

BRIEFING

The European Universities Initiative and system level reforms

Current challenges and considerations for the future

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1. Introduction

The European Universities Initiative is moving into a new phase. As the pilot phase comes to an end, it is time to take stock of the impact it has had thus far at various levels. Aside from changes at the level of the participating institutions, from the start the European University Association (EUA) has focused on the potential of the initiative to help further policy reforms that benefit the wider university system.

This briefing aims to shed light on the link between European and national system reform discussions in the context of the European Universities Initiative and to structure the debate about remaining system-level challenges related to transnational university cooperation in Europe. It also provides some considerations for the future.

The following sections draw on evidence provided by national rectors' conferences, collected through a survey in April 2022 and interviews conducted in the framework of the forthcoming update of EUA's Autonomy Scorecard. Where relevant, it also refers to previous EUA studies on [international strategic institutional partnerships and the European Universities Initiative](#) (2020) and [European university alliances' governance models](#) (2021).

THE POLICY CONTEXT

The aim of the European Commission, as announced in the [European Strategy for Universities](#) (January 2022), is to support the creation of 60 alliances involving more than 500 higher education institutions from across Europe by mid-2024.

17 alliances selected under the 2019 Erasmus+ call will exit the pilot phase at the end of 2022. One year later, the same will be true for the 24 alliances selected from the 2020 call. In the summer of 2022, 16 out of 17 alliances from the first cohort successfully obtained follow-up funding and four new alliances were selected under the third Erasmus+ call. This brings the number of alliances up to 44, with approximately 340 higher education institutions from 31 countries involved as full partners. The 2023 Erasmus+ call launched in October 2022 provides opportunities for a few new alliances as well as for those established in 2020 to apply for follow-up funding.

In parallel, discussions are starting on the evaluation of the pilot phase, the impact the initiative has had so far and the suitability of the scheme. These aspects will also be part of the upcoming mid-term reviews of the Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programmes.

With this, pressure is mounting on alliances to deliver first results and demonstrate what they have achieved so far. At the same time, challenges to transnational university collaboration are coming to the surface. Several of these are already well known, such as [those addressed in the Bologna Process](#); linked to quality assurance, recognition, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and degree structures. Moreover, they appear even more challenging in a large-scale multilateral setting like the alliances under the European Universities Initiative. Additional challenges linked to the language of instruction, funding or employment and secondment of staff have so far received comparatively less attention at European level.

With the [European Strategy for Universities](#) and the ideas for a potential EU label for joint programmes and a legal statute for transnational university alliances, the European Commission has initiated a debate about possible new EU instruments aimed at deepening transnational collaboration. [These will be piloted throughout 2023](#) and the jury is out on how they may contribute to addressing some of the challenges mentioned here.

2. Challenges to transnational collaboration

Two decades of working towards better compatibility and convergence of European higher education and research systems in the context of the Bologna Process and the European Research Area have brought considerable progress. Nevertheless, many challenges to transnational university cooperation persist.

The challenges mentioned during consultations with national rectors' conferences can be found at various levels. They may be linked to different institutional policies and practices of consortium partners, but also to restrictive or diverging regulatory and funding frameworks at the level of higher education systems, or a combination of both.

Furthermore, they are not necessarily specific to the alliances in the European Universities Initiative, as institutions may also face issues with other types of transnational cooperation. However, they are often amplified in the context of multilateral alliances involving many institutions from different higher education systems. This can then be a driver for change due to pressure to find solutions.

Table 1 Levels and causes of challenges

LEVEL OF THE CHALLENGE

- Higher education system context;
- Institutional level policies and practices;
- A combination of both.

ISSUES CAN APPEAR DUE TO

- Restrictions in regulatory frameworks;
- Differences in funding frameworks and levels of funding;
- Divergence of policies and practices;
- A combination of all three.

The following section analyses the challenges reported by national rectors' conferences in the context of the surveys mentioned above and interviews conducted in 2022. While this list is certainly not exhaustive, it captures what was perceived as most relevant at the time.

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF JOINT PROGRAMMES

The challenges mentioned most often by national rectors' conferences relate to issues around the accreditation and quality assurance of joint study programmes. Some point to differences in the implementation of the [European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes](#), as developed in the framework of the Bologna Process. This is an instrument to ensure that in systems with programme accreditation, a joint programme that has been accredited using the European Approach does not need to undergo another (national) accreditation procedure in any of the partner countries. While the approach was adopted by ministers of EHEA member countries in 2015, implementation is still quite fragmented (see [EQAR data](#)).

