

Report on 1st informal NA staff meeting on European Universities (as role models) as part of the LTA-EUIs 'Spreading innovative results from European University Alliances (EUI) to other higher education institutions'

The first LTA event, an informal NA staff meeting, took place on 23-24 April 2024 in Bonn, Germany. It brought together more than 30 representatives from 25 NAs regularly dealing with the European Universities Initiative in their daily work (counselling and informing applicants, events, dissemination activities, etc.) and interested in working on this topic.

The aim of the event was twofold: 1) to exchange on NAs' approaches to the EUI 2) to collect ideas on NAs' role as facilitators for EUIs being role models as well as on their contribution to the LTA and to the future of the initiative. The first half day of the event was dedicated to the status quo and good practices regarding NAs' involvement in the EUI. 10 NAs presented their national strategies and good practices on how they support the EUI and their HEIs involved in an alliance (see presentations).

Main messages

Day 1 – Status quo and good practices

- Different NA structures imply different roles of NAs. Many NAs are active with regard to EUIs, but the extent of involvement is varying due to national mandates, e.g. because ministries or other national organisations have been given the mandate. However, the role of NAs in connection to EUIs is changing and developing, and NAs (e.g. IT, FR, RO) are now becoming more active.
- NAs use the momentum of HE political attention to advertise the numerous other opportunities for Erasmus+ cooperation for all HEIs. In the current situation many NAs are writing mid-term evaluations of the Erasmus+ programme and providing the feedback regarding the next programme to come; these parallel processes make various interconnections visible and reinforce the momentum.
- Many NAs work together with their Ministries or other agencies on removing various administrative barriers which make it difficult to work on joint undertakings (micro-credentials, joint degrees, legal obstacles).
- There is the risk of a possible overlap regarding funding opportunities for EUI-HEIs and non-EUI-HEIs. For example, regarding mobility the two groups are in competition. The careful consideration on the future budget for EUIs would require solutions on how the budget for EUIs may come from supplementary sources.
- The quality of Alliances activities and their strategies should be evaluated, bearing in mind that their time frame is much longer than for normal E+ projects. Since Alliances have higher ambitions, multiple aims and funding which comes from different sources, the evaluation activities will require careful consideration on indicators and methodology. Some NAs are already writing national reports, and the results and knowledge developed could be shared with other NAs.

Day 2 -Looking ahead

NAs' role regarding the EUI

- The facilitator's role is very central: NAs have a key role in connecting with national authorities, they are dialogue partners for the alliances. NAs can build a platform between EUIs, ministries and other decision makers and stakeholders. When meeting with the EUIs, the NAs can address different actors, such as rectors, administration staff, academic staff students and student associations, international offices, quality assurances department, etc. Thus, NAs can act as multipliers, forging non-existent links and expanding existing networks.
- They are definitively prepared to assume this role, but they need a clear mandate. Therefore, a structured dialogue with the Commission is needed.
- In doing so, they can contribute to co-creating the future programme.
- However, NAs cannot take over monitoring activities for EUI, that should remain the competence of the Commission, but they would welcome outcome of the monitoring activities to improve their own work and to spread results to other HEIS in a more structured manner.
- "Soft" monitoring of what Alliances are doing to spread the results to other HEIs.

What can NAs do to support non EUI-HEIs?

- Prevent EUIs becoming a restricted and superior cluster of HEIs by sharing innovative results with other HEIs. The non-EUIs should be included in the national EUI communities and work with the EUIs on joint projects.
- NAs should set up a platform to bring together EUIs and non-EUIs at national level. thus encouraging the sharing of experiences and showcasing best practices.
- Contact "Seal of Excellence" institutions and support them in finding other (E+) funding opportunities.
- Promote other E+ opportunities. NAs need to make the non-EUIs aware about the many possibilities of Erasmus+ and other (national) programmes that are out there and give them good examples how they can build up or (re)shape their internationalisation strategies in general.
- Establish a platform collecting good practices, e.g. on how to deal with regulatory barriers (e.g. MS Teams or similar)
- Support smaller HEIs willing to join Alliances, e.g. as associated partners.
- Showcase new approaches and practices that EUIs are testing and how they can be used for the benefit all institutions.

NAs' contribution to the LTA

NAs are willing to contribute to the planned LTA activities in line with their possibilities and main areas of action. They suggested concrete contributions to the different work packages of the LTA: elaborating and disseminating surveys and papers, participating actively to meetings, workshops and conferences as well as creating synergies between the LTA activities and their own activities at national level (see list of suggestions attached). Furthermore, they suggested new ideas like creating a Teams channel on the EUI under the Commission's Teams or a dedicated repository.

Conclusions

The meeting provided NAs with the opportunity to learn from each other about EUI related activities and to explore their potential to act as facilitators between Alliances and HEIs who are not in the initiative. However, the exchanges showed that NAs are still not fully involved in this initiative. Most NAs would like to have a more active role with regard to the EUI. That is what the present LTA would like to achieve.

Next steps

- Creating a channel for all NAs to facilitate internal dialogue on EUI
- Collecting and processing the participants' feedback
- Launching a website for the LTA
- Inviting volunteering NAs to contribute to the preferred tasks
- Planning the next (online) Informal NA Meeting for Q4
- Introducing the LTA developments of the first year, including the needs and recommendations on EUIs to the Commission
- Survey on the needs of non-EUI HEIs throughout Europe

Background of the LTA-EUIs as role models

Through their deep transnational collaboration, European University Alliances are experimenting with a variety of innovative forms of teaching and learning, institutional cooperation structures at different levels, creative formats of collaboration with partners outside academia and support for joint research projects. Alliances also identify barriers to cooperation and test solutions in a safe space of collaboration.

In addition to the changes achieved in their own institutions, Alliances are **called upon to act as role models** and «to serve as inspiration for the wider higher education sector» (Erasmus+ calls „European Universities“ 2022, 2023, 2024).

To fulfil this mission and reach out to the 90% of HEIs not involved in the initiative, the Alliances need facilitators and spaces. With the proposed LTA, the organising NAs support the transfer of experiences for the benefit of other interested HEIs.

The LTA is a direct result of the TCA conference on European University Alliances: “Spreading innovative results from European University Alliances to other higher education institutions” which took place in Bergen in May 2023 and exhibited the need for support for Alliances to act effectively as role models.

The LTA is co-organised by a **core group of four NAs** (Austria/OeAD, Hungary/ Tempus Public Foundation, Norway/Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, Germany/ NA DAAD). **All interested NAs** are invited to contribute to the planned activities.