting
- ✔ EDI Workshop session chair: Zorica Grubor, University of Kristianstad and Léa Niang, Le Mans Université

10.30-10.45 | ☕ coffee break

10.45-13.40 | Plenary Closing Session
Also available on COLOURS Youtube

Session Chair: Xavier Lachazette, Vice-President for International Relations Le Mans Université

10.45-10.55 | COLOURS hymn

10.55-11.10 | Virtual week closing ceremony
Gosia Kurek, WP7, Jan Długosz University

11.10-11.30 | From Idea to Reality: How COLOURS sparks student entrepreneurship
Student representatives share their experience and personal journey.

11.30-12.30 | Roundtable: Consolidating the COLOURS Alliance
Session Chair: Martin Persson, chair of the COLOURS Steering Committee
Panelists: referents of topical groups of day 2 + Wael Mousa, referent for the Strategic Board

12.30-13.00 | Q&A session

13.00-13.10 | Students Point of View
Līva Slesare COLOURS Vice president.

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13.10-13.40 | COLOURS Future Roadmap
Delphine Letort, Président, Le Mans Université
Lisa Skär, Rector, University of Kristianstad

Closing remarks
Sandrine Labory

13.45-14.30 | 🍽️ Networking Light Lunch

Afternoon session (upon request):

14.30-17.00 | Spaces available for group or individual meetings

17.00-19.30 | Cooking masterclass (limited number - upon registration) - self paid activity

📍Location Istituto Vergani (via Sogari 3): Open in Google Maps ↗

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