Beyond this, other quality assurance challenges exist for joint programmes, including those linked to accreditation in systems where this is required. This may for instance include that a joint programme has to go through a new accreditation procedure every time there is a change in the composition of the consortium. This requirement can represent a particular challenge for multilateral alliances under the European Universities Initiative as they are still developing their activities, while being politically and financially incentivised by the European Commission to expand and integrate new partners. While it is understandable that a re-evaluation takes place when a new institution gets involved, this process should be simple and efficient, and would therefore best be dealt with by internal quality assurance processes.

DEGREE STRUCTURES AND USE OF ECTS

Differences in degree structures and the use of ECTS, such as national rules about the number of ECTS credits needed to award a degree, pose another problem. Again, this is not unique to European university alliances, but it is relevant in this context. While bachelor's and master's degree programmes are now established in all EHEA countries, programme workload and ECTS weighting differ, between but also within systems. Bachelor's programmes range from 180 to 240 ECTS credits, with master's programmes between 60 and 120 (see page 62 of the [Bologna Process Implementation Report 2020](#)). This diversity is generally in line with the Bologna Process and should not provide an obstacle for cross-border recognition of degrees. Nevertheless, it can become an obstacle for transnational joint programmes, in particular in systems which prescribe or limit duration and workload.

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

While throughout Europe universities are relatively free to choose the language in which classes are delivered, there are still several countries where universities face a variety of restrictions regarding the use of foreign languages. In some cases, for example in **Lithuania**, universities must justify organising courses in non-official languages on the grounds of internationalisation. In **Latvia**, legislation now specifies that study programmes in foreign languages may be only delivered if the institution's study programmes are rated as good or excellent during the study field accreditation.

Limits may also apply. In 2021, **Denmark** applied a new policy whereby for each institution the law stipulates a certain number of study places for programmes delivered in English. This intervention led to many programmes being terminated. In **Flanders** (Belgium), universities may offer a maximum of 35% of their master's programmes in languages other than Dutch, and only 9% at bachelor's degree level (previously 6%).

This matter may also be regulated so that universities may only open bachelor's and/or master's programmes in a foreign language when the programme is already available in a national language – whether at the same institution (**Estonia, Slovenia**) or in the sector (**Flanders**). The **francophone universities of Belgium** are subject to the same rule, with additional limits placed at 25% of ECTS credits at bachelor's degree level and 50% of ECTS credits for master's programmes delivered in languages other than French.

In **Cyprus** and **Greece**, bachelor's programmes must be taught in the national language, a strong restriction compared to other countries. Although it has been possible since 2020 for universities in Greece to deliver bachelor's programmes in foreign languages, only foreign applicants may attend the programmes.

Furthermore, in some European countries academic programmes delivered in languages other than the official national language(s) may not be eligible for public funding.

ACADEMIC CALENDARS

Differences in academic calendars, in terms of start and end dates and teaching periods, is another challenge for transnational cooperation among universities mentioned by some national rectors' conferences. Although not new, this issue becomes more challenging in large-scale multilateral cooperation frameworks such as alliances. It also demonstrates that the same issue might need to be addressed at different levels depending on who decides within a higher education system. As the [Eurydice report on academic calendars](#) points out, Europe is divided in this regard. In one half of countries, the start and end date of the academic year is set by public authorities, while in the other half, it is left to the discretion of higher education institutions. This can make the organisation of joint education provision among partner institutions more complex.

FINANCIAL AND STAFFING AUTONOMY

National rectors' conferences often point to differences in regulatory frameworks regarding financial management and autonomy. Restrictions placed on universities in certain systems may have a significant impact on their capacity to join an alliance. For example, in **Sweden**, public universities are not allowed to sign

legally binding contracts with any residential or foreign entities without obtaining preliminary parliamentary approval. While Swedish universities still participate in European university alliances, the process has been seen as extremely burdensome and administratively heavy. Similarly, in **Slovenia**, universities need permission from an external authority to join an alliance.

In addition, depending on the country/higher education system, universities may not always be able to borrow funds, engage in cross-border investments or implement resource pooling. Such cases make it difficult or impossible for a network to jointly invest in infrastructure or equipment, let alone joint hiring of staff.

In a large majority of higher education systems, universities face certain constraints with regard to borrowing. In **Spain**, for instance, public universities must get prior approval from the regional government and justify the need for investment. In **Iceland**, public universities may only borrow money indirectly through their established companies. Whereas in **Ireland**, a “borrowing framework” must be agreed between universities and the higher education authority. Furthermore, the capacity of universities in **Germany** to borrow funds differs markedly across states (Länder). This ranges from full prohibition in Hesse to limits placed on the amount in North-Rhine Westphalia, or restrictions regarding the type of banks in Brandenburg.

