

“To make do with ignorance is a denial of  
democracy and reduces it to a sham.”

(Amin Maalouf  
*in Disordered World: Setting  
a New Course for the Twenty-First Century,*  
Bloomsbury, 2011)

## Strategic project for Université Paris Sciences et Lettres (PSL) from now to 2035

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### Table des matières

I.	Raison d’être and challenges faced.....	2
II.	A sequential strategy from now to 2035, divided into two phases (2025-2030 and 2030-2035).....	2
III.	Ten strategic actions from now to 2035.....	3
1.	Consolidating PSL’s foundations to build a global European university.....	3
2.	Making PSL an innovative globally-ranked research university.....	3
3.	Recruiting and retaining talents in a context of exacerbated wage competition.....	4
4.	Fostering the multiplier effect of component schools’ brands and relations with NROs.....	5
5.	“Open excellence”: opening up to social, territorial, and international diversity.....	5
6.	Making PSL a pioneering university for change.....	6
7.	Increasing student numbers but also maintaining academic excellence.....	6
8.	Bolstering governance to foster collegiality and inter-school cooperation.....	7
9.	Diversifying PSL’s business model to guarantee its sustainability.....	7
10.	Bolstering its international reputation and developing cooperation in the Global South.....	7
	Conclusion.....	8

## I. Raison d'être and challenges faced

Université Paris Sciences et Lettres (PSL) holds a singular place in the French and European higher education and research (HE&R) landscape: due to its components, including some of the longest-standing and most prestigious institutions in Europe, due to its unique governance model, and due to its thematic coverage encompassing sciences, arts, and humanities. In this respect, Université PSL has also been home to winners of Nobel Prizes, Fields Medals, and both Molière and César awards (for achievements in French theatre and cinema respectively)... Since its founding, PSL has endeavored to **combine excellence and diversity**, high-impact disciplinary research and exacting interdisciplinarity, increasing knowledge and break-through innovations. On the back of these assets, PSL has set itself apart with notable performances in international rankings, as well as success in the biggest national calls (Excellence, university innovation centers, AI Clusters). As a result, PSL is **directly contributing to the reindustrialization, competitiveness, and reputation of France and Europe**, making its sponsors' public investment one of the most profitable. It also provides its own resources and public-private partnerships that must be grown and consolidated to increase and guarantee the sustainability of its central role in the economy and society in general. This also makes **Université PSL a French jewel: its ambition must be consolidated and its model constantly adapted** to face the challenges of a fast-changing world. It is in this spirit that I am submitting my application, based on four fundamental principles:

1. **Open excellence**, making our university a model of social, territorial, and international inclusion. PSL will provide a welcoming home for talents, whether scientific, artistic, athletic, or entrepreneurial, to build a more inclusive society together.
2. **Collegial governance**, based on cooperation between components, aiming to bolster efficiency, coordination, and collective innovation.
3. **Institutional consolidation and budgetary sustainability**, by diversifying own resources to guarantee the sustainability of major programs and absorb upcoming budgetary shocks.
4. **Bolstering academic excellence and international attractiveness**. Loyal to its tradition, our university must continue to welcome, train, and **support future Marie Curies, Jean-Pierre Serres, and Esther Duflos**, capable of **pushing the limits of knowledge** and helping us to understand the world better.

To bring this vision to fruition, a precise and pragmatic strategy must be implemented, based on the practical actions I will explain in detail below.

## II. A sequential strategy from now to 2035, divided into two phases (2025-2030 and 2030-2035)

In ten years' time, PSL must be fully recognized globally as a major research-intensive university, as much for its scientific discoveries as its training courses, prized by international students from Bachelor's to Doctorate degree level, and attractive for the world's best researchers. To achieve this, I suggest a two-stage **sequential strategy**. The first, lasting four or five years, is dedicated to **consolidating** PSL's foundations in an uncertain environment to prepare for a **transformation** on a global scale for the second phase (2030-2035). In a context of radical uncertainties hanging over HE&R in France (threats to own resources, drying up of funding via calls for projects, downward trend in student numbers, increased competition with private institutions backed by powerful investment funds, the challenge of wage attractiveness, etc.), it is crucial to **consolidate and reinforce our university's foundations**. This requires **diversification of own resources and bolstered cooperation between component schools**. This is an **absolute priority** for me. It is also necessary to **consolidate structured assets at federal level**, such as **PariSanté Campus**, and to **guarantee the sustainability of major research programs and "graduate program" (GP) courses**.

