

Aurora Joint Sustainability Strategy

AURORA



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This document is the publicly available version of Aurora’s Joint Sustainability Strategy. It was originally written as part of a larger, sensitive, *Aurora 2030* deliverable that includes a mapping of the sustainability factors underpinning Aurora’s Joint Sustainability Strategy.

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1. Sustainability Strategy in a Glance

Sustainability at a Glance



Mission:

To make Aurora a **lasting** consortium of universities at the vanguard of developments in European Higher Education Area.

Sustainability Strategy:

- 1. Invest in joint structures** that help joint funding applications and add measurable benefit to member universities.
- 2. Apply for more diverse joint projects** to diversify income streams and capitalize on fractured opportunities.
- 3. Ensure broader and deeper institutional embeddedness** to maximize universities' commitment & contributions.

Sustainability Factors:



Direct Funding



Added Value



Financial Management



Institutional Engagement

Our Values:



Collaboration



Societal Chngemaking



Sustainability

2. Introduction

The focus of this document, including the mapping and the following Sustainability Strategy, concerns the Sustainability of Aurora beyond 2030, with particular regards for the Aurora's middle and long-term financial sustainability.

In this document builds on a mapping the main sustainability factors that impact the financial sustainability of the Aurora consortium, and laid the foundation for Aurora's sustainability strategy. This strategy will be further consulted with the Aurora universities to ensure lasting acceptability and feasibility, before its formal and public adoption.

The Sustainability Strategy will be a live document, even after formal adoption. It will be reviewed on a yearly basis and updated in necessary.

3. Aurora Joint Sustainability Strategy

Based on the mapping of sustainability factors, Aurora can confidently move ahead and formulate its strategy for the period beyond 2030. The long-term prospects, although not without challenges, prove rife with opportunities for the further sustainable development of Aurora.

As of autumn 2025, the European Commission is still negotiating its proposal for the 2028-2034 multi-annual financial framework. The first signs are very promising for European University alliances, indicated increased, but more fragmented financial support for joint alliance activities. Aurora will have to adapt to ensure it will be able to capitalise on various European funding schemes, as well local government funding opportunities.

To these ends, Aurora requires sound, transparent financial management and a clear vision on how to harmonize an increasing range of spin-off projects under the Aurora banner. Aurora financial management should emphasize efficient return on investments for member universities, highlighting how big challenges are more effectively addressed together.

This should strengthen the perceived added value for all Aurora Universities. Joint support services, and a growing research community can help our universities generate additional income as strategic Aurora partnership open avenues for more coordinated research management and support.

Finally, institutional engagement also greatly contributes to Aurora's long-term prospects. Advocating for strong institutional commitments, in collaboration with national and European governmental stakeholders can positively contribute to lasting institutional engagement.

These factors have led us to formulate the following three strategic pillars that will support Aurora's way forward.

Strategic Pillar 1. Investment in joint structures

Solidifying Aurora as a lasting change-maker in the European Education Area does not happen overnight. Strong and efficient joint structures form the backbone of our sustainability strategy as they enable long-term collaboration across Aurora's member universities.

The legal status of European University alliances has long been a linchpin in the prospects of long-term sustainability. The Aurora Network, an association under Dutch law, holds a key position as our strategic “mothership”. Its role is to coordinate programmes, governance, and institutional engagement, and ensure collective impact that extends beyond the capacities of individual universities.

Under the auspices of the Aurora Network, central structures such as the Aurora Central Office, the Virtual Campus, will provide the infrastructure for joint projects, mobility, and innovation. A lean but transparent governance model ensures accountability while leaving space to adapt legal and structural arrangements for future needs.

Further investments in central structures will highlight institutional complementarity and will provide clear added value. Together, we are stronger, more competitive, and better equipped to tackle higher education’s most pressing challenges.

By strengthening internal communication, leveraging underused expertise across universities, and streamlining shared services, Aurora not only consolidates its role as a coordinating body but also enhances the value it delivers to its members.