The capacity to allocate funds internally, as well as to raise additional income also differs across Europe, both in terms of opportunities and for regulatory reasons. Thus, not all partners in transnational cooperation may be able to repurpose or otherwise generate financial support for these activities.

Regarding staff, setting up financial incentives for mobility can also be problematic, depending on set reward structures. Joint staff hiring may not be possible on long-term contracts. It should be noted that senior academic staff, such as professors, have civil servant status in many European countries. With this status come strict rules regarding recruitment, salary setting and dismissal, for which universities typically have little room for manoeuvre. Moreover, some systems (**Flanders, Latvia**) require national language proficiency tests for academic staff, making international recruitment near to impossible or highly complicated.

It is noteworthy that only a small number of systems allow their universities to autonomously decide on salaries for academic staff. Other salary setting practices include negotiation with other parties or having salary bands in place. On the opposite end of the spectrum, in countries like **Portugal, Greece, Cyprus** and **Slovenia**, an external authority exclusively sets the salary for some senior academic staff due to their civil servant status. Therefore, joint decisions on staffing matters can represent a challenge due to national specificities.

TUITION FEES

Depending on where they operate, universities may or may not have the capacity to charge or set the level of tuition fees for certain or all segments of the student population. This issue raises specific questions for consortia engaged in joint study programmes. Indeed, perceptions around the societal acceptability of fee levels differ throughout Europe. This may also create inequalities among students enrolled in similar programmes (regular/joint programmes) in the same institutions, or attending the same joint programme, according to their “country of entry”. When tuition fees differ for EU and non-EU students (as is often the case in EU member states), universities engaged in European consortia offering joint educational provision must also factor this into their financial and international strategies. Indeed, certain systems may financially incentivise the enrolment of international students over EU students or give greater autonomy to universities to decide on tuition fees for this part of the student population.

To better illustrate this point, in only a handful of systems (**Lithuania** and **Latvia** - for students who do not obtain a state-sponsored study place - and **Romania**) are universities responsible for setting tuition fees at bachelor’s degree level for national and EU students, whereas there are no tuition fees in nearly 40% of systems. Universities tend to be more autonomous for master’s and doctoral degree programmes. The

language of instruction and/or the nationality of students may also come into play when deciding on tuition fees. In certain countries (e.g. **Croatia**) no fees are charged to students who are enrolled in programmes delivered in the national languages, regardless of nationality. In other cases, such as **Slovenia**, universities may not charge fees to national and EU students, irrespective of the language of instruction.

THE COMPLEX FUNDING LANDSCAPE

The increasingly complex nature of the funding landscape for universities, both at national and at European level, is [a trend that EUA has highlighted](#). The multiplication of small-scale income sources, often time-bound and earmarked, combined with the greater use of performance-related funding instruments (formula funding, contracts) by public authorities has led universities to direct more resources into financial management. European funding, for its part, has also become a relevant income source for universities and has generated its own set of rules and procedures for which universities also require expertise. In this context, transnational collaboration is a particularly exposed area, where greater funding alignment and simplification are perhaps what matter most.

However, universities must jump through (too) many hoops, bringing together various European and national funding schemes. The main difficulties reported here relate to the fact that these schemes often address just one angle of an increasingly broad and complex collaboration landscape, and that they have different timeframes, reporting and administrative requirements. There is often simply no funding framework for joint study programme collaboration. The desynchronisation of funds, when they are available, generates a massive administrative burden for universities, with processes riddled with inefficiencies and an overall sense of uncertainty brought about by the temporary nature of the funding. Furthermore, national rectors' conferences also cite persisting divergences among European programme financial rules.

UNEVEN FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Transnational consortia also face the lack of a level playing field with regard to the support they receive from public authorities. EUA's [Public Funding Observatory](#), which tracks public investment in universities, has demonstrated the largely varying degree to which governments fund the sector and how this has changed over time. This means that partners engaged in collaboration may have very different capacities to cover costs related to cooperation out of their core budget, beyond project-bound funds.

Several European countries have set up funding schemes to support the participation of their universities in the European Universities Initiative. This is a welcome development, as it facilitates institutions' long-term planning and decreases dependency on project-bound funding. However, not all participating member states do so, and when they do, both modalities and amounts can vary significantly. This creates difficulties and uncertainty within consortia.

Scattered, unpredictable and difficult-to-combine funding possibilities, combined with a pathway akin to a (regulatory) obstacle course, make finances a core challenge in transnational collaboration.

