

Quality Assurance

Terms of Reference

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I. Objectives

The QA Topical Group aims to foster a collaborative and forward-looking space for developing, testing, and sharing quality assurance (QA) practices suited to the evolving needs of European University Alliances (EUAs). The group facilitates structured peer learning, cross-alliance knowledge exchange, and the co-creation of practical tools and policy-relevant recommendations, contributing both to internal alliance development and broader European QA policy discussions.

Our objectives are organised across short-, mid-, and long-term timeframes and are aligned with the work plan and activities of the group.

Short-term objectives

- Facilitating knowledge exchange by sharing good practices and case studies related to QA within and across alliances, including topics such as joint programmes, internal QA systems, mobility and impact evaluation.
- Establish collaborative formats (Open Hours, webinars, workshops) for cross alliance dialogue and learning
- Initiate joint activities with other topical groups including European Degree and Joint Programmes, Innovation in Teaching and Learning and other relevant groups.
- Discuss and reflect on good practices on how to coordinate different layers of QA within alliances and align QA with alliance-level impact goals.

Mid-term objectives

- Develop and disseminate practical recommendations for implementing QA policies, procedures, KPI monitoring, and evaluation tools tailored to the EUI context.
- Develop and publish reflection papers at venues such as the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF), European Association for International Education (EAIE) conference and exhibition and WP3 venues.
- Address emerging challenges in QA, such as micro-credentials, joint programmes and the European degree label but also transnational education, new forms of mobility.

Long-term objectives

- Establish a better understanding of the QA of EUAs focusing on e.g., joint programmes, mobility, KPI monitoring, and inter-institutional education.
- Enhance mutual learning by bridging first-generation and new alliances, leveraging their respective maturity and innovation as well as spurring peer learning.
- Contribute to ongoing and future political developments and provide informed perspectives to influence European Higher Education policies in general and QA policy-making in particular, ensuring that QA practices are aligned with the evolving needs of Alliances and other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), including but not limited to the European Commission's European Degree Package and the ESG review planned for 2027.

Target audience and expected outcomes

The primary target audiences of the QA topical group include:

- European University Alliances and their internal QA teams and leadership
- QA agencies, networks and stakeholders (e.g., ENQA, EQAR, ESU, EUA, EURASHE)
- Higher education institutions more broadly, especially those engaged or interested in transnational collaboration
- Policy makers at national and European levels

Expected outcomes include a dynamic and inclusive QA community of practice, concrete tools and recommendations for QA in the EUI context, and policy relevant outputs contributing to the future design of European higher education QA frameworks.

II. Background

In its 2017 communication to the Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of Regions, the European Commission envisioned a fully developed European Education Area by 2025, built on "trust, mutual recognition, cooperation, exchange of good practices, mobility, and growth". Key measures included establishing world-class European Universities that collaborate seamlessly across borders and remove obstacles to qualification recognition.

The 2018 European Universities Initiative operationalized this vision, emphasizing automatic qualification recognition within Alliances. Robust QA policies and processes are essential for fostering trust, enabling seamless recognition among alliance members, and strengthening cooperation between participating Higher Education Institutions.

Despite advancements, QA frameworks for European Alliances remain in development. Widely recognized standards — such as the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes — date back to 2005 (and its updated 2015 version) and 2015 respectively. While these have set a foundation, dedicated projects like EUniQ, QA-FIT, and IMINQA have provided further insights into developing a comprehensive QA approach for university alliances. However, their outcomes and recommendations — although some of them were tailored for alliances — have yet to be widely implemented.

In practice, QA efforts in Alliances must balance institutional and programme-level requirements, often navigating combined or system-level accreditation models in evolving contexts. This calls for innovative QA mechanisms that align with the integrated, transnational nature of joint education.

While institutional and national QA frameworks differ — sometimes significantly — even between culturally similar countries, Alliances are uniquely positioned to shape the evolution of European QA policies. By engaging with key stakeholders — including ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE, EQAR, national agencies, and student organizations — Alliances can advocate for bottom-up, needs-based QA solutions.

A structured QA Topical Group would provide a platform for sharing challenges, best practices, and innovative approaches, facilitating mutual learning across different alliance generations. Additionally, this group could inform EU policy discussions, further advancing the European Education Area.

