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INTERVIEW WITH
DR. BRITTA VAN KEMPEN

MOBILITY

EDUC STAFF WEEKS
PROMOTE CROSS-
UNIVERSITY
NETWORKING

LEARNING

E-TANDEM FOR STAFF
MEMBERS



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WELCOME ON BOARD



DR. BRITTA VAN KEMPEN: *Vice President for Teaching, Studies and Europe. (Photo: Thomas Roese, University of Potsdam)*

What is a farewell for one is a new start for the other: Britta van Kempen succeeds Professor Dr. Florian J. Schweigert, who retired at the beginning of the year, as head of the EDUC Alliance at the University of Potsdam.

Ms. van Kempen, what does the new role mean for you?

I was delighted when I was asked last year whether I would consider taking over the management of the EDUC consortium from Florian Schweigert. A positive answer came easy to me, as Europe has been very important to me since I was a student. I have been actively involved in the transformation of the German “Diplom” and “Magister” degree programs and the associated revision of curricula since the Bologna reform and have thus become familiar with many different facets of this, including administrative issues.

That is why it was clear to me from the very first second that I would be happy to take on the challenges associated with EDUC.

At the same time, I was immediately aware of the responsibility and the big shoes I would be stepping into. Florian Schweigert is one of the founding fathers of EDUC; his formative role is still tangible for me. So it was of great help that I had the opportunity to accompany him to EDUC appointments since the fall of 2023. That way, we were able to organize a smooth transition that our partners also support without reservations. I would like to thank all my colleagues for the warm welcome.

You have been following and accompanying the alliance for a few years now. Do you have a personal EDUC moment? And more generally: What is it that makes EDUC special?

I actually only followed EDUC I partially and from a distance. My first direct contact with EDUC was the meeting of the Advisory Board Education at Jaume 1 University in January 2023. This is also where my personal EDUC moment took place: From the very first moment, I was fascinated by the enthusiasm with which everyone involved dedicated themselves to EDUC during these days. I immediately noticed that the atmosphere was full of intrinsic motivation. This was notable in the intense work phases, the lively exchanges during coffee breaks, and the long evenings where we discussed EDUC – alongside many other topics. Since then, I've had the image of a family in my mind, whose many different members stick together, but also don't shy away from discussions about different views and options. Always in a goal-oriented manner, though.



DR. BRITTA VAN KEMPEN: *EDUC-WIDE Ceremonial Kick-off event in Brno, March 2024.*
Photo: David Molnar / Pécs University

From the very first second, I was fascinated and infected by this creative drive with the definitive goal of highlighting possible paths towards a European university while tackling many obstacles in the process.

You are also the Vice President for Teaching and Studies at the UP. With this role in mind: Why is internationalization important within an alliance like EDUC?

It is my firm conviction that the idea of EDUC can be successfully conveyed via the Teaching and Studies portfolio. Fortunately, we live in a time where internationalization is perceived as an enrichment for every society and every individual. In this context, universities have a central role to play in facilitating international experiences for their students. During their studies, they should be immediately inspired, on the one hand, by the diversity they experience thanks to international contacts of our faculty and to academic reading. On the other hand, the options offered by exchange programs also play a key role. This can start with a very low-threshold, via digital formats.

And that is where the D in European Digital UniverCity comes into play: EDUC is developing a wide variety of structures that allow for the implementation of digital exchange. Naturally, I hope that our students will then be able to extend the experience they have gained in this way in the form of real exchange semesters abroad.

Another momentum that makes EDUC so interesting for my portfolio is the international degree programs, where we are discovering more and more connecting lines to our European partner universities. They help students face the challenges of the world 'out there' in an even more intensive and systematic manner. Within the alliance, we want to succeed in making international exchange even more commonplace for more degree programs by continuing to remove obstacles and instead making it a matter of course.

**What are your plans for your term of office?
Where do you intend to focus your energies?**

I really want to ensure that the idea of EDUC is introduced into the respective partner universities and put into practice there. By that I mean that we should seek to spread our enthusiasm for EDUC among all interested parties. However, this can only succeed if we actively involve all members and affiliates of the university in these developments by demonstrating that the efforts associated with EDUC bring many benefits, even if they are not always of a monetary nature. Any transformation towards a new normal requires active willingness on the part of the faculties.

