Beyond Membership: Reflections on Active Engagement in Informatics Europe

With my term as Board Member and Vice-President of Informatics Europe coming to an end, this is an appropriate moment to look back on more than a decade of active engagement and consider what it has brought to my department. The reflections that follow highlight some of the lessons learned and why I have come to believe that the true institutional benefit of membership extends far beyond affiliation itself, emerging instead from active participation in and contribution to the community.

Kim Mens, UCLouvain, August 2026

Our computer science department joined Informatics Europe in 2014. Since then, we have engaged through governance roles, working groups, conferences, and data initiatives. The reflections below illustrate how this involvement has contributed to institutional learning, collaboration, strategic insight, professional development, and international visibility.

Contributing to a European Informatics Community

When departments join professional associations, they often expect tangible benefits such as access to information, participation in events, and opportunities to expand their professional networks. One of the most rewarding aspects of our involvement, however, has been the opportunity to contribute to shaping the European Informatics community rather than simply benefiting from it.

I have had the privilege of serving successively as departmental representative, Board Director, Executive Board member, and Vice-President of Informatics Europe. These roles provided direct exposure to the strategic discussions that helped define the future of Informatics research and education across Europe and, more broadly, its impact on society.

While such positions bring a certain degree of visibility, their greatest value lies elsewhere. They offer the opportunity to engage with a community of academic leaders who collectively reflect on challenges that affect us all: the development of informatics curricula, changes in academic publishing, the rise of artificial intelligence, diversity and inclusion, research funding, open science, sustainability, and the societal implications of digital technologies.

Participating in these discussions has enabled us to contribute our own perspectives while learning from colleagues across Europe. In this sense, Informatics Europe is not merely a professional association but a community whose direction is shaped by its members.

Tangible Participation in Working Groups

If governance offers a strategic perspective, the working groups provide a more hands-on way to engage with the community by bringing individual and institutional expertise and initiatives to the European level.

Informatics Europe hosts working groups covering topics such as Education Research, Software Research, Diversity and Inclusion, Ethics, Open Science, Green ICT, Early Career Researchers, Policy Recommendations, and Data Analysis and Reporting. These groups provide a practical framework for developing initiatives, producing outputs, and advancing topics of shared interest at the European level.

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I have been most involved in the Education Research Working Group. Beyond its focus on informatics education, it connected me with colleagues exploring similar questions and eventually led to my participation in, and later organisation of, the SCHIER Summer School on Informatics Education Research.

More recently, I joined the Software Research Working Group, which aims to strengthen the recognition of software science as a strategic research area and to advocate for greater European investment in software research.

For me, such working groups are among the most tangible expressions of what Informatics Europe does best: bringing together people with shared interests and transforming collective expertise into action.

Learning from Collective Experience

An important outcome of these communities is the production and dissemination of knowledge, insights, and best practices. Informatics Europe regularly publishes reports, recommendations, policy statements, and collections of good practices addressing issues that are highly relevant to Informatics departments across Europe. These topics range from diversity and inclusion to open science, research funding, ethics, digital policy, and informatics education.

Among the initiatives that have particularly impressed me is the long-term effort devoted to the Informatics Reference Framework for Schools and the associated dialogue with the European Commission, advancing the recognition of informatics as a fundamental discipline. Other notable examples include recommendations on Open Access publishing, which examine publication models, costs, and academic integrity; policy statements advocating stronger support for curiosity-driven Informatics research and European digital sovereignty; and the Minerva Informatics Equality Award catalogue, which documents a decade of successful initiatives promoting gender equality in Informatics education and research.

The Education Research Working Group is currently developing best-practice guidance on collaboration between academia and industry in courses, capstone projects, and bachelor and master theses. Likewise, the Software Research Working Group has developed a Software Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) and is actively engaging with European policy-makers to help shape future research priorities.

The value of these resources lies not only in the recommendations themselves but also in the fact that they make institutional experience reusable. By documenting successful approaches and the obstacles encountered along the way, they help departments build on existing knowledge rather than repeatedly developing solutions from scratch.

The Importance of Evidence-Based Decision Making

A resource that deserves special mention is the Informatics Higher Education Data Portal and the associated *Key Data & Trends* reports.