To successfully capitalize on these developments, we recommend Aurora to connect these strategies with concrete points of action:

Strengthen the Aurora Network as coordinating Body	Position the Aurora Network as the strategic coordinating 'mothership' that aligns programmes, governance, and member engagement to ensure long-term sustainability and collective impact.
Create a Development Committee	Establish a dedicated body to identify funding opportunities, foster partnerships, and strategically steer growth beyond EU cycles.
Add more value to members through increased efficiency	Streamline shared services and governance to reduce duplication, align efforts, and deliver clear benefits to members in teaching, research, and outreach.
Make more of available capacities across Aurora Universities	Leverage underused expertise, infrastructure, and networks across institutions through hubs, mobility, and shared infrastructure such as the Virtual Campus. By building on institutional strengths, and sharing those strengths centrally throughout the network, central services and infrastructure can be developed efficiently, heightening added value for institutions.

Strategic Pillar 2. More (diverse) joint project applications

To secure long-term sustainability, Aurora places strong emphasis on expanding and diversifying its portfolio of joint project applications, as current European development indicate

increased funding opportunities through a broad range of funding pathways, both on the European level, and beyond.

Erasmus+ will be central to the alliance's funding strategy, primarily through its direct support for the European Universities Initiative. To capitalise on current developments, Aurora needs to further explore additional funding through other Erasmus+ funding schemes, to further support initiatives such as joint degrees, blended intensive programmes, and lifelong learning opportunities.

In addition to Erasmus+, other European funding pathways must be explored and developed. These include first and foremost funding opportunities through Horizon Europe, such as WIDERA and MSCA. Other funding schemes, such as DIGITAL Europe, and the to-be-established "Competitiveness Fund" will provide further funding opportunities Aurora needs to develop.

Through these means, Aurora will continue to strategically foster spin-off projects that extend beyond core alliance funding, such as Euridice and Seizmic. Such spin-offs increase Aurora's impact, innovation and policy engagement.

Beyond 2030, Aurora aims to further strengthen and diversify its streams of revenue through further alignment with national funding pathways.

In its search for diversification and funding opportunities, Aurora will continue to draw on its greatest strength: facilitating decentralized bottom-up initiatives. Drawing on the success and knowledge of its universities has proven to be the key to success.

This process includes stakeholders across Aurora and consists of the following steps:

1. Interest in potential funding opportunities is gathered bottom-up from the local and international teams.
2. These opportunities are first shared with the institutional coordinators of the involved institutions, and tested for local feasibility and acceptability.
3. After this, the Aurora central office is formally informed of the development. They keep all Aurora universities updated on the developments surrounding the application.
4. The proposal is then developed drawing on the pre-award competencies of the involved universities.
5. Continuity and alignment is ensured through the involved Aurora Institutional Coordinators, the Aurora Central Office and the other layers of the Aurora governance, such as the Aurora Student Council and the Vice-Rectors for Research/Education boards.

To further ensure cohesion and consistency across the various spin-off projects, Aurora could further formalize its approach to multi-project management to ensure projects are aligned systemically and synergies are leveraged throughout the projects' implementation.

Look beyond European Funding

Expand beyond reliance on EU programmes by tapping national, industry, and lifelong learning revenues to secure financial resilience.

Diversify Streams of Income

Aurora will diversify its stream of income through various European and national funding pathways.

	We will encourage coordinated applications across Erasmus+, Horizon, and other schemes, aligned to Aurora's vision and goals.
Apply for More Projects	Aurora will apply for more projects to increase and diversify its streams of income. Such projects will include Aurora partner universities, as well as associate and global partners to further expand on existing funding synergies.
Further Centralised Funding Overview	Expanding on its bottom-up strengths, Aurora will further develop its centralised funding overview to maximize funding through national funding, institutional contributions and joint investments, as well as non-governmental income streams. This includes further involving NGOs, cities, industry, and civil society in co-creation of future projects for added diversification and broadened impact.