The discovery phase is now over. It must now be a matter of concern to all of us to network the tasks set out in the work packages with the faculties and university institutions. Only if we tackle them together can the tasks be dealt with in a sustainable manner. The focus here must be on engaging in discussion about the defined EDUC goals within each university. They must not be seen as imposed from the outside, but must be adapted through joint development in such a way that they produce the intended benefits.

We must also not forget that many things are already available at the universities and in some cases just need to be found. I am under the impression that the EDUC requirements are often seen as an add-on. This ignores the fact that it is often 'just' a matter of combining the existing solutions at the partner universities. I don't want to make it seem easier than it is: The obstacles are definitely there. However, I am convinced that EDUC is a structure of opportunities and not a burden.

You are taking over the lead in a dynamic phase: Just as your term of office starts, so does EDUC-WIDE, which replaces the EDUC-SHARE project in the alliance's research support area. What can we expect? How will the completed project be linked to the new one?

After the EDUC-WIDE kick-off, which we have just experienced in Brno, I am very confident that this project will successfully tie into the completed EDUC-SHARE project. Scientific collaboration with goals such as open science, the use of shared infrastructures, or research funding, especially at the beginning of a career, are important and common topics.



DR. BRITTA VAN KEMPEN: At work during a Steering Committee meeting in Brno, March 2024.
Photo: David Molnar / University of Pécs



DR. BRITTA VAN KEMPEN: *At work during a VP meeting meeting in Brno, March 2024. (Photo: David Molnar / University of Pécs)*

However, the goal now is to look at them systematically in a European context and learn from each other. This is why we also need to enter into discussions with stakeholders in faculties and institutions within the partner universities in order to integrate the many existing ideas and structures into EDUC-WIDE – and to be able to develop and implement new ideas in the process.

Where do you see EDUC in five or ten years' time?

That's a question I find difficult to answer without a crystal ball. If I think in phases, I could deduce that after the four-year discovery phase impacted by COVID-19, we will now enter the exciting phase of implementation. Now it will be a matter of translating our considerations into the reality of universities. We will definitely need the three remaining years of the current funding phase for this.

This is because the associated transformation process will also raise structural questions that will affect the engine room of each and every partner university. That is why I have very high hopes for a possible two-year extension that has been put on the table. If we succeed in this implementation phase, in ten years we could have achieved the goal of a European university as formulated by French President Emmanuel Macron.

However, I would also like to emphasize that I appreciate the decentralized nature very much, both in the microcosm of the University of Potsdam and in the macrocosm of EDUC. I don't want us to fall into the trap of standardization. Because the strength of most constructions, including EDUC, lies in their diversity. The partners have not only found each other because they have a lot in common; this is undoubtedly an important foundation. They have also recognized that they have a lot to offer each other thanks to their complementarity. And we should also focus on that as we continue to shape the future of EDUC.

EDUC STUDENT REPRESENTATION



BRNO BUZZ: *The EDUC Student Board gathered at Masaryk University in March 2024.*
(Photo: David Molnar / University of Pécs)

The Student Board gatherings held on March 11-12, 2024, at Masaryk University in Brno were alive with lively discussions and cooperative problem-solving.



One major focus has been on enhancing the role of student representatives. There is a consensus on the need for greater visibility of the Student Board, with plans to further target the student communities in the eight EDUC universities, to further enhance the participation of the 200.000+ body of EDUC students. The Board has discussed the establishment of issue-specific task forces for the strategic priorities of EDUC.

Organizational structure and elections have been discussed extensively as well. Suggestions include creating new positions such as Communication Officer and HR Manager to ease workload issues. Clearer roles and responsibilities, along with better communication channels, are seen as essential for the Board's efficiency.

Participation in task groups has been the third key point of discussion.

There is a push for tasks to come to student representatives, reducing time constraints and improving involvement. Additionally, there are calls for better communication through organized task group reviews and a centralized calendar of all EDUC meetings to facilitate coordination within the Student Board.

The Brno Student Board meeting has thus reached resolutions for increased engagement, improved structures, and new communication channels to effectively represent and serve the student community of the partner universities within the Alliance.

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS: E-TANDEM FOR STAFF MEMBERS



Let's pair you up with a staff member within the alliance to practice a language of your choice.

The **EDUC Staff Language Programme** is a tool for the development of language skills and cultural competence. The programme pairs two administrative staff members from different universities within the alliance to practice a language of their choice, enhancing intercultural communication skills in a friendly and professional environment.

Goals

The programme aims to equip staff with the necessary skills to communicate and work in a foreign language within a multicultural environment, while also providing an opportunity to engage in an international project with EDUC partners using digital communication. Participating in this program may help with planning for physical staff mobility or staff secondment, career advancement, and skills development.