PSL is built on solid foundations. With its **federal governance** structure, it demonstrated its ability to quickly and effectively address the central governance crisis experienced at the end of the first half of 2024. The core of PSL's reactor is the **assets accumulated by the schools, which they manage according to their areas of expertise on behalf of** the entire PSL community. Joint projects (major research programs, Graduate Programs, joint training courses such as CPES, institutes, etc.) are fully coordinated and bolster schools' assets. However, issues in terms of coordination or perception of mutual interest remain. The risk

of competition between central governance initiatives, which are sometimes redundant given what the component schools already do, must be eliminated. **Central governance must play a leading federative role with regard to organization and inter-school cooperation** by helping to construct Bachelor's and Master's degrees combining bi-disciplinarity, highest-level expertise and cooperation between researchers from different school laboratories. **PSL must become everybody's business. The schools must also make an effort** that is only possible if **central governance becomes a genuine instrument to coordinate and catalyze inter-school cooperation initiatives**, the third dimension of PSL's construction, after the first two set out in its articles of association (subsidiarity and mutualization). This consolidation process will serve to prepare for the second phase that will be devoted to the international deployment of research and training assets in collaboration with the world's best universities by, for instance, building and coordinating the PSL School of Arts, in conjunction with the sciences, or otherwise guaranteeing global recognition of a major "health and life sciences" center in connection with ParisSanté Campus at Val-de-Grâce.

### III. Ten strategic actions from now to 2035

#### 1. Consolidating PSL's foundations to build a global European university

PSL must address several financial and institutional challenges, with a fall in public funding and uncertainties surrounding IDEXs. The current business model is 95% based on in the vast majority fixed-term public funding, and this situation is not viable in the long term. To prepare for the future, there is a need to both **define strategic areas and the way to combine them** and a **method to increase and better allocate financial and human resources**.

- **Continuing development of major areas of research** (climate change, biodiversity, health and biotechnologies, artificial intelligence (AI), and human and social sciences (HSS), as well as the arts and humanities).
- **Bolstering fundamental research programs**, supported by **calls for projects for which preemptive budgetary sustainability measures must be taken**.
- **Preempting risks of erosion of certain key areas of research at PSL** via an active recruitment policy based on close cooperation with NROs.
- **Promoting interdisciplinarity**, which only bears fruit if it is based on complementarities between disciplinary centers of excellence in terms of research and training. PSL fosters in-depth disciplinary study and fills in knowledge gaps to drive innovation for the good of society.
- **Re-evaluating, in a collegial manner via the Directorate, all calls for projects won since 2019** (IDéES, ExcellencEs, CMA, COMP, etc.) **to eliminate short-termism, focus resources on objectives shared by different programs**, rationally and strategically implement requisite redeployments of unobligated funds, and establish a methodology for anticipating shocks to be shared with the entire Directorate, enabling the construction of a diversified model that is sustainable in all external circumstances.

#### 2. Making PSL an innovative globally-ranked research university

PSL must **strengthen its position among the world's leading universities** over the next ten years. Being well-positioned in **international rankings**, with their well-known bias, **is not an end in itself**, but must be considered a consequence of **excellent research for the common good**. To do so, research strategy must be bolstered based on collaborations with NROs (National Research Organizations). To boost its international attractiveness, PSL must focus its efforts on its areas of excellence and continue to invest in interdisciplinarity between these areas, harnessing specific resources.

- **Making PSL's undergraduate programs visible internationally** by organizing them by major schools (arts, humanities, engineering sciences, organizational and decision-making sciences, mathematics and artificial intelligence, sciences, and humanities).
- **Creating a major student selection and admissions department**.