Table 2: Examples of challenges linked to system-level rules and regulations

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Requirements for the accreditation and quality assurance of joint programmes and differences in the implementation of the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes ● Differences in degree structures and requirements regarding the number of ECTS credits needed for a degree ● Differences in academic calendars, in grading ● Differences in higher education access requirements and the ability of higher education institutions to select students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Differences/restrictions regarding the language of instruction ● Differences in university funding systems ● Differences regarding tuition fees ● Restrictions on universities making contracts with foreign entities ● Restrictions on universities creating legal entities |
|--|--|

Most of the challenges mentioned above are in one way or another linked to the education mission of universities. Challenges in relation to the research mission are not mentioned very often by national rectors' conferences. There are several possible reasons for this:

The European Universities Initiative started with a focus on the education mission and the pilot calls under Erasmus+ did not consider the research dimension. This was only brought in later through additional support via the EU's research framework programme.

Transnational research cooperation follows a different logic and in some institutions and countries has a longer tradition than cooperation in the education mission beyond pure student mobility. This does not mean that challenges linked to transnational research collaboration do not exist nor that they will not arise. Rather, in the context of the European university alliances, they are likely to appear more prominently in the further development of this dimension. Some national rectors' conferences already report challenges linked to differences in academic career assessment (**Slovenia**) and differences in the status of researchers and their types of contracts (**the Netherlands**).

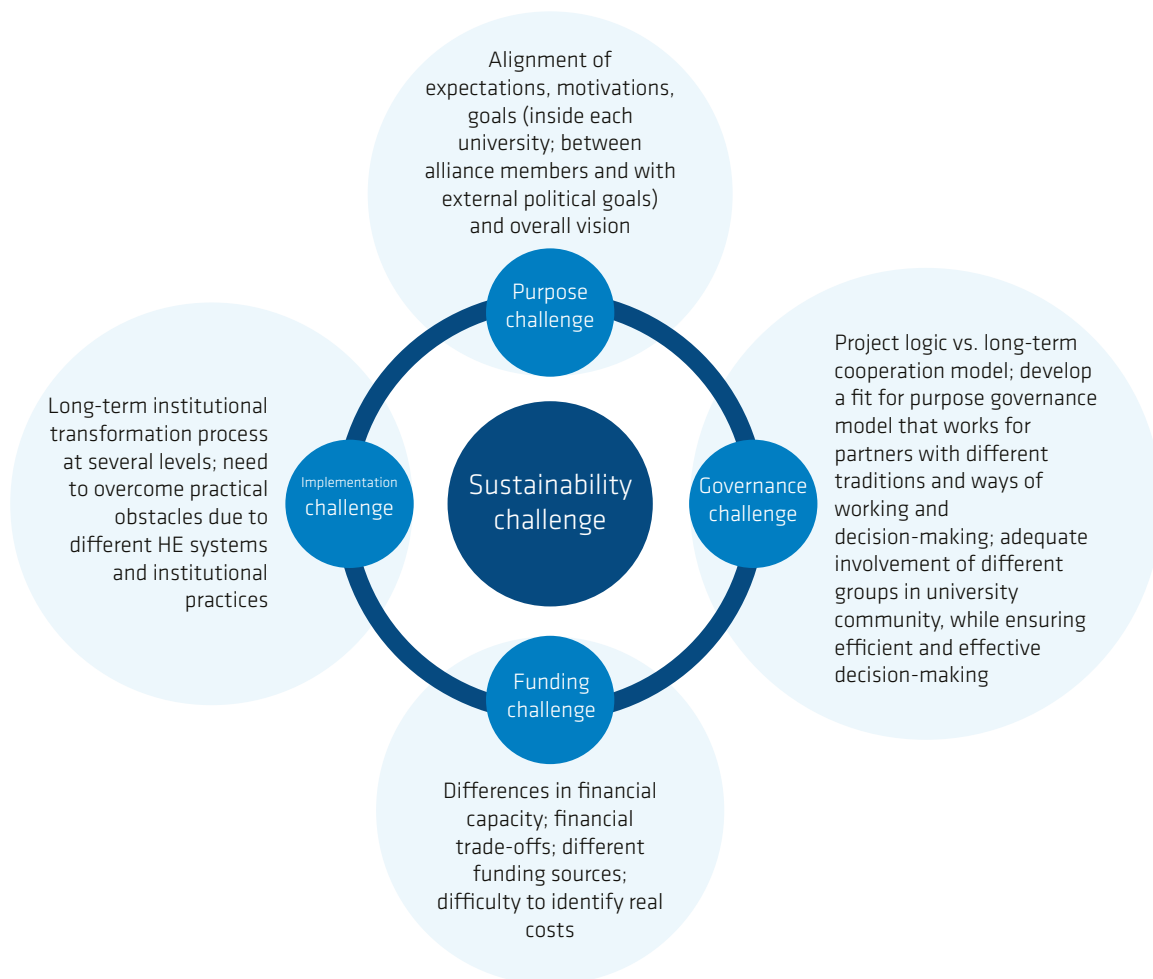
Beyond the system level context, there are also institutional level challenges such as differences in academic culture and assessment and grading, to mention just a few. To address these issues, continuous efforts and a willingness to work collaboratively with partners to find practical solutions are needed on the part of higher education institutions and those involved on the ground.

