A8.3, O1: Positions together with European University Alliances

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This document has been developed during the pilot phase of the ECIU University Erasmus+ project between 2019 - 2022.

Beneficiaries

- Aalborg University, Denmark
- Dublin City University, Ireland
- Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania
- Linköping University, Sweden
- Tampereen Korkeakoulusäätiö sr, Finland
- Hamburg University of Technology, Germany
- Universidade de Aveiro, Portugal
- Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona, Spain
- University of Stavanger, Norway
- Universita degli Studi di Trento, Italy
- Institut National des Sciences Appliquées de Toulouse, France
- University of Twente, The Netherlands

Abstract

This deliverable is a collection of three position papers developed together with the other 1st round European Universities Alliances in 2019-2021. The papers have not been further modified for the purposes of this deliverable but are attached as such without further elaborations.

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1.1 Introduction

The first generation of European University Alliances offers its expertise to realise the full roll-out of European Universities. The Alliances that are part of the first European University-pilot under Erasmus+ got together in an informal group to collaborate on project activities, share information and learn from each other. Five subgroups are established, gathering the expertise on project management, a European degree, a legal entity, multilingualism and R&I Policy.

This informal document lists challenges we are facing at the national or European levels that could hinder the full transnational operation of our alliances, as well as the identification of possible solutions.

We have to bear in mind the limits of giving feedback based on strong evidence at this early stage. A clearer picture of the needs and challenges will grow as the alliances develop. This document consists only of informal input, enabling us to give input as freely as possible, and as a starting point for further discussions.

We are eager to working together with Europe and its Member States to realise the full roll-out of European Universities, and we look forward to staying in close contact about the next steps.

This input is to raise awareness at the European and Members State level for issues linked to:

- Long-term support (incl. funding);
- Quality assurance, recognition, European degree;
- Legal entities;
- Language policies;
- Mobility (incl. needs for virtual mobility);
- Micro-credentials;
- R&I policy.

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Una Europa, The 4EU+ Alliance, ARQUS, CHARM-EU, CIVICA, CIVIS, EU-CONEXUS, ECIU University, European Digital University, EPICUR, EU4ART, EUGLOH, EUTOPIA, FORTHEM, SEA-EU, UNITE!, YUFE

Table 1. Challenges and Possible Solutions for the full roll-out of European Universities

Challenges and examples	Possible solutions	
	At the national level	At the European level
Long-term support		
Unclarity about the future policies There is unclarity about the short and mid, and long-term developments of the European Universities' Initiative. Will there be new calls in the future, will the focus lie on the existing Alliances or will there be more universities involved? Alliances need clarity to align the strategy with expected future developments.	Give clarity about the political ambitions for the 41 European University Alliances.	Give an overview of the plans, including a timeline. The further development of the EUI should be based on the pilot phase and there should be an element of co-creation with the current alliances when developing the future vision for the initiative.
Funding constraints • There is limited (EU, national, regional) funding available compared with the ambitions and expected results, e.g personnel funding: Alliances require many key stakeholders of the partner universities to participate and dedicate time to define, plan and implement structural, administrative and academic changes and actions. Additional personnel resources can often not be provided, which means that important tasks are additional work for university personnel. This can negatively impact their capacity to participate actively in the creation of sustainable Alliances.	Political support for Member State contributions to a stable budget for Erasmus+, Horizon Europe and the European Universities' Initiative at the European level, e.g. a special, long-term, funding instrument for European Universities.	Presentation of a framework of pre-evaluation for follow-up funding as soon as possible to give alliances enough possibility to plan. Development of an interim funding instrument for European Universities.

• Moreover, since the Alliances are continuously scaling up their activities there is not only an already existing, but also a further growing lack of funding. • The COVID-19 pandemic, which in itself already increased the workload and work pressure of our university staff, created an extra burden on the Alliances. The uncertainty about follow-up funding, funding conditions and funding instruments results in concrete challenges like contractual follow-up with project management staff, the continuity of cross-cutting activities with SwafS, or uncertainty for the students we are recruiting.	Greater and more harmonised national support for European Universities, the current big differences among countries should be overcome. We need support for sustainable co-financing instruments at the national (and regional) level, e.g. Support for European Universities as criterium of the general financial means provided by national/regional ministries. More funding dedicated to staff and IT infrastructure and equipment. Partner institutions involved in European Universities should be allowed to transfer a limited number of teaching and teaching support staff to a European status (thereby safeguarding all rights related to career building and social security) for a limited period in time. Continued payment during this transfer period enables the home universities to finance the replacement of these teachers in their home universities. To keep academic staff motivated to engage, a complementary effort from both national authorities and the EU, offering support and stimuli to our academic staff.	More funding for Alliances for a longer period (3-5 years minimum). More funding to Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe in the new MFF 2021-27 and a clear indication by the European Commission on how to better finance this initiative. Funding for the European Universities must be sustainable in the next MFF. The long term "institutional" and "financial" support must match the expectations raised to truly be instrumental and allow the objectives for the European Higher Education area to be reached. To keep academic staff motivated to engage, a complementary effort from both national authorities and the EU, offering support and stimuli to our academic staff. When it comes to funding European Universities, the focus of funding opportunities should not solely lie with joint Ba/Ma/PhD degree programmes, but also acknowledge other, innovative