- Launch the Paris School of Artificial Intelligence (PSAI) in September 2025 and the Paris School of Engineering in 2026. Create a **PSL School of Arts backed by PSL component arts and architecture schools** (CNSAD, ENSAD, Malaquais, Conservatoire de Danse et de Musique) to development bi-disciplinary Bachelor's and Master's degrees to include in **10-year objectives contracts with the French Ministry for Higher Education & Research**.
- Work with the Directorate to determine the **various projects for Paris Schools of PSL**, based on the model of the Paris School of AI.
- **Developing “joint theses” supplementing the SACRe thesis program** (Sciences, Arts, Creation, Research) co-funded by school foundations and own resources from calls for projects. SACRe theses must be bolstered for Arts doctorates.
- Better **coordinating CPES Multidisciplinary Undergraduate degrees with Graduate Programs** for which student recruitments need to be highly internationalized via the creation of more PhD tracks.
- Developing partnerships with renowned international institutions to consolidate PSL's position on the world stage. For example, the Bachelor's degree of the future **Paris School of AI** can be awarded as a dual degree with the University of Berkeley, with which discussions have already begun.
- Continuing the construction of the PSL **“Pôle Santé”** (health-medicine-biotechnological engineering-AI center) by identifying international partners, bolstering PSL's role in Parisanté Campus, and investing in gaps in knowledge in health-related AI, economics, management and humanities (*IHU Cancer de la Femme* [University Hospital Institute, women's cancer institute], *Santé Numérique en Société* [digital health in society], etc.).
- **Bolstering component schools' laboratory resources** Though the LPR (*Loi de Programmation de la Recherche*, French research programming act) enabled investment in new streams (e.g., junior professorships), it invested little in working collectives in laboratories.
- Bolstering presence in European research programs: ERC, Horizon 2030.
- Establishing PSL University Press as a joint venture.
- Permitting PSL students who so wish to opt to **spend a semester of their Bachelor's degree course at another PSL school**.

### 3. Recruiting and retaining talents in a context of exacerbated wage competition

The attractiveness of talents, whether students, researchers, or research professors (RP) is a fundamental issue for PSL as elsewhere for French HE&R. In a context where wage differentials with OECD countries are driving a **brain drain** abroad or to private business schools, it is essential to implement an effective talent recruitment and retention policy. Our university must innovate in this area based on the opportunities available due to its status as a major school (“Grand Etablissement”) and the agility of its components.

- **Improving the wages** of junior RPs, by offering them attractive packages including subsidized accommodation (along the lines of the agreement between Dauphine-PSL and Cité Internationale).
- Developing an HR policy for **administrative staff** and improve the attractiveness of positions
- **Developing differentiated tracks** for RPs, by offering professional development opportunities according to lifecycles (teaching, research, entrepreneurship).
- **Encouraging inter-school co-recruitments** for interdisciplinary projects, which will permit us to attract international profiles but also optimize costs.
- The LPR was missing one central reform for the future of HE&R: standardization of teaching and research conditions for RPs and NRO researchers. PSL can create the conditions for this standardization. Work must be done with NROs at PSL. The “associate professors” program could be reviewed and expanded.
- Creating an **“intra-PSL scheme similar to IUF”** (*Institut Universitaire de France*, French University Institute) to attract and retain senior researchers by offering them stimulating career prospects.
- Creating a **teaching account** (savings account to take sabbaticals: one of my achievements at Dauphine-PSL) at PSL-level.
- Designing an ambitious research strategy jointly coordinated with NROs based on an RP and researcher recruitment policy. For example, focusing freshly created researcher and RP positions on joint interdisciplinary projects.
- Identifying different ways to catalyze emergence in research and training: calls for bids, creation of spaces, school research head mobility programs, packages, teaching repositories, etc.

- Focusing school foundations and the PSL FCS (*Fondation de Coopération Scientifique*, Scientific Cooperation Foundation) on shared targets.
- Leveraging all ways to attract and develop the loyalty of the best French and international talents. Capitalizing on experiments at CNRS (CNRS AI Rising Talents), Inria (Choose France), Inserm, etc. Paris has a strong brand, bolstered by the success of the Olympics, **PSL must be its scientific and cultural flag bearer.**

#### 4. Fostering the multiplier effect of component schools' brands and relations with NROs.

Despite its good rankings, **PSL does not yet have sufficient brand recognition** with international students. Surveys of this group show that Sorbonne University is better recognized due to the impact of its historic and highly distinguished brand. PSL's very long-standing and prestigious component schools have a more significant brand effect, particularly maintained via their alumni networks. In this fertile ground, the university and the PSL Foundation will coordinate the following actions:

- Combine the PSL brand with the component brands and propose a reconfiguration of the visibility of PSL University (logo).
- Bringing together the schools' alumni networks for a major annual ceremony in Paris, New York, and London in conjunction with consular representatives to raise awareness of PSL and its practical achievements.
- Creating a **Made in PSL award to recognize the successes of PSL alumni** in the scientific, cultural, athletic, artistic, and economic fields.

