

European Universities Governance and Legal Frameworks

Terms of Reference

Table of contents

I. Objectives	2
II. Background	3
III. Work plan and working modalities	3
IV. Inputs to WP3 Policy Dialogue & WP4 Communication and Dissemination	4
V. Members.....	5

I. Objectives

Three major objectives drive our efforts to be developed in the next three and a half years:

1. **Share best practices and challenges to support the success of all alliances in the fields of governance, legal frameworks and financial sustainability (short-term).** Enhanced cooperation among alliances will benefit all. Building effective governance structures is a fundamental criterion for the success of alliances and as we are operating in an experimental environment, there are many learnings which can be shared. Where applicable, these can also be made transferable and disseminated through FOREU4ALL channels. A common space for collaborative work and trust is essential. As the alliances increasingly face the question of how to secure a long-term future beyond project-based funding and structures, the issue of legal frameworks and financial sustainability become intertwined with governance models and through closer collaboration on these topics it is our objective to support alliances in successfully addressing these crucial questions.
2. **To support the development of a Legal status for Alliances that is based on real-world feedback, experience and the evolving needs expressed by the alliances (mid-term).** It is vital that a clear voice represents all alliances, capturing both their commonalities and their diversity for current European status or possible future ones. The group will use its platform and shared experiences to help inform FOREU4All advocacy or action related to the development of a future legal status for alliances – acting as important cross-alliance stakeholder for the European Commission in this regard.
3. **To explore avenues for increased financial sustainability for alliances and understand the nuanced needs of the alliances in this regard (mid-term).** It is important that the diverse needs of alliances are well represented in policymaker discussions on the topic of alliance funding/long-term sustainability options. The group offers a platform to understand these needs in more depth, to share different experiences and models employed at national level, and to explore advocacy action at European level.

The expected outcomes are:

- To contribute to the policy dialogue FOREU4ALL (WP3) effort in the topics of governance, legal entity alliances, investment pathway or any other matters related to those.
- To share and disseminate good practices on the key topics of the group and when adequate, in collaboration with related topical groups (e.g., student engagement), through two publications (e.g., different types of existing governance models), position papers when requested by WP3, one onsite workshop (applying to the onsite workshop call organised by WP2), and one online open to higher education institutions.

Expected Impact

The work of this group is expected to generate significant impact at different levels:

1. For the European University Alliances, sharing governance models, legal pathways and sustainability strategies fosters mutual learning and strengthens collective capacity.
2. For the wider higher education sector, the experiences of alliances can inspire other universities and consortia exploring similar cooperation models. For EU policymakers, the group provides valuable insights and evidence on legal status and long-term investment options.

II. Background

The strategic relevance of the group relies on how Governance structures and legal entity issues are increasingly intertwined. The Governance and Legal frameworks topical group accompanies alliances in tackling these fundamental questions, is a source of advice on policy and implementation, and supports alliances and policy dialogue in optimising governance for a sustainable future.

The group's primary focus has been analysing governance models, sharing challenges and best practices and tracking the development of legal entities. They will be categorised for sharing more widely. The evolution of governance models will be monitored. Issues surrounding legal liability and financial sustainability will also be addressed.

The outcomes can also benefit other universities seeking to form consortia with other academic and non-academic entities. To date, we have fostered a dynamic of transparent and open exchange, with members sharing both successes and challenges for the collective benefit. Group discussions have already shown how quickly the European Universities are progressing in their missions and visions and how this requires agile adaptation of the governance of the alliances, so we are continuously learning on the topic. The same happens with the legal entity status of the alliances. The number of alliances with one is increasing rapidly and shared learnings about how to initiate this process, the challenges that others are encountering, is very valuable. As part of this work, the group extends the work and results of the pilot projects on legal instruments to all alliances.

This subgroup contributes to the European Strategy for Universities and the forthcoming recommendations from the European Council on European Universities and the ERA strategy in several ways (e.g., shared infrastructures, institutionalised EU cooperation instruments). Discussions and actions are informed by ongoing European policy developments, to ensure our work responds to emerging needs and debates. Where relevant, external speakers are invited to present updates in meetings. The group will propose practical solutions and offer in-depth analysis of the European and national frameworks.

