



# Communiqué of the ICA Rectors and Deans Forum 2025

## Navigating Complexity: ICA Leading the Circular Bioeconomy Transformation

Vienna, 16–17 October 2025

Rectors, Presidents, Deans, and senior leaders of life science universities participating in the [15th ICA Rectors and Deans Forum](#) met in Vienna on 16-17 October 2025 to reflect on the evolving role of universities in advancing a sustainable, circular bioeconomy and strengthening the science–policy interface at regional, European, and global levels.

### Context and shared understanding

Participants acknowledged that the circular bioeconomy has become a central pillar of Europe’s response to climate change, biodiversity loss, resource scarcity, and societal wellbeing. The Forum highlighted the rapidly evolving European policy landscape, including the forthcoming EU Bioeconomy Strategy, the EU Life Sciences Strategy, and related initiatives shaping research, innovation, education, and industrial transformation.

The Forum reaffirmed that life science universities are uniquely positioned as **bridges between scientific knowledge, policy development, and societal transformation**. However, participants recognised that translating scientific excellence into lasting policy and societal impact requires new approaches, incentives, and forms of engagement.

### Key messages

➤ **From knowledge generation to co-creation.**

Participants emphasised that impact in the circular bioeconomy depends not only on excellent research, but on co-production of knowledge with policymakers, industry, civil society, and citizens. Universities must move beyond linear models of “knowledge transfer” towards sustained science-policy dialogue and co-creation.

➤ **Strengthening the science-policy interface**

The Forum highlighted the need for structured, trusted, and long-term interfaces that connect research evidence with policy design, implementation, and monitoring. Good practices from Europe and beyond demonstrate that continuity, mutual trust, and institutional commitment are essential for effective science-informed policymaking.

➤ **Universities as systemic actors in the circular bioeconomy**

Participants agreed that universities play multiple, interconnected roles: educating future professionals, generating and synthesising evidence, supporting innovation and entrepreneurship, and shaping narratives that guide societal change. These roles must be aligned within institutional strategies to maximise impact.

➤ **Global perspectives and shared responsibility**

Discussions underscored that the circular bioeconomy is a global challenge requiring international cooperation. Universities have a responsibility to engage in global bioeconomy dialogues, contribute to shared principles, and support capacity-building across regions.

➤ **Life science universities play a dual role in the circular bioeconomy transition**

Participants acknowledged that translating complexity into meaningful narratives for society, and building the competences and skills needed are necessary to turn ambition into action.

## **Commitments and actions**

Participants of the ICA Rectors and Deans Forum commit to:

1. **Embedding the circular bioeconomy and science-policy engagement** more strongly in university strategies, governance, education, and research agendas.
2. **Strengthening institutional capacities** for knowledge brokerage, policy engagement, and stakeholder co-creation, including through dedicated structures and training.
3. **Promoting interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches** that integrate natural sciences, social sciences, economics, and humanities.
4. **Enhancing collaboration within ICA**, sharing best practices, and jointly engaging with European and international policy processes relevant to the bioeconomy and life sciences.
5. **Supporting the next generation**, by integrating policy literacy, systems thinking, and societal engagement into life science education and by encouraging youth participation in bioeconomy dialogues.
6. **Simplifying complexity through coherent communication and positive narratives**

Participants committed to addressing the perceived complexity of the circular bioeconomy by developing clearer, solution-oriented narratives that preserve scientific depth while remaining accessible to diverse audiences. Emphasis was

placed on positive storytelling, tangible success cases, and benefit-driven communication to foster trust, overcome resistance to change, and engage society—particularly younger generations.

7. **Strengthening education, skills, and mutual recognition across Europe**  
The Forum highlighted the need to embed circular bioeconomy thinking across all levels of education through coherent curricula, micro-credentials, and lifelong learning pathways. Participants encouraged ICA to support the development of shared competence frameworks, harmonised professional profiles, and internationally recognisable qualifications to enhance mobility, transparency, and workforce readiness in the bioeconomy sector.

## Way forward

The Forum concludes that life science universities must act collectively and proactively to shape a **transformative circular bioeconomy** that operates within planetary boundaries, supports competitiveness and resilience, and contributes to a just and sustainable future.

ICA will build on the outcomes of this Forum and the European Bioeconomy Strategy and European Life Science Strategy, to further strengthen cooperation among its members and with policymakers, industry, and society. To this end, ICA's strategic plans for 2025–2027 will be updated to reflect the suggestions, needs, and expectations expressed during the Forum.

Adopted in Vienna,  
16-17 October 2025