3. Challenges specific to the European Universities Initiative

There are also challenges that are more specific to the European Universities Initiative, the context and the funding instrument. Some of these were already mentioned as points of concern by respondents to the [EUA survey on international strategic institutional partnerships](#) (2020) and also analysed in the [EUA briefing on the governance models of European university alliances](#) (2021).

These issues can be clustered in four main challenges, namely purpose, implementation, funding and governance, with the sustainability challenge as an overarching and transversal fifth area.

Graph 1: Challenge areas for university alliances



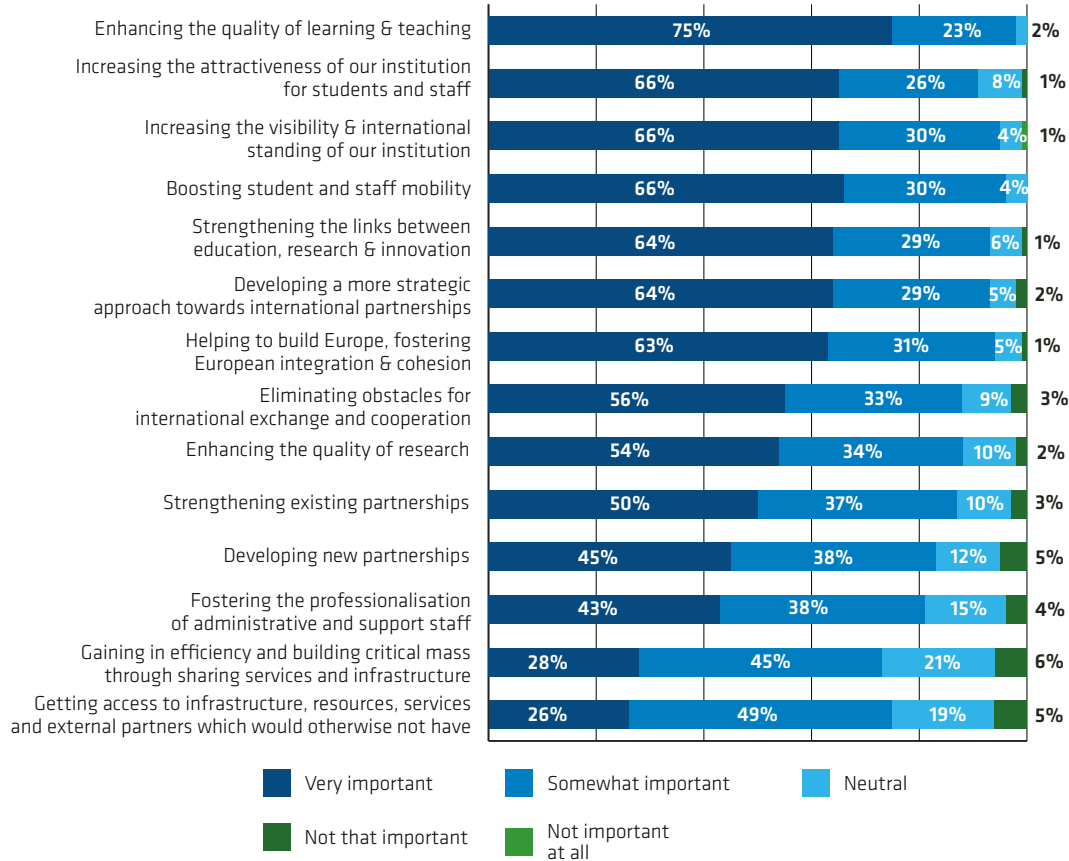
THE PURPOSE CHALLENGE

Universities expect many different benefits from participating in the European Universities Initiative. Enhancing the quality of learning and teaching is at the top of the list of expected benefits (mentioned by 75% of respondents to the EUA survey in 2020). For about two-thirds of respondents, other expected benefits of high importance include: increasing the attractiveness, visibility and international standing of the university; boosting student and staff mobility; strengthening the links between different university missions; developing a more strategic approach towards international collaboration, and; helping to build Europe and foster European integration and cohesion.