		educational models that differentiate European Universities from existing international partnerships and consortia.
Unclarity about the evaluation of the pilot How to (collectively) evaluate this first pilot? What will be de guidelines and the procedures? Will we stay with the 2020 perimeter of European universities (41 alliances, 280+ institutions) or is there a need for a process to expand the concept and the experience?	These questions need a debate at the national level, the Alliances must be included.	These questions need a debate at the European level, the Alliances must be included. Clarity is needed as soon as possible.
Quality assurance, recognition, European degree		
European degree • The concept of a 'European degree' is unclear. Many European Universities Alliances are discussing what a European degree may look like, e.g. a European degree as a qualification or quality label. The Alliances will experiment with all sorts of jointly implemented degree programmes, including dual, double, multiple and joint degree programmes, and also 'lighter' versions of joint curriculum development & implementation, to develop and offer our pilots. Questions in this respect: a) Added-value of the European degree b) How to create complementarity between national degrees and European degrees c) Avoid an additional level of technocracy d) Time constraints: The administrative and legal barriers between different countries and educational systems cannot be overcome during this limited period. Three years is – for new university constellations – about what it takes to get to know	Ensure more flexibility in national QA systems. Prioritisation and support for necessary legal changes. This requires close dialogue between the Alliance (partners), governments and the European Commission (see also examples in the row National QA frameworks and legislation). E.g. for a framework and procedures allowing the recognition and credits of courses taught transnational and online, or for virtual mobility and/or blended mobility (regardless of the COVID crisis).	Leadership from the European Commission to define the concept of a 'European degree' and its QA framework. This process must include the experts, also from Alliances, applying a bottom-up approach. It must build upon national practices, not to create an extra 'European' layer of administration. Leaving space for alternative models in the pilot phase is important. An understanding of the complex and diverse legal and administrative landscape in which the different

each other, produce a common purpose and form new collaborations and start new study courses and possibly joint programmes with mobility periods. It is not a sufficient amount of time for transforming national educational systems.		alliance partners navigate. This also requires flexible procedures and long term planning. Prioritisation and support for necessary legal changes. This requires close dialogue between the Alliance (partners), governments and the European Commission (see also examples in the row National QA frameworks and legislation). E.g. for a framework and procedures allowing the recognition and credits of courses taught transnational and online, or for virtual mobility and/or blended mobility (regardless of the COVID crisis).
Joint programmes Delivering joint programmes is one of the main goals of many (not all) of the Alliances. Some of us aim to start joint programmes in 2020/21, followed by others in the next years. Despite the approval of European Approach for Quality assurance of Joint Programmes by EHEA ministers in 2015, joint programmes require to be accredited in many Member States by each national QA agency, national rules may be heterogeneous (duration, teaching in English/foreign language, mode of teaching (online), internships, staff/student recruitment, grading scales, workload per ECTS, learning outcomes, graduation and degree awarding rules, classification of qualifications, different academic rules and programme governance,	Member states have to fulfil their obligations of the European Approach for Quality assurance of Joint Programmes. This will help, but not solve all, the challenges the universities are facing to accredit and implement interdisciplinary, flexible, and innovative joint programmes. We need flexibility in applying national accreditation standards. State legislation regarding accreditation should be more	A bottom-up approach to have the freedom to experiment within Alliances is important in the short term. In the long term, we need a more flexible accreditation process based on the outcomes and experiences of all Alliances. We have to avoid extra structures, administrations, burdens etc. at European level. We need to build on national practices and create more

academic calendars, etc.). As a consequence, it is very difficult to construct an innovative, real joint (unified curricula) degrees, including interdisciplinary and free choice of pathways to the students.

Application of European Approach for Quality assurance of Joint Programmes - There are countries where the European Approach 'is not available' (ENQA website). E.g. the Czech National Accreditation Bureau has not been registered in ENQA/EQAR yet (nevertheless, it is mentioned as one of the goals in the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 of the Czech Ministry of Education); Similar for Italy: ANVUR is currently not in EQAR.

Another challenge is an accreditation/evaluation on a European level by an external agency. Some states require a national accreditation process nevertheless because their authority does not recognise an external agency´s evaluation procedure. | open to agencies coming from other countries in Europe. Furthermore, recognition of joint programmes at the national level, even if they do not comply with national legislation, is crucial to implement interdisciplinary, flexible (where the students can create their curricula), innovative and intercultural programmes. E.g. exceptions for international study programmes are needed in states with strict legislation on sizes for modules - although this could still be problematic for the courses that are open for students of international study programmes and students of "normal" study programmes at the same time.

Flexibility in applying study access criteria for transnational programmes is also needed, including criteria for giving out scholarships. | harmonisation and flexibility. Consensus on evaluation criteria, and an easier accreditation model, overcoming the differences between national legislation models, is important. We need a European register of degrees/learning awards, recognised in each country. European evaluation procedures must be recognised by all states and enabled to be used by all universities offering international study programmes.

An ongoing EUniQ project is important, also alliances and accreditation organisations that are no case-study or partner must be involved in the processes |
| National QA frameworks and legislation

Criteria for access to studies differ between countries. Transnational study programmes may encounter difficulties when selecting their students and have to adjust their access criteria to the smallest, potentially most rigid common denominator. | Countries must change situations and ensure registration of their respective agencies. | Agencies that are working on a cross-national or European level must be supported.

We need to build on national practices and create more harmonisation and |

And In some member states, there is no possibility to introduce cross-references in a diploma of a higher education institute (European level)

Examples of Czech, Italy, Cyprus and other countries

Czech National Accreditation Bureau has not been registered in ENQA/EQAR yet (nevertheless, it is mentioned as one of the goals in the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 of the Czech Ministry of Education). Similar for Italy: ANVUR is currently not in EQAR.

There are universities and agencies in countries where the European Approach "is not available" (ENQA website). Some states have to undergo the national accreditation process nevertheless because their authority does not recognise an external agency´s evaluation procedure.

