

International Collaboration in Focus: Geisenheim University Strengthens the EU-GIFT Alliance with Two International Staff Weeks

Geisenheim. How can universities further develop their international services for students and staff? What common standards are needed to implement and recognize micro-credentials across Europe? These questions were at the heart of two international Staff Weeks hosted by Geisenheim University from 29 June to 2 July 2026 as part of the European University Alliance EU-GIFT. The programs were jointly organized by the International Office and the eLearning Department.

European Exchange for Joint University Development

Around 20 staff members from EU-GIFT partner universities in France, Italy, Hungary, Romania, Portugal, and Geisenheim University came together in Geisenheim. Participants represented International Offices, Examinations Offices, Career Services, as well as departments responsible for digitalization and lifelong learning. The Staff Weeks aimed to strengthen inter-institutional exchange, discuss shared challenges, and further expand collaboration within the alliance.

Opening Program Focuses on Networking and Multilingual Communication

The event began with a joint introductory program. Participants presented their universities, highlighting their academic programs and research priorities, and discussed opportunities for collaboration in student, staff, and researcher mobility. Dr Maria Schulze-Sylvester, EU-GIFT Coordinator at Geisenheim University, introduced the objectives, activities, and strategic vision of the European Universities Initiative. The program also included a workshop on multilingual communication led by the university's Language Center. The workshop aimed to strengthen participants' confidence in international communication and reduce barriers to using English in professional contexts.

Innovative Services for Students and Staff

The Staff Week organized by the International Office, **"Innovative Approaches to Services for Students and Staff at EU-GIFT Universities,"** explored how university support services across Europe can further enhance their collaboration. International standards, digitalization, multilingual communication, and intercultural competencies are becoming increasingly important in the daily work of administrative staff. During workshops, participants identified common challenges in supporting and integrating students and researchers within the alliance, exchanged examples of good practice, and jointly developed potential solutions. The diversity of institutional perspectives and national frameworks proved particularly valuable in fostering meaningful dialogue and mutual learning.

External Perspectives on University Alliances and Generation Z

The program was enriched by two keynote presentations from external experts. Julia-Sophie Rothmann, Head of the International Office at Fulda University of Applied Sciences, shared experiences from the European University Alliance E³UDRES² and demonstrated how communication and networking formats can strengthen collaboration within an alliance. She emphasized that developing a shared international mindset among all university members is essential: only if “everyone is brought on board” can the transformation towards a European university that is both internationally connected and regionally rooted succeed.

Lukas Pantenburg from JobTeaser then explored the expectations of Generation Z regarding higher education and the labor market. In a subsequent workshop, participants discussed innovative communication strategies and support services for the students of tomorrow.

Developing Common Standards for European Micro-credentials

Running in parallel, the Staff Week organized by the eLearning Department, **"Microcredentials at EU-GIFT Universities – from Implementation to Recognition,"** focused on developing common European micro-credentials. These shorter learning opportunities are gaining increasing importance as a flexible form of education. The Staff Week aimed to map existing micro-credential initiatives across the alliance and establish a common framework for the development, quality assurance, and recognition of future micro-credentials within EU-GIFT.

Through workshops featuring practical examples and contributions from partner universities, participants engaged in in-depth discussions on quality standards, recognition procedures, digital certification, and potential joint thematic areas. Additional expertise was provided in hybrid sessions by Katrin Schmidtke, Organisational Coordinator at the Centre for Key Competencies at Kiel University, and Tim Maschuw, Team Leader at the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

Professional Exchange and Networking

The academic program was complemented by networking activities, including an excursion to the Middle Rhine Valley with a visit to Schloss Johannisberg, as well as a campus tour showcasing Geisenheim University's research infrastructure.

Positive Feedback from the Organizers

The organizers drew a highly positive conclusion. Both Staff Weeks demonstrated the importance of personal encounters in building sustainable European networks and highlighted the added value of international exchange for the further development of joint activities in education, research, and university administration.

For Rita Broschek from the International Office, the dynamics within the international group were particularly inspiring: *"I was especially impressed by how the group came together, engaged with the vision of the EU-GIFT Alliance, and is now motivated to continue advancing the alliance together."*

Background: EU-GIFT

The **European University Alliance EU-GIFT (European University for Geographical Identity as a Driver for Food Systems Transition to Sustainability)** brings together higher education institutions with the shared goal of promoting sustainable and competitive food systems rooted in geographical identity. Through interdisciplinary research, innovation, and education, the alliance develops solutions for sustainable value chains in agriculture, food, and beverage production, while strengthening rural regions and their local economies.

EU-GIFT is committed to academic excellence, international collaboration, and the promotion of shared European values. In the long term, the alliance aims to closely integrate its study programs, establish a shared virtual campus, promote lifelong learning, and further develop a climate-neutral, digitally connected European university.

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