EELISA Governing Board

Hosted by Zürcher Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften (ZHAW)

12-13 November 2026 – Winterthur, Switzerland – DOC 6b – For Signature

EELISA Joint Statement: A Pledge for Practice
Excellent Teaching and Research for Impact

Where we stand

In an era defined by complex global challenges, the university of the future cannot rely solely on traditional, theoretical classroom models. Within the EELISA Alliance, we believe that practice — the active application of knowledge to solve tangible problems in everyday contexts — is the crucial bridge between academia, research, innovation and society. Practice means equipping our graduates and alliance members with reflective, professional, research- and practice-based competences that enable them to act responsibly and effectively in complex, real-world settings. For us, practice does not mean applying knowledge after the fact: it means coupling study, research and application from the outset, testing ideas jointly with the people, organisations and challenges they are intended to serve, and being evaluated by the outcomes they produce.

Practice is built into the way EELISA works. All EELISA Partners have made challenge-based, interdisciplinary cooperation an everyday feature of the Alliance. More than 100 external organisations from industry, the public sector and civil society have collaborated with EELISA as problem-owners, and the circle of external supporting partners has grown from 35 to 57. Students meet the world of work first-hand through 115 transnational internships and new formats of practice-related experience, such as International Project Work and Virtual and Blended Internships, while the first EELISA Career Ambassadors Programme has supported 109 students in their transition into professional life. In innovation and entrepreneurship, Innovate4Europe now connects ten European incubators and is complemented by 13 joint educational offerings, five Prototype Contests and support to more than 20 further innovation projects during the roll-out phase.

Practice is part of our strategic direction. Collaboration with companies and innovation ecosystems is crucial to the Alliance and is growing across our institutions, and closer ties with the labour market will further expand internships and entrepreneurial skills. The recently launched EELISA Partner Club now needs to be advanced, together with the Alumni Network and the Observatory of Exit Skills, which brings industry and universities into dialogue on graduate profiles. We will also position Innovate4Europe for European funding and policy opportunities and recognise joint pathways in innovation and entrepreneurship through micro-credentials. These steps are part of a wider direction of deeper institutional integration, stronger stakeholder engagement and diversified funding, and they feed into the long-term perspectives for EELISA 3.0.

Since 2023, this work has moved from pilot initiatives to a structuring layer of Alliance life. Joint formats developed with external practice partners, from Innovation Week and Skill-Up Week to specialised Summer Schools, have engaged several hundred participants. Student-led initiatives such as the two editions of the EELISA Student-led Bootcamp and One Night to Innovate show

what students can achieve when given real challenges and responsibility. In entrepreneurship, targeted education offers such as Female Founders support student and staff ventures. Through these formats, students have made lasting connections across our stakeholder network and have secured, for example, internships and thesis placements with the mentors they met through EELISA. These connections are at the heart of what we do: practice that opens real doors.

Our commitment

As members of the Governing Board, we reaffirm that practice is not an addition to academic excellence, but integral to it. We commit to a shared understanding of practice across the Alliance: knowledge that is developed, tested and refined together with the people, organisations and communities it is meant to serve.

We commit to embedding practice-based, challenge-driven learning across our curricula and Communities — through Challenge-, Project- and Research-Based Learning, developed and delivered together with external partners from industry, the public sector and civil society.

We commit to growing and diversifying our network of employers, innovators, and public and civil-society partners, and to turning these relationships into lasting collaborations on internships, projects and career pathways for our students.

We commit to giving students, researchers and staff genuine opportunities to design, test and scale innovative and entrepreneurial solutions to real-world challenges, strengthening the pipeline that carries good ideas from first prototype to lasting impact.

We commit to carrying this work forward through our Alliance-level structures for employability, partnerships, innovation and entrepreneurship, and to drawing on the practice-oriented pedagogy of Universities of Applied Sciences to strengthen this orientation across all our institutions.

To increase the impact and quality of our practice-oriented activities, we commit to systematically assessing their outcomes — the academic and practical collaborations they generate, the careers they advance, and the jobs and ventures they help create — and to mobilising existing institutional, national- and Alliance-level mechanisms to provide predictable and flexible resources for this work.

Looking ahead

Europe and the world face converging technological, economic and social transformations that are reshaping the skills our graduates need and the expectations placed on higher education. In this context, the case for a holistic education closely connected to practice — to employers, to innovation, and to real-world impact — has never been stronger. Our Communities, partnerships and innovation formats already give this ambition practical form: they are where our institutions work with practice, together, every day. Our task now is to deepen this orientation across the Alliance, widening our engagement with employers, innovators and civil society, and ensuring that the seeds we plant together grow into lasting careers, collaborations and ventures. We invite our students, our staff, our external partners and our peer Alliances to take this work forward with us.

Winterthur, 12 November 2026
The members and attendees of the EELISA Governing Board

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Vice-President Benjamin Herzhaft, on behalf of President Pierre-Franck Chevet, IFP Energies Nouvelles