Currently, Cypriot students cannot get online/virtual courses (of other HEIs) recognised in their degrees. According to the Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws, (2015 and 2016) and the University Law 144/1989, Universities in Cyprus are not allowed to offer online courses within existing conventional programs of studies as it might impact the accreditation of these programmes. | State legislation regarding accreditation should be more open to agencies coming from other countries in Europe.

Example: Cypriot case:

For the SS 2020, the offering of online courses by Cypriot universities is allowed due to COVID-19 pandemic, further to the decision of the CYQAA. There is no such decision for the Academic Year 2020/21 and onwards. | flexibility at the European level. Consensus on evaluation criteria, and an easier accreditation model, overcoming the differences between national legislation models, is important. We need a European register of degrees/learning awards, recognised in each country. European evaluation procedures must be recognised by all states and enabled to be used by all universities offering international study programmes. |
| Legal entities | | |
| European Universities need a legal entity for different reasons. When exploring options for legal entities, there has to be a good understanding of the need for flexibility for the various needs and goals of the alliances. The entity should furthermore be designed to protect the autonomy of their members, to remain operative in the partner | It would be good to have a roadmap for establishing a European University, which allows for different speeds in the alliances. The cooperation of national Ministries and the European | European Universities are looking at (elements for) potential legal entities that could work (see below) but are also looking at new forms, to overcome limitations of instruments designed for |

countries. And it should enable the status of European higher education institution.

Alliances are also still enquiring about the exact needs. The reasons why the alliances are looking for a new entity are (although not all the alliance share all the points):

- To develop long-term collaboration
- For visibility: Joint identity, access to networks, etc.
- To be sustainable in the long-term
- To acquire long-term basic institutional funding
- To apply for joint European Projects
- To share staff and also hire staff
- To deliver European Joint Awards/Degrees
- To share infrastructures, buy goods and services
- To run necessary University functions in a unified way (i.e. to have its own rules and regulations, to register students, to offer study programmes, to run research laboratories, offer professorship status, etc.)
- To improve the governance of the alliance
- To disrupt the university landscape in Europe

Around half of the alliances are already exploring the existing European models and types of legal entities for the cross-border initiative. The other half is still discussing possibilities. Two alliances have an entity: ECIU University and Una Europa.

Commission to co-create some dedicated status or legal forms for European universities and the accompanying funding programme for guaranteeing financial stability will be a very promising development.

Adjust national laws to set-up legal entities

No other forms of incorporation are permitted concerning Greek Universities. According to Greek law, the subject matter of this type of legal structure is Non-Profit and it cannot carry out any type of activities, except these expressly permitted by the State. See also article 4 of the Law 4485/017 in force. For the Greek Universities to be able to participate in a legal entity with other European Universities, prior approval by parliament via special Law is required. E.g. A broader (activity) purpose of awarding a common degree with other European Universities is for the time being not permitted by the Greek Constitution and the Law.

other purposes than higher education and research.

The legal entity must be flexible and generic to fit the different needs of the different alliances, which are developing in different directions. The scope of missions (even if adjustable to the need of the consortium) can be precise ex: Award of a European degree. The legal status should be eligible to receive a valid Erasmus+ Charter and submit project proposals under Horizon Europe and possibly other programmes.

Legal entities to be inspired by:

- European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). The subgroup of legal entity had a benchmark session with EUCOR, the existing EGTC, created by four EPICUR members.
- Not for Profit Association (Una Europa already operates under this type)
- European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC)
- European Technology Institute (EIT)

Language policies		
Language governance Language governance and in particular the use of English vis-à-vis the use of national or regional languages in universities has been subject to heated debates in several European countries in recent years (e.g. France, Finland, the Netherlands). In particular, the influx of international students triggered discussions with political and societal stakeholders who expressed concern about the accessibility of higher education to domestic students.	Universities should remain (or become) autonomous in deciding on the use of languages in all walks of university life. That said, decision-making on the official languages at the institutional level and proposals for a transition to different languages of instruction should be robust and transparent. To this end, universities should be prepared to adopt a language policy for safeguarding the quality of teaching & learning and research. EPICUR is developing a model language policy for European Higher Education Institutions. National governments are invited and encouraged to embrace this model language policy.	The majority of first-generation European Universities alliances are planning to offer European courses, modules and programmes of study in more than one language of instruction. For this reason, alliances will also need to adopt a language policy at the level of the alliance. To this end, EPICUR is developing a model language policy that will be offered to all European Universities alliances of the first and second generation. The European Commission is invited to endorse this initiative and going forward, promote the use of the model language policy.
'Englishisation' of Higher Education In recent years, many Higher Education Institutions across Europe decided to change the language of instruction of a growing number of study programmes into English. These programmes of studies using English as a medium of instruction (EMI) are often considered more prestigious. Due to the high prestige and competitiveness of EMI programs, many domestic students are less eager to enrol in programmes taught in national European languages. This development could harm the viability and sustainability of programmes taught in other European languages than English.	Facilitate constructive dialogue, aimed at building trust, between governmental bodies and higher education institutions on the key ingredients of language policies. These key ingredients should balance national interests, international ambitions of European universities and issues about the accessibility of higher education. Ultimately, higher education institutions should be given more	Possibly include mention of the model language policy in the official EU language policy to help validate strategies and equitable language policies. There should be less emphasis on internationalisation understood as

