D. 3. Quality Report

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Screening, Mapping, Analyzing, Recommending, Transferring, and Transforming HE international programmes

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About SMARTT

SMARTT is an innovative project aiming at analysing, testing, and piloting the new European Degree label criteria, improving the quality, and increasing the transferability of future developments of European Degrees across Europe and beyond.

SMARTT is formed by the **CIVIS - Europe's Civic University Alliance** in cooperation with the European Universities Alliances EUTOPIA, NEUROTECHEU, and UNITA, alongside higher education institutions, national and regional stakeholders and relevant actors. Based on significant experience in designing and delivering joint and multiple degree programs at transnational level, the higher education institutions involved in the SMARTT project propose to expand this experience and draw, based on clear methodologies and thorough analyses, recommendations and proposals both for the European Commission and the member states, to support the development of a European Approach for designing and implementing Joint European Degrees in the future. The consortium partners possess an extensive history of successful international collaboration and have consistently played a leading role in the co-development of the European Degree policy initiative since its inception.

Executive Summary

This report builds on Deliverable 3: Quality Report, providing an overview of the implementation of the Quality Assurance Plan for the SMARTT project.

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1. Acronyms and abbreviations

AMU – Aix-Marseille Université (France)

EC – European Commission

EA – European Approach

EDL – European Degree Label

EHEA – European Higher Education Area

ESGs – European Standards and Guidelines

HEI – Higher Education Institutions

NKUA – National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Greece)

PLUS – Paris Lodron University of Salzburg (Austria)

QA - Quality Assurance

SMARTT – Screening, mapping, analyzing, recommending, transferring, and transforming HE international programmes

SU – Stockholm University (Sweden)

SUR –-Sapienza Università di Roma (Italy)

UAM – Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain)

UB – University of Bucharest (Romania)

ULB – Université libre de Bruxelles (Belgium)

UofG – University of Glasgow (Scotland)

UNIL – University of Lausanne (Switzerland)

UT – Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen (Germany)

2.

Introduction

2. Introduction

This report offers a self-evaluation of the project quality at different levels for the whole evaluation period (12 months). It is based on the previously delivered SMARTT Quality Assurance (QA) plan, which outlined procedures and methodologies for project development based on the work packages, and established indicators and means of measurement to ensure the technical quality of the results. This document assesses the compliance following those guidelines, after carefully monitoring the indicators for each work package.

Objectives and mission

SMARTT main objectives were to explore and recommend possible optimization of the set of EDL criteria proposed by the Commission. These goals have been successfully achieved:

➔ Propose an approach that could be commonly agreed on for the delivery of joint degrees based on co-created European criteria by European countries at all education levels.
➔ Test the relevance of these criteria
➔ Conduct focus groups and interviews with Ministries and Quality Agencies
➔ Conduct a joint reflection with experts at all levels on possible scenarios for the delivery of a joint degree at all levels, based on these co-created European criteria
➔ Explore and recommend possible optimization of the proposed set of criteria
➔ Disseminate good practices at all levels through various dissemination activities, effectively sharing insights and recommendations derived from the project's findings.

Consortium brevis

The Consortium was formed with CIVIS Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as beneficiaries, including UAM, AMU, NKUA, UB, SUR, SU, ULB, PLUS, TU, and was extended to include other HEIs as associate partners, such as UofG, UNIL, Hassan II, and other alliances, UNITA, NeurotechEU, and Eutopia. Additionally, national and regional ministries of education and Quality Agencies joined to offer policy guidance and support for the project. The project duration was originally foreseen for 12 months (March 2023 – March 2024), but due to the celebration of the final event in Brussels (29th April 2024), the action period was extended an additional month in order to implement the communication, dissemination, and management activities accordingly.

The UAM has been the project coordinator, responsible for the overall project development. Beneficiaries were expected to collaborate with the research teams in conducting comprehensive assessments of all specified indicators within the criteria. This involved employing surveys, interviews, or alternative evaluative methods aimed at collecting data to evaluate the alignment of programs with the predefined indicators. Their involvement has been crucial, as they have fulfilled their responsibilities effectively and brought resources and academic programs to the table.

Associate partners also played a pivotal role in reinforcing the project's quality assurance framework. Their involvement spanned a range of activities, from engaging in evaluation efforts and offering constructive feedback to aiding in the monitoring and assessment of the EDL. These partners actively participated in collaborative discussions that were crucial to the project's progress as they brought their specialized expertise. Additionally, ministries of education and Quality Agencies(national and regional) provided essential policy direction and support.

Both beneficiaries and associate partners designated experts to join the expert groups focused on analyzing the criteria, evaluating the EDL, and contributing to the final set of recommendations. All appointed members actively participated and contributed to the project's outputs.

3.

Quality Assurance Bodies and their performance

3. Quality Assurance Bodies and their performance

3. 1. Consortium

The general division of roles and responsibilities within the consortium is as follows: the coordinator oversaw the management of the grant and served as the primary contact point for the granting authority, while the beneficiaries collectively contributed to a smooth and successful implementation of the grant. This involved contributing to the successful execution of the project, fulfilling their individual obligations under the Grant Agreement, and assisting the coordinator in meeting her responsibilities.