The portal provides comparative data on Informatics higher education across Europe, including student enrolment and graduation figures, gender distribution, institutional structures, and academic career paths. The underlying dataset, which spans multiple European countries and more than a decade of observations, is unique in its focus on Informatics. It enables institutions to explore trends, benchmark themselves against their peers, and conduct analyses tailored to their specific needs. Its future value will depend on the continued engagement of members, particularly through the Data Analysis & Reporting Working Group, in identifying new indicators, expanding the dataset, and developing new analyses.

For our department, these data have proven particularly valuable during quality assurance exercises and curriculum reviews. They have enabled us to benchmark our programmes against those of comparable

institutions, place local developments in a broader European context, and support strategic discussions with evidence rather than assumptions. Too often, discussions about higher education strategy rely on anecdotes or local impressions. Comparative European data provide a stronger basis for decision-making and help departments frame local challenges within a broader context.

Building Collaborations and Expanding Networks

Networking is often cited as one of the benefits of professional associations, but over the years I have come to appreciate just how important and enduring these professional relationships can be.

Participation in governance bodies, working groups, ECSS, webinars, and other Informatics Europe activities has allowed me to connect with colleagues from universities across Europe and from many different areas of the discipline. Many of these connections have evolved from occasional encounters into long-term professional relationships that provide trusted sources of advice, expertise, and perspective when addressing institutional challenges or exploring new opportunities.

Perhaps equally importantly, these networks contribute to the international visibility of participating departments. Active engagement increases an institution's visibility while creating opportunities to contribute its expertise and perspectives beyond its own national context.

A Rich Ecosystem of Resources

Alongside its people and activities, Informatics Europe offers a rich ecosystem of resources that supports research, teaching, and academic leadership.

Over the years, my department has benefited from its reports, surveys, policy recommendations, webinars, leadership courses, workshops, and summer schools. The *IE Bulletin* keeps us informed about developments across the association and its member institutions, while the recently launched *IE Perspectives* magazine provides a complementary space for more in-depth reflections and exchanges of ideas from across the community.

The association also offers a range of practical services, including a European job platform, research and education directories, tailored department assessments, and extensive collections of reports and publications.

What I particularly appreciate is the breadth and relevance of the topics covered. Whether a department is newly established or long established, reviewing its strategy, exploring curriculum innovation, fostering a more inclusive culture, seeking evidence to inform decision-making, or looking for partners for international projects, there is usually a relevant initiative, publication, resource, or event to engage with.

Together, these resources ensure that the value of membership extends well beyond individual events and remains relevant throughout the year.

ECSS: Where the Community Comes Together

No reflection on Informatics Europe would be complete without mentioning the European Informatics Leaders Summit (ECSS), the association's flagship annual event. Unlike most conferences, ECSS is not centred on a specific research area but on the broader strategic challenges and opportunities facing Informatics and its institutions across Europe.

The programme brings together thought-provoking keynote talks, strategy workshops, activities for early-career researchers, poster sessions, networking opportunities, policy discussions, working-group meetings, award ceremonies, and the association's General Assembly.

What I particularly value about ECSS is the quality of the conversations it fosters. The programme encourages participants to look beyond their immediate research interests and reflect on wider developments shaping our discipline. Equally valuable are the informal conversations that help participants better understand how other institutions approach similar challenges.

For anyone seeking to understand the breadth of Informatics Europe's activities and derive the greatest value from membership, ECSS remains, in my view, the single most important event in the annual calendar. It provides a unique opportunity to gain a panoramic view of the association's activities and priorities.

Looking Back and Looking Forward

Looking back on these years of involvement, I am proud of the role we have played in strengthening the standing of Informatics in Europe, promoting responsible research and education, and supporting the discipline's contribution to society. At the same time, I am deeply grateful for everything our department has gained from Informatics Europe, both strategically and practically.

I have become convinced that the benefits of Informatics Europe are closely tied to the engagement of its members. Membership provides access to valuable resources and a stronger collective voice, but active participation multiplies that value. Through its many activities and initiatives, the association has consistently provided a stimulating environment in which institutions can learn from one another and evolve together.

As my term comes to an end, I am especially grateful for the many colleagues I have had the privilege to meet and work with across Europe. More than anything, this experience has reinforced my belief that the challenges facing Informatics research and education are best addressed through collaboration, and that Informatics Europe provides an effective framework for doing so.

Author Biography

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