At the same time, European universities should face the reality that English has de facto become the lingua franca of academia and higher education also in Europe. Mobility Promoting European linguistic diversity and mobility of student and staff are closely interconnected. At present, in some disciplines courses and programmes (esp. within Humanities and Social Sciences) are offered in only one language of instruction, which is certainly limiting opportunities for European and international collaboration (esp. Mobility).	freedom to decide on the languages of instruction of their programmes of study, also in the undergraduate phase. Such a framework of mutual understanding and autonomy for higher education institutions will trigger European universities to rise to the occasion, take responsibility for safeguarding national languages as academic language and strike the right balance between EMI and study programmes offered in national and regional languages. National governmental agencies are encouraged to allocate more resources to universities, especially those involved in a European University Alliance, to allow more language support to expand opportunities for (virtual, blended and physical) mobility and exchange.	opening EMI programs across the European Higher Education Area. Instead, we recommend exploring possibilities for offering bilingual programmes (parallel tracks in the national language and English). Furthermore, the alliances should prioritise the development of joint (bi- or multilingual) programmes and/or flexible (stackable) modular study programmes, comprising courses in more than one language. The European Commission is encouraged to allocate more resources to the European universities alliances to allow for more language support to scale up opportunities for (virtual, blended and physical) mobility and exchange across the alliance partners.
Diversity / inclusion There is a tension between the principle of diversity in the language of education, thus, multilingualism, on the one hand, and the principle of equal accessibility on the other (students being offered the opportunity of taking classes in the local language at some institutions means closing out some other students of these classes and vice versa.).	National governments should be made fully aware of the challenges higher education institutions are facing when balancing aspects of diversifying language education with efforts about widening access to underrepresented groups to academic programmes. Furthermore, national governments should provide more (financial) support	This tension would be very important to address in discussions and policies at the European level so that solutions can be piloted via European University Alliances. All European Universities alliances should give careful consideration to balancing academic admission requirements and mechanisms aimed at widening access.

	to universities for setting up targeted measures (such as 'soft landing' programmes for first-generation students and similar instruments).	The European Commission should allow alliances sufficient room for testing and piloting experimental formats in this context, for example by introducing elements of gamification into future European modules, courses and programmes. Furthermore, an inclusivity check for future activity developed at the level of the alliances could be recommended. Differentiation between passive and active use of languages could also be a solution.
European linguistic diversity The European Universities alliances consider the Commission's aspiration that young Europeans should speak at least two European languages in addition to their mother tongue essential in safeguarding the phenomenon of European linguistic diversity. That said, the alliances are well aware that the viability and sustainability of European language programmes at European universities cannot be taken for granted: many universities have witnessed a steep decrease in enrolments of students in European language programmes.	National governmental bodies should consider providing additional financial support to universities to sustain small-scale European language programmes at the academic level. Over and above that, more visibility for study programmes in the humanities should be created in the national context to counterbalance the focus on STEM programmes.	European Universities alliances are instrumental when it comes to creating and strengthening physical and virtual mobility instruments for students and teaching staff enrolled in language programmes. Some alliances are pooling institutional offerings in European languages to create larger critical mass and more exposure to these programmes. Many alliances also pay attention to the obvious links between language proficiency and intercultural skills, and to the opportunities, such skills provide on the job market. Alliances would welcome the endorsement by the Commission for these sets of activity as well as confirmation of medium-long

		term support for the future roll-out of these pilot instruments.
Mobility (incl. need for virtual/blended mobility)		
Mobility and the European Degree		
Will mobility be a mandatory element for the awarding of a European Degree, and if yes, do we need to describe minimum requirements?	More flexibility in implementing short mobilities under Erasmus+, flexibility in designing short mobility programmes adapted to the needs of the inter-university campus of European Universities.	We need discussions on the standards and minimum requirements for mobility under the European degree.
The intercampus concept and joint, interdisciplinary academic offerings, imply various types of mobilities, usually going beyond traditional models described and financed by Erasmus+ programme.		Financial means for non-traditional forms of mobility must be made available. Testing these mobilities in our Alliances is scheduled already for the academic year 2021/2022.
Erasmus + Agreements are bilateral. Each university signs an agreement with another university with common fields of studies. For European Universities, a single joint multilateral agreement with all institutions would be easier to manage instead of bilateral agreements for each partner.		Introduction, recognition and support for short-term physical mobilities are needed. Flexibility in designing and implementing short mobility programmes adapted to the needs of the inter-university campus of European Universities is key.
New frameworks for financing short mobilities are still rigid (minimum 2 months within a hybrid format, or 5 days but between minimum 3 partners).		
Also other, more general, mobility challenges do exist under the European degree: - Obligatory fees: How to enrol a student from a European University Alliance who participates in a two-weeks-educational activity without obliging him/her to pay a fee for student services for health insurance during the whole		Credits obtained at other partner universities by completing courses which do not fall within the home institution's academic calendar should be made possible. In the context of Erasmus exchanges, this is a topic which partners can bilaterally make

semester (national level)? - A a specific status for international students who stay on a short-term basis needs to be created. - Privacy: Learning Management Systems: How to connect these and complying with data privacy and copyright regulations. CO2: Big challenge.		agreements on. However, in the multilateral context of European Universities, a generic European model would be beneficial to all European Universities Possibility of Multilateral Erasmus Agreements instead of bilateral agreements is important.
Virtual Mobility Virtual and blended mobility is becoming the new reality in higher education. Yet, virtual mobility (especially at a small scale, e.g 6 ECTS per semester) lacks official recognition, and virtual mobility for teaching is not considered at all. There is a need to have a clearer picture of what Virtual Mobility means in European Higher Education and how to develop, assess and recognise this kind of mobility. We need greater ambition for the potential of virtual mobility in Europe. • The concept, definition, recognition and value of virtual mobility and blended mobility under Erasmus+ is unclear. • Financial resources to build the necessary infrastructure to provide excellent teaching in blended/digital formats, which until now was not widely used by most universities, is needed. • In some member states teaching online is been regulated and exclusively permitted to specialised universities only. • Virtual collaboration and differentiations between teaching platforms (incl. the identification of users) among universities from different countries, is a challenge.	• Ensure flexibility to support the development of virtual mobility. • Provide funding to develop virtual mobility programs. • Support mutual exchange and provide good practise handbooks. • Provide guidance on administration and recognition of virtual mobility. The necessity for frameworks and procedures allowing the recognition and credits of courses taught online, of virtual mobility and/or blended mobility, regardless of the COVID crisis.	• Provide funding and support to develop virtual mobility programs • Need for training to make full use of digital tools and campus for the academics and university staff. • Support mutual exchange and provide good practice handbooks • Provide guidance on administration and recognition of virtual mobility while allowing the universities to develop different formats for virtual mobility. • The necessity for framework and procedures allowing the recognition and credits of courses taught online, of virtual mobility and/or blended mobility. • More flexibility in implementing short mobilities under Erasmus+, flexibility in designing short mobility programmes adapted to