#### 5. "Open excellence": opening up to social, territorial, and international diversity

One of PSL's big strengths must be its ability to combine academic excellence with **social and territorial openness**. It is crucial to **reduce social and territorial inequalities** in terms of access to selective tracks. Students with equal skills must have access to PSL's excellent training courses, regardless of their social or geographical origins.

I suggest implementing an **active openness strategy** focused on four areas:

##### i) Diversity

- Bolstering **assistance programs** for underprivileged students, permitting them to overcome barriers to enter selective tracks.
- Extending **equal opportunities programs** (promotion of gap years, **scholarships and financial aid** for internships and studies abroad funded by PSL Foundation and school sponsors, coaching programs, etc.).
- Creating **indicators to measure** access inequalities and set quantified goals to reduce them, including regular monitoring of the impact of the policies put in place (10 access inequality items correlated to social and territorial origin with equal fundamental skills to be reduced: accommodation, international mobility and long stays abroad; languages, digital and AI; culture and arts; health and mental health; sports, solidarity networks).
- Fostering **commitment to organizations** by reducing inequalities in terms of access to student organizations, to develop a spirit of solidarity and inclusion.
- **Creating a Disabled Student Master Plan** coordinated with equivalent plans at component schools. **Monitoring the occupational integration of disabled students.**
- Implementing an **ambitious strategy to attract women** to STEM (sciences, technology, engineering, mathematics) disciplines. Female PSL researchers could be called on to play an ambassadorial role for their disciplines with young people in underprivileged rural and urban territories. **Special scholarships for female students** on STEM tracks and organization of **open days** and awareness events must be put in place.

##### ii) Talents: artists, athletes, and entrepreneurs

- Duplicating the CPES and SMD programs as "Talent programs" by adapting them (four years instead of three)
- Extending the talents program to certain PSL Master's degrees

### iii) Society and democracy

- Transforming the PSL “Sharing knowledge” group into a knowledge dissemination institute to safeguard democracy.
- Creating a “Climate, Migration, Global South & Geopolitics” Think Tank along the lines of the Kennedy School at Harvard in connection with the PSL *Institut d'Actions Publiques* (Public Actions Institute) via Collège de France, ENS, Dauphine and EPHE joining forces with CNRS and IRD.
- **Supporting and coordinating schools’ projects to inform societal debates** (Savoirs ENS, République des Savoirs ENS, YouTube channels, Dauphine Éclairages, etc., PSL Cube in Excellence). Supporting and developing the PSL Future Of Active Health program. Creating a sciences/theatre program under the aegis of CNSAD and the PSL “Knowledge sharing” group to disseminate research results by organizing joint playwright-researcher projects following in the footsteps of the “le sens des mots” company or the “Théâtre de la Reine Blanche.”
- Providing direct support for national and international initiatives (Barcelona declaration on open research information), participation in the French chapter of COARA to work on changes to research evaluation rules.
- **Continuing the construction of a PSL open science strategy.** An open publication and data strategy for all PSL-funded projects must be adopted and a researcher awareness campaign for the adoption of ORCID identifiers (identifier, affiliation, and publications) to promote PSL’s visibility launched.
- **Creating a library of PSL knowledge using specific PSL generative AI.**

### iv) Territorial network

- Promoting the location of bi-disciplinary arts and sciences or engineering and management training courses in outlying urban areas of the Paris region and rural areas.
- Joining forces with the sites of our engineering schools (Mines-Sophia Antipolis) and our arts schools (CNSAD, ENSAD).

## 6. Making PSL a pioneering university for change

- Drawing inspiration from Berkeley University that has implemented an innovative “**Change Makers**” program designed to train students to become leaders capable of positively transforming society. This program focuses on ethical leadership, social entrepreneurship, and responsible innovation. On this program, students develop practical projects designed to solve societal issues, but also acquire project management, strategy, and communications skills. Creating a **PSL student “change maker” status** including educational recognition of this commitment.
- Making component schools’ incubators and PSL’s structure into catalysts for innovation by further coordinating them to harness synergies and complementarities.
- Developing an action research strategy for ecological transformation and biodiversity conservation and establishing a Master Plan on this subject
- Creating a dedicated vice-presidency on the topic.

