

## **DRAFT: ELLS Fund for Incentives – Directives for 2027 Application and Reporting**

### **Executive summary**

Available for allocation in Fund For Incentives (FFI) contestable round: €153,500<sup>1</sup>

Indicative allocation per project: €10,000 – €15,000

Who can apply: ELLS partner and member University staff and students

Application Deadline: 30 June 2026

Minimum number of partners per application: 2-3 institutions

Reporting deadline: 15 Feb 2028

### **Context**

The joint ELLS Fund for Incentives (FFI) was established in October 2004. Each full ELLS member and partner contributes an annual membership fee that is largely dispersed via a competitive process to further the achievement of ELLS objectives in line with the ELLS Mission and Vision. ELLS has a number of strategic priorities including:

- strengthen long-term inter-member collaboration
- prepare external European funding proposals
- promote institutional learning and best practices within ELLS
- enhance visibility and societal outreach and impact
- address sustainability and challenge-driven themes

### **Intent**

The fund has the following aims:

- to strengthen ELLS
- to give an incentive to promising new innovative initiatives,
- to stimulate joint research and educational activities,
- to recognize and further support the work of Subject Area (SA) groups and Support Teams (ST) with a proven record,
- to give effect to ‘low-hanging fruit’ initiatives that arise with the potential to provide rapid, immediate benefits to the ELLS alliance.

To maximize the number of projects that can be supported by the FFI, whilst recognizing that some very high value initiatives may cost more, it’s expected that most proposals will be costed at € 10,000 – €15,000.

Four funding categories exist within the FFI. The exact allocation between categories will be determined by the Task Forces depending on the quality and volume of applications, and alignment to any priority themes and fields articulated in the Call for Proposals.

<sup>1</sup> In 2026, 13 full ELLS members/partners will each contribute a membership fee of € 16,500 to a total of € 214,500. ELLS has a number of fixed commitments including ELLS Scientific Student Conference (€ 53,000), the ELLS Award (if nominated) (€ 5,000) and the ELLS Scientific Student Conference Prizes (€ 3,000). The FFI contestable allocation is thus the annual income minus the fixed commitments. Of note the WUR secretariat transferred to UHOH 2025 residuals of € 49,001.05. These have been excluded from the 2026 FFI contestable round with the intent they be used to support ‘ELLS 25’ activities, and ‘fundable’ initiatives, outside of the scope of Education or Research.

### **1. Development of ELLS:**

This category fosters the development of our alliance and provides seed money for their development and initial implementation. For example;

- Seed money for stimulating the development of new groups like Subject Areas or Support Teams, or collaborative actions between ELLS groups,
- Seed money for new innovative initiatives to support cooperation of staff and students in the ELLS network.
- Development of initiatives that promote institutional learning between ELLS partners
- Activities that increase the societal outreach and visibility of ELLS internally and externally.
- Seed money for innovative initiatives to improve ELLS

### **2. Education collaboration**

This category fosters the development of new educational activities and provides seed money for their development and initial implementation. For example;

- Seed money for supporting personnel costs and meetings organization to develop proposals new educational programmes (like joint BSc, MSc programmes, joint summer schools or similar activities) aligned with the ELLS Mission and Vision, by staff or students.
- Seed money for developing new joint teaching formats or joint courses.
- development of innovative open educational resources shared among ELLS members, for example funding for the first ELLS prospective webinars in conjunction with European University Initiative, or shared repositories.

### **3. Research collaboration:**

This category supports the development of new research collaborations including preparing joint applications for European funding schemes, structured doctoral cooperation and challenge-driven research initiatives addressing sustainable agri-food systems, biodiversity, climate resilience, and food security. For example,

- Seed money for supporting personnel costs and meetings organization to develop proposals for new research programs (e.g. COST, Horizon, Erasmus+ etc)
- Funding for short research internships (master's level) involving mobility which may or may not lead to subsequent projects (with mobility covered by Erasmus grants if possible)
- Funding for laboratory costs for short stays by doctoral students (with mobility covered by Erasmus grants if possible).
- Activities that focus on challenge-based training for PhD students (link with DOC BEST)