		the needs of the inter-university campus of European Universities. • Include virtual mobilities (of students and staff) in the new Erasmus+ programme with adequate financial support, enabling the virtual collaboration of students and teachers and official recognition (Mobility tool, Diploma Supplement, etc.). The mobility grant could also cover the costs faced by the students (IT equipment and internet access).
Unclear 50%-rule The rule regarding "50% of all students should benefit from mobility" is unclear. The benefit from mobility rule (50%) should be either clearly defined in terms of documentation or monitoring or the rule should be omitted.		The benefit from mobility rule (50%) should be either clearly defined in terms of documentation or monitoring or the rule should be omitted. Close collaboration with the Alliances is important.
Micro-credentials		
National limitations/differences Micro-credentials may lead to flexible, innovative study curricula of student´s choice, but some countries apply very strict (and sometimes limit interdisciplinarity) requirements towards the study programmes.	More flexibility in study curricula, re-accreditation could be required if, e.g., 20% of curricula changes.	Continue the discussion on micro-credentials, including experts from European Universities, on linking micro-credentials with Bologna commitments, accreditation and recognition.

	The launch of micro-credentials should not come at the cost of existing financing mechanisms. Innovating curricula is very demanding for educators and administrators. Separate additional funding and support are needed.	Share the outcomes of European studies and projects (like MICROBOL or the Dutch SURF project) and take possible decisions and tools from existing structures, rather than creating something new in parallel.
		Include micro-credentials in the European Qualification Framework.
R&I policy		
EU R&I Policy development The development of R&I policy within the European university initiative needs to go hand in hand with other policy initiatives at EU-level. The 'IBA-SwafS-Support-1-2020' was a good signal from DG RTD to integrate a research component in the European Universities Initiative. Unlike many of us had expected, the call was focussed on strategy and the construction of a new model, integrating education and R&I – therefore supporting the integration from a policy and organisational perspective. Although the call for proposals 'IBA-SwafS-Support-1-2020' had very ambitious goals, the total amount of funding was rather limited		E.g. In Open Science, private editors are putting high rates and make it very difficult to join our effort to mutualise our library resources or research data. Low financing for research on the new financial framework 2021-2027 will impact the alliances at R&I level. We hope the focus of a potential future call will be more on strengthening the R&I collaboration between the researchers of the Alliances as well, to get researchers (more) involved in the project.

compared to these goals. Moreover given the current COVID-19 crisis which is for many universities, also financially, a very challenging period. Although they are strongly linked, the Erasmus+ project will be finished before the Horizon 2020 project and there was no specific indication on how the Horizon 2020 project had to be embedded in the Erasmus+ project (e.g. governance).		We hope that for potential future calls, the amount of funding is more aligned with the ambitions of the call. A better alignment of the potential future calls of Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe, both in timing as to when it comes to content.
Further integration of research and education initiatives The European University Alliances are happy to be a testbed for the integration of a programme focussed on education on the one hand and research and innovation on the other. We look forward to a dialogue between the European Commission and all the European University Alliances to further develop this integration.	Support from the Member States to be able to further develop this European University Alliance approach. In the end, education is a national/regional competence so support on policies should come from the Member States.	A dialogue between the European University Alliances and the European Commission to further develop the initiatives.
Regional dimension Visibility of European Universities and their role for and in the regional innovation system: There are no regional policy and funding instruments adapted to the transnational character of thematic European Universities. Close collaboration between universities and their surrounding regions and ecosystems will enrich not only local R&I ecosystems, but also the innovative ways of teaching and learning at European Universities and will thus benefit regions, researchers, entrepreneurs and innovators, and students alike.	Identification of European Universities as regional actors in a new period of structural funds programming (e.g., thematic smart specialisation).	Identification of European Universities as regional actors in a new period of structural funds programming (e.g., thematic smart specialisation).

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2. Feedback FOR EU Midterm Evaluation

2.1 Introduction

With this document, the Forum of European Universities (FOREU) is eager to make use of the possibility to provide joint input to the Midterm Evaluation Templates that were shared by EACEA on 20 November. This input presents the common denominator amongst all 17 Alliances and their partners. Additional feedback on the Midterm Evaluation Templates might be provided by the individual alliances. We look forward to further discussing the evaluation process itself, the templates and this input with the colleagues of the European Commission and executive agencies of both EAC and RTD.

As set out in the European Commission Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025, the European Universities will play a key role in driving forward the EU policy agenda to allow for seamless and ambitious transnational cooperation between higher education institutions in Europe and transform higher education for a resilient, inclusive and sustainable society. This requires the Alliances to implement an ambitious long-term vision, to set up sustainable structures and realise institutional transformation and systemic changes.