This topical group background is the result of the merger of FOREU1/3 and FOREU2/4 at the end of 2023. The merged group was composed by 75 members representing 47 alliances until now. The main activities of the group have been:

- Follow-up the EU Commission developments on the legal status and the investment pathway
- Follow-up on the legal entity pilots
- Sharing governance models of each alliance, challenges and best practices
- Survey about legal entity and Governance

III. Work plan and working modalities

The pre-existing group work plan proposal is as follows:

- Complete the outstanding presentations of the governance model of alliances - sharing of best practice and current challenges/uncertainties, and open discussion, combining this with other topics of alliances interests (e.g., student and associate partners participation in governance, how alliance governance integrates project management) (June 2025)
- Keep monitoring governance models evolution as they are continuously learning and quickly adapting to new challenges (during the four years)
- Evaluate the effectiveness or benefits of a legal entity via survey and targeted discussions (December 2025)

- Prepare a publication for the second semester on the Governance models maybe in collaboration with some external stakeholders such as networks, university associations and/or policy makers. (December 2025)
- Apply for a FOREU4ALL on-site transversal workshop (2026 call to extend the discussion about one or two of the topics of the group with other subgroups and institutions outside the alliances).
- Integrate the results of the policy experimentation project of some Member States, starting in April 2025 (2027, considering that there will be a clearer picture from the European and national perspective).
- Create information toolkits and collect and disseminate advice or support for the future and also for possible new alliances forming, hereby creating an output at the end of the FOREU4ALL project and longer-term impact for the European Higher Education Area

In terms of DEI, the coordinators/Secretary Generals are the ones that appoint the members, which places the responsibility for ensuring diversity and inclusion outside the group itself. Nevertheless, diversity and inclusion are strongly encouraged and valued within the group. The group will analyse diversity when evaluating the functioning.

Attributions of the Chair, Vice-chairs, GCT and group members

Chair and Vice-Chairs:

- Organise the meetings (including with invited stakeholders) and writing the minutes
- Maintain the contact list
- Liaise with the Community of Practice Board (WP2).
- Liaise with the Policy Dialogue team (WP3)
- Liaise with the Communication and Dissemination team (WP4)
- Liaise with other related topical groups selected (e.g., student engagement, regional ecosystems, faculty and staff, quality assurance, project management)
- Organise consultations

External speakers can also be invited to join meetings as needed.

Ad-hoc subgroup or task force can emerge from the main group (as it is now the case with the subgroup of alliances that have an AISBL).

The topical group meets virtually once every month for 1,5 hours through Teams. The agenda is shared one week beforehand. All members can add items to the agenda. Minutes are written after each meeting and shared with all participants.

Extra meetings may be organised upon request by the members of the subgroup or the European Commission. Depending on the (rolling) agenda, we will seek to meet the European Commission representatives, such as DG EAC, DG RTD and the Executive Agencies to ensure close contact with the European policymakers.

Between meetings, the subgroup's main communication channel is e-mail (with links to a shared folder).

IV. Inputs to WP3 Policy Dialogue & WP4 Communication and Dissemination

The link with the other work packages is as follows:

- **WP2:** the topical group will be reporting to the Community of Practice (WP2) including Best Practices to be provided to WP4 for the website.
- **WP3:** the topical group will provide data, evidence and insights to the Policy Dialogue (WP3) when requested or when the topical group would consider that any action or statement on Governance and Legal Framework topics need to be taken by FOREU4ALL.
- **WP4:** the topical group will provide with best practice, publications, and events for communication and dissemination.

V. Members

All members of the group hold equal rights and participate on equal footing, and are invited to take a proactive role, sharing their experience and challenges with the group in an open manner. This is considered a value of the members' interactions. The expected profile is secretary general/coordinator and or the alliance's member in charge or actively participating in the governance management.

The number of members per alliance is two. If any of the members cannot attend one of the meetings, they can provide the information and the link for that meeting to another member of the alliance.