### **4. Existing activities:**

This category fosters the running and further development of (recurring) key activities of the SA and ST. Specific amounts of money can be used for the network activities that enhance the image and visibility of ELLS, for example;

Summer Schools – A lump sum amount of €1100/day and €22/student/day (with a minimum number of 15 students) will be granted to an ELLS Summer School. The contribution should be used for organizational costs, on-site costs, teacher and student mobility (only in addition to funding from the home university and other sources (e.g. Erasmus+ staff exchange or Blended Intensive Programs), depending on the availability of funds and upon decisions of the Task Force.

Case Study Competition (CSC) – Every second year TF-Edu will announce via the Call for Proposals if a CSC will be prioritized. The CSC will give ELLS students an opportunity to utilize their gained knowledge in a practical matter to find solutions to real-life problems within the field of Life Sciences (application via an SA is mandatory).

## **Directives for the application**

### **1. Who can apply?**

- ELLS Subject Area groups (SA),
- ELLS Support Teams (ST) - for individually designed ST projects or as an integrated part of SA activities,
- ELLS working groups or project groups
- ELSA,
- Students from ELLS universities,
- Employees, including researchers, working for ELLS universities for specific types of actions/initiatives or subjects not covered by SA or ST.

At least three ELLS universities must be involved in the proposed activity, except for research activities, where proposals from two partners shall also be considered (noting larger consortia are preferred).

### **2. Requested information to be described in the application**

An application for the Funds for Incentives should contain a project description, including envisaged outcomes and impact, motivation in line with the ELLS Objectives, in relation to a SA, ST, ELLS project or ELSA focus and overall network goals, responsible persons, timeline, and budget. It should also provide clear answers to the following questions:

- How will the activity contribute to the ELLS objectives?
- How will the activity contribute to the ELLS brand?
- Which quality measures are in place to ensure the further development of ELLS as a quality label?
- In what way the activity also leverage and/or seek co-funding like, Erasmus Blended Intensive Programs, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes, or Erasmus Mundus Design Measures, or other internal or external funding possibilities? (Please check with the IRO for more information about these education funding possibilities.)
- How will this seed funding lead to further common projects or sustainable activity in the future?

### **3. Application procedures**

The ELLS Secretariat sends out an Annual Call for the Fund for Incentives.

- A. The application must be on the application form provided in the Annual Call and should be kept short, not exceeding three pages.

- B. If needed, Liaison Hub (LH) members of the lead university can give advice or support to the application before submission.
- C. Applications must be signed by the project coordinator.
- D. Applications are to be submitted only via e-mail to the ELLS secretariat [ells-secretariat@ua.uni-hohenheim.de](mailto:ells-secretariat@ua.uni-hohenheim.de), copying in the lead University LH members.
- E. Applications must indicate if they are to be considered by TF-Res, TF-Edu, or, if a structural initiative, a combination of the two.
- F. Deadline for application: **30 June 2026**.
- G. The ELLS Task Forces may send out a second call, if it is foreseeable that residual funds will be available after the selection procedure for the first call.

#### 4. Decision procedures

- a) The ELLS Secretariat will send TF-Edu and TF-Res relevant applications (as per point 3e above).
- b) TF-Edu and TF-Res will rank the applications they are tasked with assessing in terms of funding priority.
- c) Assessment Criteria are:
  - Is the application eligible? (Does it meet the criteria mentioned in who can apply and requested information?)
  - Budget: is the request in line with the budget requirements (incl Summer school amounts) and, if not in line;
    - o Summer Schools: adjust budget to the directives
    - o Other projects: look at the strategic value for ELLS
  - Scoring on the defined priorities:
    - o strengthen long-term inter-member collaboration
    - o prepare external European funding proposals
    - o promote institutional learning and best practices within ELLS
    - o enhance visibility and societal outreach and impact
    - o address sustainability and challenge-driven themes
  - Scoring on project attributes:
    - o Network impact and collaboration breadth
    - o Sustainability beyond seed funding
    - o Leverage potential for external funding
    - o Innovation and interdisciplinarity
    - o Student and early-career engagement
    - o Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