The Alliances underline that the evaluation scheme for the European Universities Initiative must reflect the aim of the pilot call, which is implementing a transformative vision, setting up sustainable structures and realising systemic changes by developing diverse models of European Universities. The evaluation must also recognise that the Alliances are still very much in their experimental phase of testing different initiatives suited to their local contexts and individual visions for the Universities of the Future.

The Alliances look forward to working together with EACEA and REA next year to co-develop a process and an evaluation template that are sufficiently flexible for all Alliances to reflect their vision and accomplishments while also providing the European Commission with all the relevant information to build the future of the European Universities' Initiative further

2.2 General reflections, questions and remarks

- Setting up and implementing a European University Alliance is not a project, but a long-term process. It includes implementing a transformative vision, setting up sustainable structures and realising systemic changes. The specificities of such strategic processes, with long-term goals, must be reflected in the evaluation; a focus on long-term dynamic systemic changes would be preferred above a focus on static outputs.

- There are significant differences among the Alliances in scope, scale and focus. This differentiation was encouraged by the European Commission during the launch phase of the pilot calls, where a reference to testing different models was emphasised. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach is not adequate, and the evaluation approach needs to reflect this diversity optimally. DG EAC communication has always underlined the flexibility in

the pilot-phase, in order to test different concepts and possibilities and to have room for experimentation. The evaluation must reflect this flexibility.

- Clarity about the weight of the criteria, the relation between the current midterm evaluation and the final evaluation, and more information about the final evaluation, including criteria to evaluate the alliances regarding their eligibility for follow-up funding, are needed.

- The effects that COVID-19 has exerted and still has on (physical) mobility are not taken into account with sufficient clarity. Some of the universities are closed for international students; others are announcing closures for the admission of international students. Moreover, although it has been indicated that the target does not need to be achieved within the three-year pilot-phase, the 50% mobility target of beneficiaries for mobility by 2025 is mentioned without an associated definition. This raises the question: How should virtual mobility be defined, assessed or measured in this context? In line with the diversity of the model and the room for innovation that the European Commission has stressed in several occasions, the Alliances suggest that the evaluation template explicitly introduces the request for each Alliance to formulate their own definition of 50% mobility target by 2025.

- The purpose and added value of the common indicators is not clear. Are they related to the objectives set by each Alliance or will they serve to benchmark the (very diverse) Alliances? Precise definitions for calculation must be provided. It could be adequate to stick to the indicators that each Alliance has set for itself in its project description. Flexibility should be allowed for those indicators that might be affected by the pandemic.

Also, the common indicators were unforeseen until now. Therefore, no data has been collected so far; beneficiaries have not been informed and might face difficulties in providing indicators at such a detailed level. We would appreciate a joint discussion and decision on common indicators since these have been provided at the reporting stage and do not correlate with the objectives set by the European Universities in the applications.

- Our colleagues across our European University Alliances are heavily committed and engaged in delivering the ambition we have in the pilot phase and beyond. We are concerned about the risk of a heavy evaluation procedure, especially concerning Annex 2 parts B and D, being too time-consuming and therefore distracting us from delivering the ambition we have set out. Provision of relevant indicators is very labour intensive for administrations and needs to be agreed upon with all partners as early into the process as possible. Also, it should be taken into account that the aim of the mid-term report is giving an overview of what has been achieved and is ongoing after 18 months of project time. We fully understand the importance of providing data to the European Commission to justify future investments in the European University Initiative. However, we also would like to question how useful the outcome of the exercise of collecting these quantitative data will be at this stage.

- The changes due to the COVID-19 situation must be reflected. The circumstances and conditions have changed in 2020 and will continue until (at least some of) 2021, which made sticking to the planned goals and outputs of the application challenging to achieve for some Alliances. A re-

evaluation of Alliances own indicators (outlined in their project description) in light of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions imposed on the projects could be a solution to ensure transparency when presenting progress and results.

2.3 Reflections on the process

- The extension of the deadline to provide input is very much appreciated. We need sufficient time to touch-base with our managers, legal and financial experts to reflect on these important requests. In this context, it is desirable to be informed about the next steps of the evaluation process. The Alliances prefer to provide input at an earlier stage and to be involved in the process of creating the report template.

- The request for quantitative indicators, and also the indicators on the status of collaboration before the project start, should have been made known to all Alliances and its partners before the projects started, in order for the relevant data to be organised, collected and become readily available. It is challenging to collect all information at this stage of the project; only a few months away from the mid-term evaluation. Information is not always centrally available at all universities, and some indicators may require specific collection procedures.

- Coordination between DG EAC/EACEA and RTD/REA towards the (preparation of) evaluation process is important to ensure synergies with the SwafS projects and an 'Alliance level' evaluation.

- Erasmus+ Guidelines are not always up to date, nor is there sufficient information in the guidelines, especially on financial matters and reporting obligations (timesheets, maximum annual hours allowed, calculation of hourly rates etc.).

2.4 Specific remarks

- Annex 2 includes too many (quantitative) indicators. Especially part D includes requests that do not reflect the current situation and are not applicable at this stage of the project. It might be useful to have a comments section associated with each indicator in order to explain and give context to the answers.

Examples:

  o How about one-cycle degrees (med, pharma, law, engineering…)? If they replace BA/MA/PhD by 1st, 2nd, 3rd cycle then we can we may indicate the equivalent year.

  o How do they define 'short cycles'? Shall we put all short-term mobility there, even if it is conducted within a 1st, 2nd or 3rd cycle degree?

  o How do we get information on Erasmus App users?

- o How do we count automatic recognition?

- o How to track the contribution to regional development? Where is the relevance between these data and the reporting on the status quo of the work plan? Does this indicator concern only the activities in the WP or across all university activities?