Organisation

Staff from two different universities will be paired up to meet online at least 12 times between May and November 2024.

The programme consists of 2 mandatory components and 1 non-mandatory online course:

- A 2-hours online introductory session about the programme and intercultural communication (mandatory)
- An E-Tandem programme: weekly online tandem meetings - 12 hours which 3 off active tutorial. Total minimum 12 hours (mandatory)
- A 30-hours online self-study course for participants seeking further immersion into intercultural communication and the English language (non-mandatory)

INTERESTED?

[Join the EDUC Staff Language Programme](#)

CFP OFFICES: EDUC STAFF SECONDMENTS



During 2025, we're hoping to find 1 to 3 offices at each partner university that can welcome a staff member through the EDUC Staff Secondments Programme.

What?

It's a unique chance for administrative staff to spend between 2 to 6 months working at one of the EDUC partner universities. This is an opportunity for both the hosting university and the visiting staff member to learn, grow, and exchange ideas.

How?

As a host, you'll need to provide a few things:

- Workspace
- Access to your university's IT systems
- Help in finding accommodation
- A local contact person to help with administrative issues and training
- An introduction to your institution, including a 2-week schedule for the initial phase
- Assistance with immigration matters, if needed

Who?

We're particularly interested in the following areas, but we're open to others as well:

- International or European project offices
- Libraries
- Student services
- Sustainability initiatives
- Language centers
-

Other areas that may be of interest:

- Communication and marketing
- Knowledge and technology transfer/start-ups
- Human Resources
- Career Services
- Business relations department

INTERESTED?

**[Join the EDUC Staff
Secondment Programme](#)**

THE 2024 EU ELECTIONS AND YOUR ROLE



This is an exciting time for young people across Europe. For many, it will be their first opportunity to cast their vote and have their voices heard in shaping the future of the European Parliament.

Between 6–9 June 2024, millions of Europeans will participate in shaping the future of European democracy on the occasion of the European elections.

Impact

At this pivotal moment, it's essential to encourage active participation and engagement among young voters.

But beyond just voting, it's about understanding the impact of European policies on our daily lives, and how our collective voice can influence decision-making.

Navigate the complexities

The upcoming elections present an opportunity to foster dialogue and discussion among young people about the role of the EU and its impact on their lives.

Whether it's discussing how European initiatives shape our towns, cities, and regions or exploring the ways in which Europe affects

various aspects of our everyday lives, there are plenty of avenues for conversation.

One crucial aspect of this initiative is providing easy access to resources that empower young people to educate themselves about the EU and the electoral process. From online guides to informative videos, there are numerous tools available to help navigate the complexities of European politics and policies.

In the EU-context

In the context of the European University Alliance, such initiatives hold particular significance

The EDUC, along with other European Universities alliances, plays a vital role in shaping the future of higher education and research in Europe.

By engaging with students from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, these alliances contribute to a vibrant and dynamic European community.

IS IT CRITICAL TO THINK?

Introducing the EDUC Initiation to Research and Critical Thinking Course: When education meets research.

One of the cornerstones of EU principles is bridging the gap between education and research, ensuring the development of research in Europe. Therefore it is necessary to boost the attractiveness of scientific careers for young people from their early Bachelor years, who are expected to play a crucial role in Europe's prosperity.

To fulfill this necessity, the EDUC Alliance has introduced an innovative learning pathway: the Initiation to Research and Critical Thinking course.

Cultivation

Throughout a dynamic, cross-cutting, and multidisciplinary approach, the course integrates various learning methods, ranging from online modules to a brief physical internship in a research laboratory. Numerous research groups have expressed keen interest, embracing the opportunity to welcome these young, enthusiastic minds. This experience provides invaluable insights into research activities and career opportunities.

A key aspect of the initiative is the "Presentation Day" event, which allows students to share their experiences. The Initiation to Research and Critical Thinking course by EDUC Alliance serves as a guide/tool for young minds toward a future in research.

By combining theoretical knowledge with hands-on experiences, we are not just imparting education; we are cultivating the researchers and critical thinkers of tomorrow.

Forth edition

The course has reached its fourth edition, involving a total of 500 students in online classes, and 20 students participating in mobility programs between 2021 and 2022, restricted to the first two editions. Currently, the course features six new modules and engages 20 additional faculty members compared to previous editions.