If there are more applications than funds available, the following criteria should be taken into consideration by the Task Forces for the final selection:

- o Spread / encourage involvement in ELLS
  - over the consortium: to have more different ELLS partners in the lead
  - Over the SA/STs: to improve involvement in ELLS from different groups
- o Balance Education – Research
- d) Before the annual ELLS Conference, the ELLS Taskforce Education and the Taskforce Research will then jointly decide on the distribution of the funds based on the priority scores.

- e) The decision will be announced during the GAF conference and formal letters will be sent to the coordinators of the granted projects. The grant will be paid to the home university of the project coordinator.

## **5. Reporting procedures**

- a. The Report Form for the Fund for Incentives can be found on the ELLS intranet. The reporting template is aimed to provide sufficient details to assess the projects success, and to provide information to be utilized by the Marketing and Communications ST for publicity purposes.
- b. No later than **February, 15** the year after the project has been implemented, a signed final report and a signed final financial statement in the form of a table detailing the eligible costs actually incurred shall be submitted to the ELLS Secretariat. The administration of the institution must certify that the financial documents provided comply with the financial provisions of the agreement and that the costs declared are the actual costs.
- c. If a grant from the ELLS fund is not spent within the scheduled project period, the responsible project coordinator must submit a declaration with the reasons for the delay of the project and a revised budget. The ELLS Secretariat can authorize an extension of a maximum of 12 months. If, without comprehensible reasons, the project is not completed within the extended period, payback of the grant or surplus may be requested.

A grant expires if it is not requested within one year after approval of the project and the project coordinator does not provide a satisfactory explanation for the delay.

## Annex 1: ELLS Mission and Vision

**Overview** The **EuroLeague of Life Sciences Universities (ELLS)** is a strategic alliance of leading European universities founded 25 years ago that is focused on sustainable agri-food systems. We cover all pedagogical and research activities related to food production and consumption, agriculture in its broad activities of food and non-food production (including forestry), wild fish and aquaculture, and the sustainability of their interactions with landscape (urban and rural) and aquatic systems, biodiversity, as well as the bioeconomy and rural socio-ecosystems. Our alliance is also distinguished by its unique physical infrastructure, including experimental farms, living labs, and specialised research facilities, that no other European network can offer.

ELLS operates with its own organisational infrastructure, academic, administrative, and pedagogical, enabling member institutions to learn and act beyond national contexts, benefiting from a shared pool of diverse expertise and experience.

### **The Challenge We Address**

Humanity is facing a series of existential global threats directly linked to our ecological imprint. This makes our ambition to contribute to the sustainable transformation of agri-food systems crucial. The three societal priorities of ELLS are: to ensure food security, achieve environmental sustainability (especially with regard to mitigating climate change and preventing biodiversity loss), and support prosperous and resilient rural economies and communities.

Our work centres on these three deeply interconnected priorities:

**Food Security** - Food and nutrition security, in the sense of availability of both sufficient and healthy food, is critical for stable and healthy societies. Ensuring future food security necessitates significant changes to our existing food production and distribution systems, and our food markets and preferences. Agri-food systems must become more resilient, especially in a more unstable climate and geopolitical situation. Changes in the agri-food system must mitigate its negative environmental impacts, and increase its positive contributions, for instance by enhancing biodiversity, fixing carbon dioxide

and improving soil, plant and human health, and developing sustainable sources of energy, fibres and other materials, thus contributing to the European bioeconomy.

**Environmental Sustainability** – Sustainable supply of food and nutrition, and the health, stability, and prosperity of humanity depend on the health of the natural environment in a one health perspective. Yet current consumption and production systems often deplete natural resources, including water, destroy ecosystems, are detrimental to animal and human welfare, and are reducing biodiversity. Changes in agriculture must mitigate negative environmental impacts while increasing positive contributions, enhancing biodiversity, fixing carbon dioxide, improving soil and plant health, and developing sustainable sources of energy, fibres and other materials, thus contributing to the European bioeconomy.