This shows that alliance building has many different purposes, to which different actors in and outside of the university may attach different degrees of importance. Here, the challenge is to bring everything together while not overloading the cooperation with ambitions that are too high.

Graph 2: Expected benefits from participating in the European Universities Initiative

EUA Survey Q88: What are/might be the benefits that you expect for your higher education institution from participating in the initiative?



Source: *EUA survey 2020, p. 22*

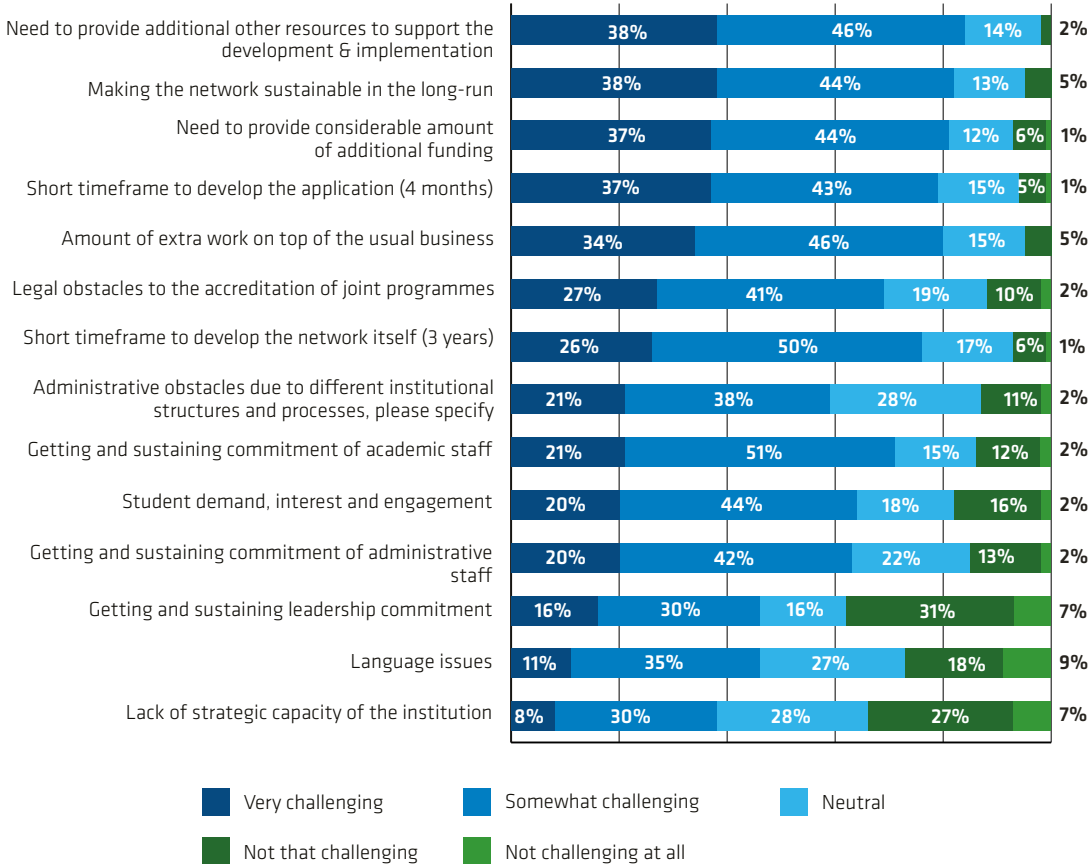
Aligning different goals, motivations and expectations, while keeping the alliance’s academic vision in focus is a challenge, be it within a participating institution, among alliance members or with regard to external political demands and expectations. The multiplicity of goals and potential trade-offs between them is another issue. And in many ways, including politically, alliances are asked to tick a lot of boxes and be good at everything. This may include covering diverse institutional profiles and regions, developing inter-institutional campuses with a diverse student community, offering student-centred and challenge-based learning in interdisciplinary teams fostering synergies between education, utilising research and innovation to solve societal challenges and increasing mobility up to 50% at all levels. This makes focusing on the specific strengths of a partnership more difficult.

THE FUNDING CHALLENGE

Funding and resource allocation is one of the most significant challenges. This includes the need to provide a substantial amount of co-funding and the amount of additional work required to develop and sustain the alliance and its activities. Of course, this comes on top of the usual responsibilities of academics and administrative staff as well as the need to ensure long-term sustainability.