The Quality Assurance group first convened in July 2021 and their initial agenda was to address the following subjects:

- Definition of indicators / Evaluation indicators
- Internal evaluation processes
- Recognition and admission procedures
- Micro-credentials
- Accreditation of joint programmes
- External evaluation of alliances (e.g., EuniQ Framework, external evaluation by national agencies, etc)

The group held six meetings between 2021 and 2023, engaging approximately 20 Alliances. Outcomes included:

- An informal paper on strategic indicators to measure European Universities Initiatives (EUIs) impact.
- Participation in the DG EAC and PPMI “Technical Workshop on a Joint European Degree Label pilot.”
- Shared presentations and meeting minutes on internal QA processes.

The group laid a solid foundation for future QA efforts.

III. Work plan and working modalities

Work Plan and Provisional Timeline

Year 1 (start May 2025/M7):

- Monthly General meetings initially, then bi-monthly.
- 1 Open Hour per month (starting in June 2025), e.g., on a rotating basis regarding the three subgroups respectively.
- 1-2 internal webinars/workshops e.g., based on the Open Hour feedback and participation (starting in October 2025).
- Bi-weekly GCT meetings initially, then monthly.
- 2-3 meetings with WP2.
- Creation of the shared repository (cloud-based) for collaborative work.
- Yearly report to WP2 Board.

Year 2:

- Monthly General meetings initially, then bi-monthly.
- Open Hour and internal webinars/workshops continue and will be followed up at the end of the second year.
- Planning, applying and organisation of 1 on-site topical/transversal CoP workshop with WP2.
- Preparations for potential reflection papers and other kinds of publications e.g., focusing on good practice and common challenges, for example via case studies based on webinars and workshops in Year 1 & 2.
- Participation in EQAF 2026 and EAIE 2026.
- Monthly GCT meetings.
- 2-3 meetings with WP2.
- Yearly report to WP2 Board.

Year 3:

- Monthly General meetings initially, then bi-monthly.
- Open Hour and internal webinars/workshops continue.
- Continued work on reflection papers on good practices, etc.
- Online external webinars (targeting a larger audience).
- Policy dialogue with WP3.
- Participation in EQAF 2027, EAIE 2027, etc. for dissemination.
- Monthly GCT meetings.

- 2-3 meetings with WP2.
- Yearly report to WP2 Board.

Year 4:

- Monthly General meetings initially, then bi-monthly.
- Publication of reflection papers.
- Continued dissemination and policy contributions.
- Participation in EQAF 2028, EAIE 2028.
- FOREU4ALL final event for dissemination.
- Monthly GCT meetings.
- 2-3 meetings with WP2.
- Yearly report to WP2 Board.

Meeting Plan and Working Modalities

There will be regular GCT meetings of one to two hours on a monthly basis to coordinate and oversee all activities. The GCT chair is responsible to fix all meeting dates in coordination with the members of the GCT. Communication will include regular emails. This includes sharing an agenda one week before and minutes one to two weeks after the meetings. All will be available in the FOREU4ALL SharePoint. The duty of minute-taking is shared by all GCT members and they take turns in fulfilling this duty. The agenda is prepared by the GCT chair in collaboration with the entire GCT. All GCT members can make suggestions for agenda items.

The GCT will assign itself the coordination and administrative tasks for all formats proposed under the QA group, including Open Hour sessions, webinars, workshops, drafting groups and reporting to WP2 Board/WP2 Project Officer. Those members of the GCT responsible for individual formats are in charge of fixing the dates in coordination with the GCT and in consulting with the topical group members. This assignment, especially for the Open Hour, shall take place in the first GCT meetings. However, other members of the QA group and stakeholders may also participate in organizing activities based on their interests and expertise.

The GCT will also be in charge of coordinating the potential subgroups. In the first GCT meetings, the team will distribute preliminary responsibilities for the subgroups along the following three focus areas:

1. QA of Joint Educational Offers
2. Internal QA in Alliances: alliance-wide QA processes, KPIs, mobility, inter-institutional teaching
3. QA Beyond Education (research, services to society, civic engagement, joint administrative services, governance, impact)

The GCT will also support and contribute to coordinating the exchanges and cooperation with the other Work Packages and Topical Groups including this topical group's contribution to the FOREU4ALL final dissemination event (for more details see section V.).

The GCT is also responsible to manage, maintain and monitor the topical group's SharePoint folders as a repository for collaborative work, ensuring easy access to resources and outputs for all members.

