

Brussels Institute for Advanced Studies, BRIAS

Why a Brussels Institute for Advanced Studies, BRIAS ?

Belgium, and Brussels in particular, is a patchwork of different socio-economic and cultural environments. It offers a unique potential for creativity and groundbreaking progress, making it very attractive to high-level researchers, artists, designers and all those who want to help shape a harmonious and sustainable future.

The Université Libre de Bruxelles, ULB, and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, VUB, are the two leading universities in Brussels. Their origin goes back 150 years. Five out of 10 Belgian Nobel laureates and two Fields medal laureates were professor and/or alumni of the universities¹.

The words "Libre" and "Vrije" in their name stands for free enquiry, which postulates independent reasoning and the rejection of all dogma. Indeed, both the ULB and the VUB strive to break down the walls of ignorance and dogmatism by stimulating groundbreaking research at the highest level of creativity, without taboos or prejudice. This implies crossing boundaries and building bridges between disciplines and different socio-economic or cultural environments.

Institutes for Advanced Studies, IASs, are incubators of ideas, with no philosophical or political restriction, where some of the very best scientists, artists or designers, coming from various fields and countries, are given the opportunity to work in an atmosphere of complete freedom, collaboration, mutual emulation and cross-fertilisation. The first IAS was created in Princeton, 1930. Since then, several IASs have been established worldwide.

Despite a considerable number of internationally acclaimed university laboratories, there is no IAS in Brussels or Belgium as of yet. The authorities of ULB and VUB have therefore decided to create a Brussels Institute for Advanced Studies (BRIAS) as a joint initiative.

Based on submitted projects, BRIAS will offer fellowships and housing to a number, typically between 15 and 20, of "BRIAS fellows", for periods of up to 10 months. From 2024 on, it will be located in Usquare, the prestigious, listed and currently being renovated military barracks in Elsene / Ixelles, situated within walking distance of campuses of both the ULB and VUB.

BRIAS will stimulate a close interaction between science and other fields of creativity, which are essential for a harmonious and sustainable future and which will contribute to the prestige of the Brussels universities, region and zone of influence.

¹ Henri La Fontaine, Nobel peace prize, alumnus ; Prof. Jules Bordet, Nobel medicine prize; Prof. Albert Claude, Nobel medicine prize; Prof. Ilya Prigogine, Nobel physics prize; Prof. François Englert, Nobel physics prize; Dr. Denis Mukwege, Nobel peace prize, alumnus; Prof. Pierre Deligne, Fields medal, alumnus; Prof. Jean Bourgain, Fields medal, alumnus.

Mission

The mission of the Brussels Institute for Advanced Studies is:

- To contribute to the advancement of science in an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary spirit by attracting the very best researchers at international level;
- To progress towards a sustainable world;
- To strengthen both the mutual and worldwide collaborations of the founding universities of BriAS, thanks to the hospitality offered to researchers and postdocs, thereby generating a community of researchers and alumni, part of the global network of IASs;
- To stimulate the interaction between science and creative fields such as arts and design, essential for a harmonious and sustainable future of the socio-economic and cultural environment of the Brussels region and influence zone;
- To contribute to the prestige of the Brussels Region and its constituents.

Vision

The vision of the Brussels Institute for Advanced Studies is to create an environment which is an incubator of ideas, with no philosophical or political restrictions, where some of the very best researchers, coming from diverse fields, are given the opportunity of pursuing their research in an atmosphere of total freedom, collaboration, mutual emulation and cross-fertilisation.

This vision supports the longstanding traditions and aspirations of both the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) of breaking down the walls of ignorance and dogmatism through science, without taboos or prejudice.

Unique Niche

BriAS will not simply be just another IAS. The traditions of ULB and VUB as founding universities highlight some unique niches such as subjects with important potential societal impacts; residency for researchers who have had to flee their countries; collaborations with countries where society faces critical challenges with respect to sustainability.

Interdisciplinary themes

In line with the aspiration of both founding universities, the objectives of the Usquare project, the ERDF convention and the emphyteusis agreement with the Brussels Region, the themes will be based on the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Periodically, one or more interdisciplinary themes will be defined. The theme(s) will be broad enough to stimulate international applicants from a multitude of disciplines to submit proposals, thereby allowing optimisation of potential interactions and cross-fertilisation between the selected BriAS fellows. The colliding worlds of arts, design, technology and sciences contribute an extra layer of inspiration and creativity.

BriAS fellows

Every year, once BriAS is fully operational, a maximum of 20 'BriAS fellows', top personalities in their respective fields, will be selected and temporarily move to Brussels for periods up to 10 months. Junior fellows may be selected for shorter stays. The applicants will be invited to specify how their contribution will fit into the general theme of the year, why they have chosen Brussels and which synergies they would like to develop with the local research teams.

Commitments by the BriAS fellows

Each fellow will be invited to present his/her work at seminar sessions, followed by a debate with all the attendees.

Presence of the fellows at BriAS will promote critical discussions, collaborations and community cohesion.

Working/living environment

BriAS will provide living quarters with common areas to welcome fellows and their families within the BriAS premises of Usquare. The working and living environment will stimulate scientific creativity, networking and collaboration. The architectural plan will be such that the fellows naturally meet and come together rather than isolate themselves in their living quarters.

The fellows will have access to the on-site infrastructure, such as the FabLab etc... and regular presence in university and affiliated laboratories will be strongly encouraged.

Apart from the seminars amongst the fellows, a regular secondary programme will be developed with invited and visiting researchers, artists, designers and people with a key role in society.

The BriAS Pilot Phase (2021-2024)

During the pilot phase, BriAS will be progressively implemented in order to allow BriAS to be fully operational by 2024, when Usquare will be ready to welcome the BriAS fellows and their families. The proposed theme is " The past, present and future of food, climate and sustainability".

BriAS may already offer a grant, partially covering the living costs or housing, to a limited number of researchers who have chosen to spend a sabbatical at VUB or ULB.

Contact data:

BriAS
Usquare VUB-ULB
50 av. Roosevelt CP 155
B-1050 Brussels

Current BriAS directors:

Frank Deconinck frank.deconinck@vub.be	+32 475 66 84 98
Serge Jaumain Serge.Jaumain@ulb.be	+32 476 49 80 50