- o How to track the number of students with disadvantaged backgrounds? At many partner institutions, this information is not available (GDPR, internal/national policies…)

- o Questions about automatic recognition - This is a long term goal of all European University Alliances. Hence, it is not measurable yet.

- o Question regarding the "European Student Card" - How is it relevant for the reporting on the development of the Alliances' work plan?

- o How to measure a certain % of the Academic year 2018-2019 is unclear.

- o Re-inforced links between research and education - Challenge based approach – Are only activities in the project WP considered, or does it concern research-education activities across all university activities? The latter would be extremely difficult to obtain in large universities with many programmes.

- o Columns B, C: The data was not collected at the time and is very difficult to report now.

- Moreover, the relevance of the indicators is not clear.

- Also, sheet B includes a mobility monitoring scheme that was not communicated beforehand. Hence no appropriate statistics were devised and kept by each Alliance. Moreover, the mobility tool only tracks teaching and training mobilities; it does not recognise the category of the researchers in mobility processes.

Moreover, counting number of people participating in physical mobility is manageable because of the paper trail such mobility leaves: tickets, participant lists etc. Participation in virtual events is considerably more challenging to document.

- How to deal with ongoing/incomplete academic years for the indicators? When we submit the information on the academic year 2020/2021, the year is still ongoing, and the indicators will not be complete. Shall we stop at the end of the winter semester? Shall we include preliminary data concerning the summer semester, knowing this is somewhat arbitrary, especially for short-term mobility (for the KA103 mobility we might have an idea)? Also, the academic years do not coincide between the partners: how to deal with that (e.g. short-term mobility in September 2020 will be counted in Academic Year 2019/2020 for one partner and in Academic Year 2020/2021 for another)?

- A division between academics, staff and researchers does not make sense. We propose an alternative: just academic/researchers and non-academic staff.

The ECIU University

- 1.1: The factsheet, a very synthetic document for external communication, might not be the best basis for evaluating the state of play of the Alliances. The objectives and vision, as described in the Mission Statement and the description of the action seem to present more appropriate indicators for achievements.

- The Section 3.3 In exceptional cases, deviation(s) from the planned Work programme activities, is welcomed, but this is a small section and does not capture the full scale of what the pilot has had to deal with since COVID-19 began. Make sure that this section has enough space to be able to answer it correctly.

- Annex I is the Request for 2nd pre-financing template, but the EACEA prepared no financial statement. Will the Alliances receive a financial statement for the final report? Does this mean no financial statement has to be provided with the mid-term report?

- 4.3 (list of meetings) and 4.5 (involvement in activities) should be in annexes, to ensure the evaluation report will not exceed the 50-page limit. Also a question: What is meant by the partnership meetings: is it on a project management level or they would like to have as well e.g. the list of all meetings organised within the work packages themselves and regarding e.g. additional funding for the project, the meetings of internal steering committees that we formed, etc.?

- 4.5: what is the expectation of this requested detailed information, and what is the relevance of the level of studies/disciplines? With 63 activities to be described multiplied by 3 categories (students, researchers, staff) it will become a long list. It could be rather important to receive information about the development of the activities (starting phase, current status quo, planning, etc.) and their implementation. In 3.1, it is only asked for a "reflection on results/outputs/deliverables".

- Draft mid-term progress report template 1.3, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 2.1 and 3.4 seem to be too early to report on or not relevant at this point; some of them look like a repetition of information requested in Annex 2, e.g. 1.9 and 1.10.1.

- If we have to present the impact and the significant changes now, this can only be done as "Window dressing", so practically saying "everything is fine". The surveys would have to already been carried out, or the indicators from the application would have to be filled in.

- Some required data is unclear to us: Annex 2 "number of students registered within the alliance, no. of researchers working for the alliance, no. of staff working in the alliance" - does it mean the overall no. of students/staff at each university - given that the whole institution is part of the Alliance - or rather the students/staff involved in the Alliance?

- The Alliance started their work in autumn 2019; this must be taken into account when measuring the data for the academic year 2018/2019. The data 2018/2019 does not apply to all specific indicators.

- Part A – Column B and J: It is not clear what the difference between the two columns are.

The ECIU University

- Part A – Column G: It seems that the codes for classifying the nature of outputs do not appear to cover all possible types of outcomes systematically, but instead they appear to be an assembly of disparate lists. For example, there is no type for new research collaborations.

- Part B – Column C: A prescription of pre-determined disciplines at a fairly high level that will capture all possible disciplines might be helpful to get useful data.

3. Terms of reference, Forum of European Universities (FOR EU)

3.1 The Forum of European Universities

The 17 alliances from the first Erasmus+ Pilot Call (ARQUS, CHARM-EU, CIVICA, CIVIS, ECIU, EDUC, EPICUR, EU-CONEXUS, EU4Art, EUGLOH, EUTOPIA, FORTHEM, 4EU+, SEA-EU, UNA-Europa, UNITE! and YUFE), have agreed that they will ensure collaboration by establishing a Forum of European Universities (FOR EU), to discuss and share intelligence resulting from:

- assessment of current practices, best practice and progress made/success stories implementing our long-term strategies

- Identification of barriers – legal, financial and regulatory, level at which the barrier exists (Local, regional or European)

The Forum is an informal group, established to work together where it is of added value, e.g. to:

- Share information;

- Benchmark the process of our projects;

- Collaborate on project activities;

- Monitor the process of the initiative as a whole;

- Join lobby efforts and coordinate lobby at the European and national level.

All members can use the Forum when of added value and are free to initiate bilateral/sub-meetings or initiate lobby efforts on their behalf next to the Forum.