Graph 3: Challenges in participating in the European Universities Initiative

EUA Survey Q89: What are/would be the challenges for your institution in participating in the initiative? Please rate the degree of the challenges listed below. - Language issues (N=190)



Source: [EUA survey 2020, p.23](#)

This challenge also refers to financial trade-offs with other institutional activities outside of the alliance. In addition, there is the fact that alliance members must juggle different funding frameworks to cover the costs of joint activities, while the full and real costs of implementing diverse goals may be underestimated or not even known.

Beyond discrepancies in national support and co-funding for participating in an alliance, there are also big [differences in the overall levels of funding for universities in the different systems](#) and variations in investment capacity among countries. This is an issue for alliances as it creates an uneven playing field among alliance members.

THE IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGE

Another notable challenge is the complexity of the endeavour as a long-term institutional change process involving many different actors and groups in the institution. Often, university leadership drives the alliance building process at the beginning. Then the question arises as to whether this support can be sustained when leaders and institutional priorities change. The integration of alliances in long-term institutional strategies, consolidated buy-in from the wider university community and the upscaling of activities from pilots to integration into the normal activity flow of the university represents yet another issue. This requires overcoming barriers and finding practical solutions to differences in regulatory frameworks and institutional practices.

THE GOVERNANCE CHALLENGE

Following a long-term vision and ensuring the sustainability of the alliances requires that we look beyond the short-term project logic of EU funding support, as provided by the Erasmus+ programme and the research framework programme. It means establishing a governance framework for the alliance that is compatible with and takes account of the institutional level governance setup and decision making processes at the member universities. It also requires finding a balance between ensuring the involvement of different groups within the university community and keeping decision making efficient and effective.

All of these issues are interlinked and together form the alliances' sustainability challenge, including their long-term vision and establishment. Such questions need to be addressed for alliances to become sustainable in the long run. This can be done in different ways, but it is in many aspects a continuous process of aligning ambitions, resources and capacities.

4. Impact of the European Universities Initiative on national level reform discussions

In several countries the European Universities Initiative and the development of the alliances have brought transnational university cooperation back into the arena of policy discussions, albeit to different degrees. While some are discussing issues and challenges linked to system level barriers and, in a few cases, already starting to act, others do not perceive them in the same way. One important question is whether the opportunity is used to make the system less restrictive for transnational university cooperation generally or whether changes would create exceptions and only benefit universities involved in alliances. Currently, in many cases, the debate tends to focus on academic autonomy matters (such as the accreditation of programmes, language of instruction and admission of students), but effective change has remained rare in 2022.

In **Greece**, exceptions are discussed for the seven universities that are part of European university alliances, notably when it comes to automatic recognition (by the Greek National Academic Recognition Information Centre - NARIC) and accreditation of joint study programmes. At present Greece has not implemented the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes but using it for the programmes of European university alliances is under discussion.

In **Flanders** (Belgium), the existing restrictions regarding the language of instruction have caused a debate and the sector is collectively advocating for the exemption of joint programmes of European university alliances from the general rule. If successful, this would mean that these programmes would not count toward the maximum percentage of programmes that a university can deliver in a foreign language.

In **Hungary**, the sector expects that the regulatory framework will be simplified by the end of 2023, as it has been deemed somewhat rigid and inflexible. This was also raised in the context of the participation of Hungarian universities in the European Universities Initiative, and therefore some modifications were already implemented to ease this process (a Hungarian member university of a European university alliance may start a course that another member has accredited abroad).

In **Italy**, the Initiative has caused a new debate about accreditation and the university sector, led by the national rectors' conference, is arguing for a move from programme to institutional accreditation. At present, universities in Italy must submit each new programme for external accreditation.

In **Romania**, the national rectors' conference has played a key role in changing the law to facilitate the participation of Romanian universities in European university alliances.

In **Slovenia**, the national rectors' conference reports that the European Universities Initiative and related European level policy discussions are triggering national reform discussions with regard to several aspects.

These include the quality assurance of joint programmes and joint degrees, the introduction of micro-credentials and online learning.

In **Denmark**, online learning and more specifically virtual mobility is also a topic that came up in the context of participation in European university alliances. At present, it is not possible for Danish universities to offer virtual mobility during online courses. While virtual mobility is a topic that emerged more generally during the pandemic, the Danish rectors' conference was the only one that specifically mentioned it in relation to the European Universities Initiative.