Attributions of the GCT

- Open Hour: **Informal exchanges between QA group members** at a fixed time. The GCT will provide a videoconference link, plan the agenda, and moderate these sessions. A first session shall be dedicated to explore the interest of the community, e.g., by using a mentimeter to assess

the interest in the different focus areas. In light of the informal character of the Open Hours, the GCT will not provide minutes. Participants are invited to take notes themselves on whatever they deem most interesting for them personally.

- Online webinars/workshops: Internal QA group sessions focusing on collaborative discussions, peer learning, and knowledge sharing. The initial insights from the Open Hour shall serve as a topical orientation for organising these webinars/workshops.
- On-site workshops: Transversal/topical QA group workshops organized in collaboration with WP2 and other topical groups, most importantly 'European Degree' and 'ALLIES', to encourage in-depth discussions and external engagement.
- External webinars/workshops: Sessions inviting external stakeholders, such as QA experts, policymakers, QA agencies, and representatives from ENQA and EQAR, to provide broader perspectives.
- Coordinated participation in major conferences, including EQAF and EAIE, to disseminate results, showcase good practices, and enhance the visibility of QA initiatives.
- Surveys and data collection to gather member insights, evaluate activities, and inform ongoing and future initiatives.
- Review and adapt modalities to new priorities, allowing for additional formats or ad hoc initiatives as required.

All the above activities will be the shared responsibility for GCT, but other members of the QA group will also be involved in the organization of the activities, depending on interest, competence etc.

The work plan is provisional and will be adjusted following members' feedback and engagement.

Considerations on Equality & Diversity in organisational modalities

The QA group is committed to fostering an inclusive and equitable environment that values and respects diversity. All activities and outputs undertaken by the group shall be non-discriminatory and promote equitable participation, ensuring accessibility and representation across diverse backgrounds, identities, and perspectives. The GCT shall proactively consider EDI principles in its activities and outputs, e.g., by reflecting on good practices and guidelines on inclusive language and an online meeting netiquette for the Open Hours and Webinars. Members are expected to uphold these values and contribute to a culture of respect, collaboration, and belonging.

The composition of the GCT shall take gender balance, geographical balance, diversity of countries and diversity of EUIs (alliances of all rounds of calls) into account. Other equality and diversity factors may also be taken into account if deemed relevant.

The QA group is open to representatives from all 65 alliances and can therefore be assumed to have a good spread in terms of equality and diversity. The group is also open to external stakeholders interested in QA issues in EUIs.

Communication and dissemination plan of both the topical group activities and outputs

The GCT will liaise with WP2 & WP4 to ensure compliance with existing communication plans and guidelines as well as coordinated and meaningful internal and external communication and dissemination.

The following outputs are to be communicated within FOREU4ALL and beyond:

- Reflection papers summarising members' experiences, for example on the use of the European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, on Micro-credentials or

internal/transnational QA (reflections on the EUNIQ-project). This can be submitted to EQAF and/or EAIE.

In addition, the following outputs are to be communicated in the context and framework of the different formats proposed (e.g., webinars and workshops) by the topical groups depending on the scope of these formats (internal or external):

- Cursory mapping of key QA principles and approaches used in EUI to uncover commonalities and/or divergence and most importantly common challenges in alliance, national and institutional contexts.
- Case Studies to identify enablers and barriers to the implementation of a unified European Approach to quality assurance of Alliances. These case studies will be informed and built upon other projects including EUniQ.
- Recommendations and good practices describing the ways in which internal quality assurance mechanisms can be implemented in collaboration with the European Quality Assurance Agencies and which each Alliance can adapt for their specific purposes and contexts. This may include sections on, for example, mobilities, joint programmes, joint initiatives, research, professional services, and governance. Building on the EUniQ Framework and IMINQA project to provide scenarios of the implementation of quality assurance practices within alliances through sharing of process maps and members' experiences.

All the above outputs shall be communicated and disseminated in selected and condensed form during the FOREU4ALL final dissemination event in line with the specific topical foci set for this event and in close collaboration and coordination with WP2, WP4 as well as other topical groups, most importantly, the groups 'European Degree' and 'ALLIES'.

IV. Members

The QA topical group will consist of up to 3 Quality Assurance representative(s) from each European University Alliance who can participate in any of the subgroups they would like.

External stakeholders, such as the ESU (and its dedicated QA expert students' pool), EQAR, ENQA, EUA, and EURASHE, but also external stakeholders who show an interest in the topical group or have valuable expertise will be invited to the group's workshops or webinars.