Work is underway to enrich the program for the new edition that will be in April, 2024. Together, let's build a brighter future through the synergy of Education and Research.

The course, in asynchronous mode and freely accessible, is divided into eight online modules in English, structured in an interactive and stimulating manner, thanks to the contribution of faculty researchers from the universities of the EDUC Alliance.

EIGHT FOCUS POINTS

- **identification of a scientific question**
- **bibliographic research and tools**
- **selection of instruments to resolve a scientific question**
- **basis of scientific integrity**
- **presentation of the research professions and the means of accessing them in each EDUC Universities**
- **elements of a European research project**
- **research presentation**
- **critical thinking**

EDUC STAFF WEEKS PROMOTE CROSS-UNIVERSITY NETWORKING



EDUC Staff Week programmes are designed to unite academic and non-academic staff from our network of eight universities. These themed weeks offer a unique chance to foster collaboration, build international networks, and gain invaluable insights from our global partners.

EDUC organizes thematic staff weeks aimed at different groups of academic and non-academic staff across the eight universities.

The objective of our Staff Weeks is to create networks across the EDUC universities and learn from each other. These events are well designed to create opportunities for starting and strengthening collaborations as well as foster international experience and in this sense represents our institutions internationally.

Staff Weeks involves physical mobility to partner institutions, which is supported through Erasmus mobility grants for staff mobility.

We encourage all our staff to participate in suitable international Staff Weeks held by our partner universities.

This strategic initiative not only facilitates the exchange of expertise and best practices but also underscores our commitment to promoting mobility, interinstitutional cooperation, and cross-border collaboration within the European higher education landscape.

Overview of upcoming Staff Weeks organized by our partner universities

educalliance.eu

WHY POTSDAM STUDENTS ARE EXCAVATING A ROMAN VILLA IN SPAIN



All of the summer school participants in Spain. Photo: Denise Simonetti

Students studying history or classical philology at the University of Potsdam usually learn about archaeological excavations from books, films, or presentations. Filippo Carlà-Uhink wanted to change that. The Professor of Ancient History organized an exchange with Spain's Jaume I University as part of the EDUC university alliance, which took a group of students to Castellón de la Plana in October 2023 – and straight to an excavation site where they eagerly got their hands dirty. Matthias Zimmermann spoke to Carlà-Uhink, his colleague Dr. Eike Faber, and student Luca Alacán Friedrich, who traveled to Spain with them – about the trip, important experiences, and what makes EDUC so special.

In October, a group of students from Potsdam traveled to Spain on an excursion you led. What was the reason for and purpose of the trip?

Prof. Dr. Filippo Carlà-Uhink: The trip was part of an exchange program within the EDUC

university alliance, in which seven universities from six countries are networked alongside the University of Potsdam, including the University Jaume I in Castellón de la Plana, Spain. Our students were able to go on some very exciting day trips there – to Sagunto and Valencia – but above all they took part in an international

archaeological training excavation in Burriana. For students who had never been to an archaeological excavation before, this was an enormously important experience.

Luca Alacán Friedrich: The excavations were a real highlight! Hands-on history, so to speak. We were guided and supported by professionals from the local archaeological museum and were able to advance a real archaeological excavation – even though we were non-professionals.

Carlà-Uhink: The site where the training excavation was supposed to take place, a villa maritima that archaeologists have been working on since 2008, was inaccessible due to persistent rainfall. But thanks to the dedication of the Burriana Archaeological Museum and the regional archaeology department, the group was able to switch to another excavation site. Necropolises, a road, and a building were found during road construction work, and the students were able to help uncover them.

Can you take us on a virtual recap of the trip?

Dr. Eike Faber: The trip lasted from October 1 to 7, including four days of work on the excavation site and in the museum.

We spent half our day in the heat, on all fours and with mosquitoes buzzing all around. This practical experience shock was immense – and important. To realize how quickly a layperson can break something, to learn how not to do it and instead recover something that the archaeologists can then work with. Then to process and classify what was found in the archaeological laboratory. During the four days, the students did almost everything that archaeologists do in the course of a whole year.

Alacán Friedrich: It was great to experience all the steps of archaeological work! Initially, everyone was assigned to a marked-out field, perhaps five square meters, and given instructions on how to proceed: clearing away rubble, carefully uncovering possible finds ... The joy when you find a piece of urn, a bone, or a tooth. Artifacts that already seem worthy of museums to us, but on which so much work is still being done. This brings you very close to history!

Faber: The second part is extremely important! It was great to see how it just clicked with the students.