**Rural Prosperity** – Agriculture is among the most important economic activities in rural communities and can be an engine for economic growth. However, rural areas are rapidly emptying as many young people see them as offering little economic opportunity.

The decline of rural communities imperils local cultures and ways of life, the provision of public services, agricultural production and food security, and support for environmental protection.

These three challenges are tightly interdependent. Food security that is not environmentally sustainable is undercut by deteriorating conditions. Communities often compromise environmental sustainability when food security and economic opportunities appear threatened. And deteriorating environmental conditions and food insecurity undercut wealth through price inflation and adaptation costs. Sustainable agri-food systems must address all three challenges at once.

Developing sustainable agri-food systems is in part a technical challenge, implementing the right technologies and practices from digital and data-driven technologies (e.g. remote sensing or digital twins), advanced biological innovations (e.g. microbiome engineering or cellular agriculture), and alternative and regenerative production systems (e.g. biodiversity-integrated farming systems or vertical farming) to automation and robotics (e.g. autonomous harvesting or drone monitoring). But it is also a profound societal challenge requiring changes in human beliefs and behaviour. Changemakers must operate across many fields, understanding deeply both technology and processes of political, social, economic, and cultural change.

### **Societal Mission and Vision**

ELLS is a leading academic actor in Europe advancing the transition towards sustainable agri-food systems through three interdependent missions: engaging with society, educating and empowering people who can lead sustainable change, and conducting world-leading research. Our societal vision focuses on the production of

sufficient, healthy food for all, the preservation and enhancement of the natural environment, and the fostering of more dynamic, resilient, and inclusive rural economies and communities.

Three pillars of activity enable us to achieve our mission.

### **Pillar 1**

Challenge-driven science and innovation - ELLS is a platform of collaboration and mobility between scientists and students across the European University, and other stakeholders across Europe and around the world. This enables ELLS to conduct world-leading research and innovation and to connect research results to actors in Government, industry, and other sectors, empowering them to make evidence-informed decisions and accelerate innovation to develop sustainable agri-food systems.

### **Pillar 2**

Challenge-driven teaching and learning - ELLS fosters key competencies for changemakers to develop sustainable agri-food systems. We orient our teaching and learning experiences towards the development of these competencies, in particular via student and staff mobility, capacitate educators to deliver student-centred, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary, challenge-based, research-grounded, and real-world-relevant learning, and build structures and cultural norms supportive of this innovative pedagogical approach within our member universities.

### **Pillar 3**

Challenge-driven credentials - ELLS develops academic programs and credentials which certify students' preparation as changemakers in the transition towards sustainable agri-food systems. These credentials include challenge-driven European degree programs and micro-credentials. We also enable learners to study

across the member universities and ensure academic processes are aligned accordingly.

### **Institutional Strategy**

**Position and Recognition** – ELLS and our member universities are the most appealing places to study sustainable change in the agri-food system, and more broadly are recognised as leaders on the topic in Europe and beyond. We are key counterparts for research collaboration, recognised as leading providers of evidence and insights to inform societal transitions related to our topic. Internally, students and academic and non-academic staff at all member universities, across faculties and departments, identify strongly with ELLS and its mission to foster sustainable agri-food systems.

**Education and Credentials** – ELLS fosters teaching innovation and works towards granting credentials in two forms: joint and European degrees aligned with ELLS competency and quality frameworks, and micro-credentials combining competency-focused and challenge-focused learning, which can be stacked into challenge-driven degrees.

**Research** – ELLS runs a powerful science strategy focusing on key challenges concerning our main theme. We connect researchers with each other, provide access to scientific facilities, and assist in securing resources and partnerships. ELLS provides systematic support to connect research to decision-makers at the European Commission, in governments, and in industry—both communicating research and helping ensure its relevance.