## 7. Increasing student numbers but also maintaining academic excellence

French HE&R is clashing with a Malthusian conception of the production of its educated elites: alongside mass universities at which undergraduate-level failure rates remain unusually high, the *grandes écoles* and ultra-selective preparatory classes produce - despite the genuine progress made over the last few years - small numbers of students who nonetheless remain invisible in comparison to the global competition. Investing in selective tracks means offering exacting training to as many students as possible. The difference in terms of expertise and application quality between applicants admitted on these restricted lists and the following 15 to 20% who miss out is extremely tenuous. Our socioeconomic model requires additional skills to drive technological and social innovations, and guarantee a successful ecological transition. PSL could plan a **15% increase in its student numbers** by 2035, which would represent approx. 3,000 additional students on selective tracks. This growth should be accompanied by an appropriate real-estate strategy, aiming to create new campuses or extend existing infrastructure in Paris and the surrounding region. In addition, it would require the creation of **new positions for research professors and administrative personnel**, funded by contracts with the French government and public-private partnerships.

## 8. Bolstering governance to foster collegiality and inter-school cooperation

PSL's governance is flawed in terms of coordination and cooperation between central governance and component schools. These internal tensions limit the university's efficiency. It is therefore essential to introduce **collegial governance**, based on transparency and cooperation between all stakeholders, ending a practice of bilateral functioning and asymmetrical information based on a "hub" (Mazarine) / "spokes" (schools) model. Decision-making processes, already implemented during the interim phase (weekly board meetings setting the Directorate's agenda, etc.), permit better involvement of schools in decision making. The **Academic Senate** must be consulted ahead of strategic projects. **Central governance must coordinate efforts without competing with components' initiatives**. Social dialogue with staff representatives and student organizations must be constructive and based on principles of mutual respect. We must:

- **Formally establish internal and inter-school processes** by aligning timetables between central PSL and schools, and guarantee transparency and traceability by reducing processing lead times, and bolster the PSL accounting office.
- **Fostering exchanges with schools by business lines** by bolstering synergies and the feeling of belonging to PSL by creating a climate of trust and mutual respect.

## 9. Diversifying PSL's business model to guarantee its sustainability

PSL principally depends on public funding and calls for projects. To guarantee its sustainability, it is crucial to diversify the university's financial resources. There is therefore a need to:

- **Bolster own resources** by developing research-based internationalized **life-long learning** in close cooperation with components and increasing income from sponsors and alumni by targeting interdisciplinary inter-school programs (e.g., "Hydrogen and energy transition" certificate launched by Chimie-PSL and Dauphine-PSL).
- Design a **real-estate strategy** and providing services to students and indirectly investing in the future.
- **Promote real-estate assets to generate additional resources** and better seize vocational training opportunities.
- Create an **accreditation and funding department** to centralize management of partnerships, research contracts and private funding to optimize available resources and guarantee transparent management of partnerships.
- Make FCS (*Fondation de Coopération Scientifique*, Scientific Cooperation Foundation) a catalyst for Université PSL's initiatives and strategy. Developing planned management of the **foundation's leverage focused on the university's major strategic focuses** (equal opportunities, student accommodation, international mobility, supporting promotion of research, organization of global socio-economic research chairs in the university's multidisciplinary research programs, etc.).
- Develop **research sponsorship** by setting clear officially-approved rules such as **non-exclusive ties with private stakeholders** based on a code of ethics discussed and adopted by the PSL Directorate and Board of Directors.

## 10. Bolstering its international reputation and developing cooperation in the Global South

PSL must position itself as an international stakeholder by adopting a dual strategy consisting of attracting talents from all over the world but also contributing to development of the Global South. This involves:

- Mutualizing **campuses abroad** to attract international students.
- Creating **dual degrees** with prestigious universities, and opening new campuses.
- A **co-development strategy** with the Global South, particularly via training projects in key areas such as artificial intelligence, biotechnologies and engineering, to foster retention of local talents.

### Conclusion

This strategic project for PSL will serve to consolidate its foundations, bolster its governance and diversify its resources, as well as establishing it as an excellent global research university at the forefront of international cooperation and social responsibility.