In **Spain**, one of the objectives of the ongoing reform of the university law is to facilitate the further internationalisation of Spanish universities. In this respect, the sector, represented by the national rectors' conference, has called for more autonomy of all universities to enable them to strengthen their transnational and international engagement in its diverse forms, independently from the question of whether they are involved in a European university alliance.

In **the Netherlands**, discussions around a new university law illustrate the complexity of internationalisation issues in higher education. The country may introduce new restrictions regarding the language of instruction (currently on hold). This is considered in the context of high growth of the international student population in the country. In part, the law may help universities to be more selective in terms of international student recruitment, but the provisions may also limit the autonomy of the universities to offer programmes in foreign languages. In the absence of actual student selection mechanisms (in the interest of open access for Dutch students), limiting student numbers for programmes delivered in foreign languages as well as policy based on language of instruction is being considered by the state as a means to address the issue of growing student cohorts, housing issues and related cost pressures.

5. Conclusions and considerations for the future

EUA's analysis confirms that there are still many challenges and obstacles to transnational university cooperation, and many come to the surface or are amplified in the context of large-scale multilateral cooperation like the alliances under the European Universities Initiative. Evidence from EUA's work shows that only in a few systems is there some improvement with regard to regulatory frameworks, either as part of broader reforms or specifically linked to the alliances. There will always be differences in European higher education systems due to different distributions of regulatory power, levels and systems of funding, academic cultures and traditions. Working towards more convergence, while keeping structures and approaches sufficiently open and flexible, continues to be an important endeavour.

This needs to include a systematic identification and examination of all challenges, barriers and obstacles, as well as a classification according to the level at which they need to be addressed. These efforts should build on the work and the tools already developed in the context of the Bologna Process and the European Research Area.

Before inventing new tools, those that already exist should be better and more widely implemented. This concerns notably the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, ECTS as well as common degree structures. The ongoing discussions on a [European degree label](#) may help to push this further, but a label alone will not solve the challenge of making systems more compatible.

Regarding restrictions on the language of instruction, solutions must be found that do not place an unnecessary burden on universities with regard to joint programmes with partners in other countries, while taking account of the particular concerns of smaller countries and those related to less widely spoken languages.

The diversity of institutional governance models and approaches as well as regulations around staffing and employment are examples of areas where convergence is more difficult to achieve. The same applies to funding levels. Despite common EU targets to increase investment in higher education and research at

national level, it is unlikely that the [differences in funding](#) will radically change in the near future. Funding for transnational cooperation is a challenge in itself, notably when it comes to long-term endeavours such as alliances under the European Universities Initiative. Here a better alignment of EU and national support is important, as is more transparency about national co-funding available in different countries. EU funding can never replace national efforts in this regard. Crucially, this also calls for strengthening universities' core funding and financial autonomy in order to enable them to invest in the type of transnational cooperation that best fits their vision, profile and strategy. To be sustainable in the long-term, any transnational cooperation needs to first and foremost provide added value to the achievement and fulfilment of institutional goals and missions. If transnational collaboration is to be properly embedded into institutional strategies, and fully accounted for in the universities' long-term financial sustainability, then it must receive support in a synergetic way through aligned, mutually reinforcing European and national funding that allows the institutions to allocate funding according to their priorities.

In addition, obstacles to the creation of legal entities, notably with partners in other countries, should be addressed where they exist, as some of the long-term multilateral activities may benefit from the creation of such entities. Whether a specific European legal statute for university alliances would be of added value has to be further explored. In this respect, it is particularly important to evaluate for which of the challenges described above such a design would provide a solution. It will be important to consider the outcomes of the related pilot call under the Erasmus+ programme and the testing phase in 2023.

While the focus of political attention is currently very much on the education dimension and the remaining challenges in this regard, in the future this must be considered jointly with the research dimension, where appropriate. Overcoming challenges to transnational cooperation should therefore be an integral part of the policy discussions on synergies between the European Education Area, the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area.

In order to improve transnational university cooperation, be it through alliances or other formats, all actors at European, national/regional and institutional level must continue to work together, address the identified challenges focusing on the areas where concrete change can be achieved, and each contribute what they can.

EUA looks forward to further contributing and engaging in this debate, and indeed to bringing the perspective of universities to the various European policy fora.

The European University Association (EUA) is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 48 European countries. EUA plays a crucial role in the Bologna Process and in influencing EU policies on higher education, research and innovation. Thanks to its interaction with a range of other European and international organisations, EUA ensures that the voice of European universities is heard wherever decisions are being taken that will impact their activities.

The Association provides unique expertise in higher education and research as well as a forum for exchange of ideas and good practice among universities. The results of EUA's work are made available to members and stakeholders through conferences, seminars, websites and publications.