**Brand and Talent** – ELLS strengthens the branding of all member universities as sustainability leaders. For the past 25 years, the ELLS brand has progressively gained greater importance and visibility, enhancing academic prestige and the ability to attract

talent and partners worldwide. ELLS helps member universities overcome unfavourable

demographic trends by conveying the critical role of agricultural sciences in addressing global challenges and showing they are at the cutting-edge of science, technology, and societal change.

**Collaboration and Innovation** – ELLS facilitates exchange of ideas and knowledge across member universities, challenging us to think differently and strive for excellence. Member universities learn from the strongest practices in the group through ongoing exchanges and collaborations, becoming more innovative in pursuing our shared mission.

### **How ELLS delivers**

To achieve its vision, ELLS drives ambitious change, enabling member universities to individually and collectively act at a scale and ambition they could not reach alone; explores and builds the benefits of joint or mutualised structures such as the ELLS Faculty and Subject Area working groups, Innovation Platform for Teaching and Learning, and structured research collaboration; expands and deepens engagement with societal partners at the member institution and ELLS levels; supports member universities in enhancing their capacity for innovation, societal impact, and national and international competitiveness; directly engages and mobilises member university communities; and promotes Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, European values, and tackles European challenges.

### **Guiding Principles**

ELLS ensures that its activities align with the following principles:

**Relevance** - ELLS engages governments, NGOs, and private-sector actors, among other stakeholders concerned with agri-food systems, to identify critical challenges and help shape the European University's education, research, and innovation activities on an ongoing basis.

**World-leading research** – ELLS produces world-leading academic research in sustainable agri-food systems.

**Interdisciplinarity and trans-disciplinarity** – ELLS reduces disciplinary boundaries for teaching, research and innovation to promote the development of sustainable agri-food systems.

**Competency-based learning** – ELLS promotes competency-based learning through its activities, starting with the key skills, aptitudes, and attitudes to be change-makers for sustainable agri-food systems.

**Lifelong learning** – ELLS promotes learning in all its activities, not only for students of all ages, but also for staff and other stakeholders.

**Open science** - ELLS adheres to the FAIR principles, ensuring that research (publications and data) is Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable, and commits to support the development of next-generation metrics, to facilitate open scientific knowledge, to foster citizen science, and to adopt and promote open science principles.

**Open education** – ELLS is committed to open education by removing barriers and making learning accessible, abundant, and customisable for all.

**Equity, diversity, inclusion, and European values** – ELLS fosters environments where students, employees, and community members of all backgrounds feel welcomed and safe to be themselves and educates all to be more understanding of and better able to include and communicate with people of diverse lived experiences.

**Drive for innovation** – ELLS strives for continuous improvement in all its activities, including through the adoption and improvement of information and communications technologies.

## **Member Charter**

The ELLS members make the following commitments to each other, in support of our common mission.

✓ ELLS members follow through on their joint commitments, including by providing their staff sufficient time and support to fulfil their responsibilities for the alliance, and by making changes in internal structures and procedures where necessary to realise the joint mission and successful implementation of joint projects. Recognising the reality of resource constraints, of course, members communicate transparently their capacity and priorities to ensure trust in commitments, avoid over-commitment, and guarantee the durable motivation of critical team members.

✓ ELLS members are each other's first-choice partners in areas of relevance to the European University's mandate, expressing a clear preference vis-à-vis other potential academic partners where each can make comparable contributions.

✓ ELLS members consistently explore where deeper integration or collaboration can enhance impact or efficiency and provide or secure additional financial resources to achieve these aims.

✓ ELLS members commit to the transparent sharing of information among European University members while respecting the confidentiality of information shared, in a spirit of joint learning, benchmarking, and mutual trust.

✓ ELLS members make use of conflict resolution structures established by the Alliance in the event of disagreements.

✓ ELLS members seek, wherever reasonable, to minimise the environmental footprint of ELLS activities.

✓ ELLS members engage students, through the **EuroLeague Student Association (ELSA)**, in the governance and the development, execution, promotion, and assessment of all ELLS activities.

✓ ELLS members steward ELLS resources as closely as they would their universities' own funds to maximise the efficiency of resource use.