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UCT to host leading African universities VCs and European leaders

First-ever meeting in Africa seeks to strengthen collaborations

The University of Cape Town (UCT) will host a high-level delegation of 16 vice-chancellors from Africa's leading research universities and 15 European university leaders on 4 November.

This will be the first time a meeting of this nature takes place in Africa. The vice-chancellors form part of the [African Research Universities Alliance](#) (ARUA) and the [Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities](#).

The purpose is to discuss the formation of clusters of excellence with multimillion euros in funding, bringing the two powerful alliances together to tackle the grand challenges of the 21st century, thus maximising the impact of their work.

This important meeting is happening at a time when the European Union (EU) is funneling unprecedented amounts of money into research in Africa through several funding instruments, mainly through partnerships between European and African universities.

It follows the proposed African Union (AU)-EU Innovation Agenda, announced on 14 February 2022 ahead of the AU-EU summit, in which universities were seen to assume a central place in the development of AU-EU relations. The agenda was [supported by both the Guild and ARUA](#). One concrete element of the proposal was the development and strengthening of clusters of excellence, which would foster research excellence and strengthen intra-African as well as North-South science collaboration.

The Guild and ARUA propose the establishment of [40 Centres of Excellence \(CoE\)](#), each funded by up to €20 million (almost R350 million) per year. Each CoE will address key common societal challenges in one of five areas, within the local, national and regional contexts of African partner universities. The priority areas for investment in research, innovation and higher education include:

- public health,

- the green deal, blue (marine) economy and energy transitions,
- digital transformations for a more sustainable economy and society,
- good governance, peace and security, and
- migration, mobility, and overcoming discrimination.

The coming together of the Guild and ARUA will discuss the proposed formation of these clusters of excellence. They will expand on the work of [ARUA's existing CoEs](#), which have already played a significant role in fostering collaboration on the continent and providing strong instruments that promote African-centred knowledge.

ARUA's 13 CoEs are each focused on the grand challenges faced by the continent. Africa is at the coalface of these global challenges, given the large, impoverished populations and limited resources to build resilience to, for instance, ensure food security or adapt to the ravages of global warming. Funding is therefore increasingly channeled towards work on the continent, and researchers in the global North are encouraged to partner with universities in Africa.

However, there is growing recognition that partnerships between the global North and global South need to go beyond the equitable. In the past, such partnerships tended to be deeply unequal, with researchers in the global North taking the lead. Researchers in Africa are now increasingly confident in asserting the need to take the lead in solving their own problems, in their own contexts, and centering African knowledge in doing so. The CoEs have been central to this endeavour.

Notes to editors/journalists

A media conversation session will be held on Friday, 4 November from 12:00–13:00 at the Neville Alexander Building, UCT Lower Campus. Members of the media wishing to attend are requested to RSVP by Thursday, 3 November.

About ARUA

Founded in 2015, ARUA consists of the 16 leading research universities in Africa. Its purpose is to expand and enhance the quality of research by and on the continent. Its members work together to pool resources, thus generating a critical mass that could be leveraged for additional resources from outside the network. Its mission is therefore to develop capacity in African universities to generate African-centred knowledge.

About The Guild

Founded in 2016, The Guild comprises 21 of Europe's most distinguished research-intensive universities in 16 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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