At the excavation site. Photo: Denise Simonetti

You can tell them about it for weeks, but when they remove the dirt themselves with the spatula and then create the documentation so that others can continue working with it – this practice is so important. No checklist can replace this.

Carlà-Uhink: For example, the students worked with cinerary urns containing the remains of human bodies that died several thousand years ago. Digging them up with your own hands and developing an awareness for this... It is extremely important for historians to see such sources with their own eyes. The University of Potsdam does not have an archaeology department and yet our students can gain such experience thanks to the cooperation!

Alacán Friedrich: I am studying chemistry and history to become a teacher and I am sure that this experience will really help me on my journey. It is a shame that this is not available to everyone.

Carlà-Uhink: I think this will actually help future history teachers a lot. And I don't just mean because they know how archaeology works, but also with regard to very specific and even regional aspects. For example, history teachers could discover buried cultural monuments in the state of Brandenburg as places of learning and present them to their pupils.

Dr. Eike Faber: Last but not least, the training excavation was a truly international event: In addition to Spanish and German students, there were also French and Italian students.

Alacán Friedrich: We had many opportunities for exchange and networking. Because we were so close together for such a long time throughout the day, it was in some ways much more intense than longer stays abroad can be, where you study alone, at best together with the other "internationals", at an otherwise foreign university. And who knows: Perhaps some students will already have an idea of where to go for an Erasmus semester as a result of the conversations.

Travel diary – where and how?

Alacán Friedrich: We thought it made sense to document this – for ourselves, but also for others who are interested. I think it has become a beautiful and visual diary. And it has shown us that quite a few people have contributed to making this excursion possible.

In November, Spanish students paid a visit to Potsdam in return ...

Faber: Exactly. The program is designed as an exchange. A few weeks after our trip to Castellón, a group from Jaume I University came to Potsdam. For our students, it was part 2 of the trip so to speak, only this time they were the hosts and had to organize the agenda. On the one hand, we had our teaching and research, and on the other hand there was the Berlin-Brandenburg research landscape, which is very extensive. We had excursions to Brandenburg to the Archaeological State Museum and to Berlin, for example to the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, but also directly "on our doorstep" to Sanssouci Park, where we were able to present key aspects of ancient history at the University of Potsdam using the example of statues with antique motifs and explain aspects of the history of reception.

Alacán Friedrich: We, the students, prepared and led the tours ourselves. This was also informative for us and another important experience. We also showed our Spanish guests the Christmas market – including the first snow. Many of them were mesmerized by it!

The exchange program is funded by EDUC. How does it fit into the alliance's work?

Carlà-Uhink: We have been involved in EDUC from the very beginning, working closely with partners in Pécs (Hungary) and Cagliari (Italy). For example, we had already organized excursions to Italy.



The group at the Via del Pòrtic museum in Sagunt. Photo: Tom Dera



At the Plaza de la Virgen in Valencia. Photo: Lea Fürst

It was an absolute stroke of luck for us when Jaume I University joined EDUC in 2022: My predecessor as Professor of Ancient History, Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. Pedro Barceló, came to Germany from the region a long time ago and fostered relations with his home region and the institutions there, including the university, over the years – we were able to build on this. EDUC is based on the idea of promoting student mobility within Europe. It enables tailor-made forms of mobility, sometimes shorter, sometimes digital, and hopefully we will see a whole jointly organized degree program in the future.

Moreover, thanks to EDUC, a program like ours is not a one-off – and therefore has a lasting effect. The students see each other again and form long-term bonds. And perhaps they will then decide to spend a period abroad (e.g. via Erasmus+) at our partner university in Spain, or to write a thesis with a second examiner from among the colleagues at Jaume I University. I think the exchange program is important and I am very happy that I was able to take part in it as a lecturer. The flexibility and the variety of networking options that EDUC offers are great –

in 2025, for example, we are also organizing a "Blended Intensive Program" with the universities of Cagliari and Paris Nanterre.

So the exchange will take place again in 2024. How is the organization going and who can participate this year?

Carlà-Uhink: From 2024, we will help organize the event, hopefully for a few years. We now want to participate regularly with students from Potsdam – and I will also be involved as a lecturer. Five students from Potsdam will travel to Spain in October. Students of all subjects could take part, but ultimately it will probably be mainly those whose program has a connection to history and excavations from Roman times. The agenda will be similar to 2023: There will be excursions to museums, historical sites – and of course, a week at the excavation site. We are already looking forward to it!