Strategic Pillar 3. Broader and Deeper institutional embeddedness

Institutional embeddedness forms the third pillar of Aurora's sustainability strategy. Aurora member universities should ensure Aurora activities and outcomes are embedded throughout the universities departments. This embeddedness should be *broad*, spanning the width of university activities, and *deep*, reaching both university management, the academic community and beyond.

This means integrating Aurora's outcomes, methodologies, and values directly into institutional strategies, guidelines, curricula, and research agendas. This will facilitate long-term institutional change strengthening the pipeline from alliance activities to spin-off projects.

Institutional embeddedness operates on multiple levels: at the leadership level, where president-level commitment secures alignment with university strategies; at the faculty and staff level, where academic engagement drives joint projects and innovation; and at the student level, where active participation and co-creation ensure bottom-up ownership. Institutional funding schemes, such as the Research Incentive Call or Mini-Grant initiatives, connect these levels. As such, they are prime examples of palpable institutional commitment, effective at anchoring Aurora more securely within our universities.

Deepening this embeddedness safeguards continuity beyond EU funding cycles, strengthens the added value for institutions and stakeholders, and nurtures Aurora's high-trust culture. Ultimately, by investing in bottom-up academic and student engagement, while maintaining strong institutional commitment, Aurora ensures that its activities become "business as usual" for its members, anchoring the alliance as a long-term driver of institutional transformation and societal impact.

This extends to Aurora Associate Partners, and the Global Partners of the Aurora Network. Ensuring institutional embeddedness and commitment at these institutions will amplify both the impact of and the institutional contribution to Aurora's endeavours.

The following action points will help Aurora become further anchored at Aurora Universities.

Deepen sustainable embeddedness at member universities	To ensure Aurora’s long-term resilience, member universities must move beyond project-based participation and integrate Aurora activities into their core institutional strategies. Sustainable embeddedness also requires alignment at leadership, faculty, and administrative levels, so that Aurora becomes part of “business as usual” rather than an add-on. This increased embeddedness will be through the internal reporting cycle, where all Institutional Coordinators provide an annual update on: • <i>Number of Aurora Activities Integrated into University Strategy</i> • <i>Institutional Funding allocated to Aurora Activities</i> • <i>Number of Permanent Staff Positions linked to Aurora Activities (in FTEs)</i> By fostering this progressive integration, universities not only safeguard continuity beyond funding cycles but also maximize Aurora’s added value for staff, students, and local stakeholders.
Highlight added value	Communicate clearly how Aurora benefits members institutionally and strategically, strengthening commitment at leadership and faculty levels.
Invest in bottom-up Academic Engagement	Support academics to initiate and lead collaborative teaching and research projects through seed funding, networks, and recognition.
Invest in bottom-up Student Engagement	Empower students as co-creators in Aurora by funding initiatives, promoting peer-to-peer engagement, and integrating their voices into governance.

Concluding Remarks

These three strategic pillars form the foundation of Aurora’s sustainability strategy beyond 2030. By carrying out the proposed actions, and building on these pillars, Aurora is ready to make the most of the current momentum surrounding European Universities.

The European Higher Education faces considerable challenges and developments in the foreseeable future. By investing in joint structures, our institutions are brought closer together and will have the shared tools to address these challenges in an efficient manner.

The ever-widening range of funding opportunities will require Aurora to broaden its scope and pursue more, and more diverse funding opportunities. By diversifying streams of revenue, looking at the full range of European, national, and non-governmental funding opportunities, Aurora’s financial sustainability will be assured for years to come.

Such long-term commitments will allow us to focus on true institutional embeddedness, where Aurora, its partnerships and outcomes are accessible too and benefiting a wide array of internal stakeholders. Bottom-up initiatives and participation constitute one of Aurora's core strengths. With that in mind, it is important Aurora further broadens its horizontal embeddedness, across disciplines and departments, as well as deepen this embeddedness, cementing Aurora's presence from the bottom to the top of our universities' organisations.

Together, we ensure Aurora remains at the forefront of European Higher Education well beyond 2030.