3.2 Members

The Forum is composed of the 17 alliances of the first Erasmus+ call (2019).[1] The group commits to closely collaborate with the 24 alliances selected in the second Erasmus+ pilot call (2020), e.g. by organising joined meetings starting midst 2021.[2]

Members of the Forum are the representatives of the alliances at the central / coordinator level. The number of representatives per alliances is limited to two representatives, next to the invited participants, such as Subgroup Chairs.

The Forum is coordinated by the ECIU (European Consortium of Innovative Universities) University during the three-year pilot phase (2020-2023). All members are invited to take a pro-active role. The chairing of the Forum will be evaluated after the pilot phase.

3.3 Communication

The Forum meets virtually once every four weeks for 1,5 hour (Monday at 15 CET). The agenda is shared one week beforehand. All members can add items to the agenda. Minutes will be written after each meeting and shared with all participants. Extra meetings may be organised upon request by the members of the Forum or the European Commission. Depending on the (rolling) agenda, approximately every three months European Commission representatives, such as DG EAC, DG RTD and the Executive Agencies are invited to join the meetings to ensure close contact with the European policymakers.

Between meetings, the Forum's main communication channel is e-mail, using the e-mail list as listed in the Minutes. The list will be updated and shared once every four weeks; right after a virtual meeting took place.

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[1] UNA Europa (1EUROPE), 4EU+ Alliance (4EU+), ARQUS European University Alliance (ARQUS), CHARM European University (CHARMEU), CIVICA – The European University in social sciences (CIVICA), CIVIS – A European civic university alliance (CIVIS), European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability (CONEXUS), ECIU University (ECIUn), European Digital UniverCity (EDUC), European Partnership for an Innovative Campus Unifying Regions (EPICUR), Alliance for common fine arts curriculum (EU4ART), European University Alliance for Global Health (EUGLOH), European Universities Transforming to an Open, Inclusive Academy for 2050 (EUTOPIA), Fostering Outreach within European Regions, Transnational Higher Education and Mobility (FORTHEM), The European University of the Seas (SEA-EU), University Network for Innovation, Technology and Engineering (UNITE!), Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE).

[2] Advanced Technology Higher Education Network Alliance (ATHENA), Aurora Alliance, Circle U. European University (Circle U.), Engaged and Entrepreneurial European University as Driver for European Smart and Sustainable regions (E3UDRES2), European Campus of City-Universities (EC2U), European Engineering Learning Innovation and Science Alliance (EELISA), The European University engaged in societal change (ENGAGE.EU), European Universities of Technology Alliance (ENHANCE), European University Network to promote Equitable Quality of Life, Sustainability, and Global Engagement through Higher Education Transformation (ENLIGHT), European Reform University Alliance (ERUA), European University for Customised Education (EUNICE), European University for Well-Being (EUniWell), The European University Alliance on Responsible Consumption and Production (EURECA-PRO), EuroTeQ Engineering University (EuroTeQ), European University of Technology (Eut), The European Universities Alliance for Film and Media Arts (FILMEU), Innovations of Regional Sustainability: European University Alliance (INVEST), European University of Brain and Technology (NeurotechEU), Regional University Network – European University (RUN-EU), Transform4Europe: The European University for Knowledge Entrepreneurs (T4E), Ulysseus: An open to the world, persons-centred and entrepreneurial European University for the citizenship of the future (ULYSSEUS), The European University of Post-Industrial Cities (UNIC), UNITA – Unversitas Montium (UNITA), European Space University of Earth and Humanity (UNIVERSEH).

3.4 Scope of the lobby

Lobby efforts can include the need for long-term support, monitoring of the pilot phase, topics that are covered by the Subgroups, and other topics that are brought forward by the members of the Forum.

Lobbying activities, such as written input to the European Commission, need a unanimous agreement in the Forum. In all communications from the Forum to the European Commission and other stakeholders, it will be clearly stated which of the alliances support the presented ideas.

It will be emphasised, that the ideas brought forward by the Forum do not necessarily reflect the positions of the individual alliances and involved partners, but rather present the least common denominator amongst them.

Subgroups can address their respective experts of the European Commission directly. The Subgroup shall keep the Forum informed about any external outreach.

3.5 Subgroups

Five Subgroups are established at the Forums initiative, gathering expertise on

- Project management (Chaired by Tjaša Nabergoj (EUTOPIA));

- A European degree (Chaired by Neringa Narbutiene (EU-CONEXUS));

- A legal entity (Chaired by Meritxell Chaves (CHARM-EU));

- Multilingualism (Chaired by Anouk Tso (EPICUR), Tamás Péter Szábo (FORTHEM)); and

- R&I Policy (Chaired by Kristof Vlaeminck (UNA-Europa)).

It is up to the Alliance to decide if they want to participate in a Subgroup. The subgroup member does not need to be the same person as the Forum member, although they must represent the same Alliance. The Chairs of the Subgroups report to the Forum at each monthly meeting. The Forum may amend or veto at any time the propositions or concluding remarks made by the Subgroups. However, this is the last resort, and input, comments and discussions should be first and foremost dealt with in the Subgroup.

The ECIU University

The Forum can decide to create additional (ad-hoc) Subgroups. All alliances can decide individually on their participation in the Subgroups. To avoid a jungle of Subgroups:

- o There should be a clear benefit for the alliance members to start and be involved in a Subgroup;

- o If members want input on a specific topic, they send an e-mail to the Forum.

Each Subgroup will come up with an informal one-page description of the purpose of the group, the rules and regulations of the group and the planned activities. The Subgroups can be dissolved when there is no need to have them anymore, and they will be evaluated after the

This Terms of Reference
This Terms of Reference can be amended at any time by the Forum. They will be evaluated in six months.

Acknowledgements