The quality of the consortium was assessed using an internal questionnaire to be completed by all partners. The partners evaluated several items related to the performance, commitment, and agreement capacity of the consortium. For each of the items below, the partners rated from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent):

- Willingness to solve problems (commitment to the project).
- Consortium's performance of its responsibilities (clear work plan and responsibilities fulfillment).
- Development of positive attitudes and trust throughout the life of the project (mutual understanding, commitment).

About 80% of the total number of partners responded to the internal questionnaire. The results are as follows.

How do you rate the willingness of the consortium to resolve problems?
12 respuestas
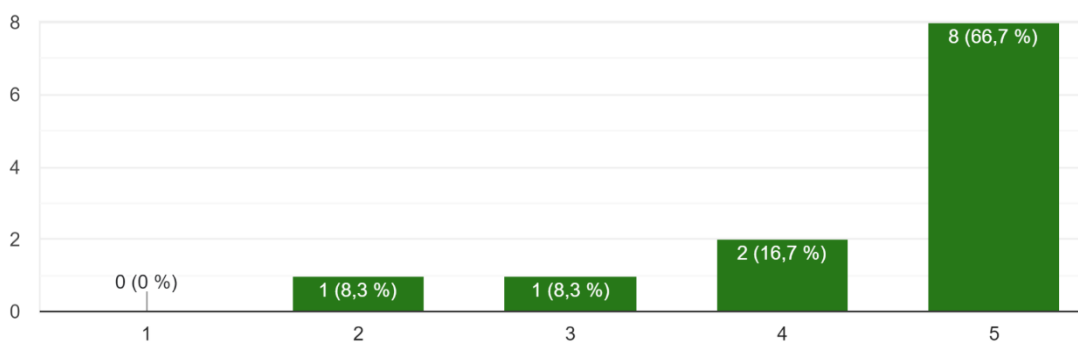
Please rate the consortium's performance of its responsibilities.
12 respuestas

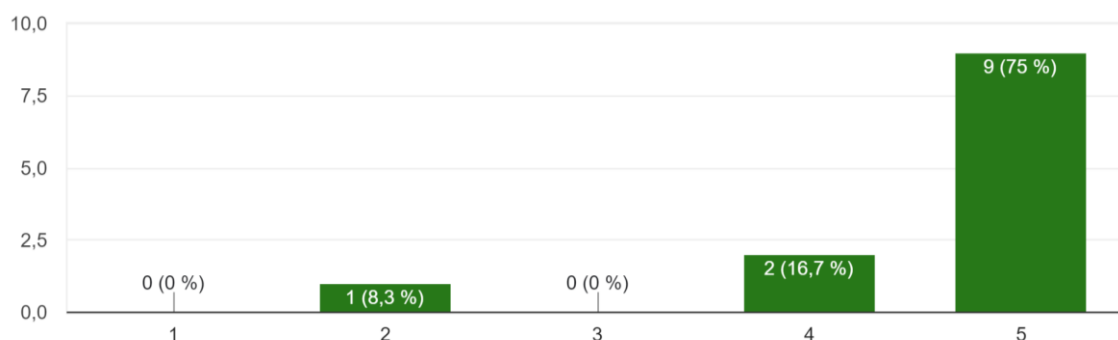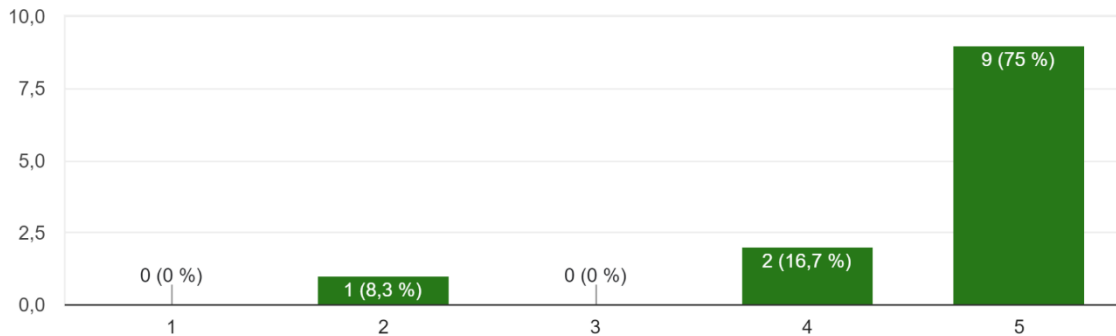How do you rate the development of positive attitudes and trust throughout the life of the project?
12 respuestas

About 83% of respondents rated the willingness to solve problems as "good" and "excellent". Some 92% gave the same rating to the fulfillment of the consortium's responsibilities, and the same percentage gave a positive rating to the development of trust in the consortium throughout the project. Despite a minority rating these items as "below average", there is a clear majority who consider the consortium's adherence to quality to be excellent.

3.2. Coordination Management Committee (CMC)

The CMC has been a higher-level governing body responsible for overseeing the overall operations and decision-making within the SMARTT consortium. Its membership has consisted of the UAM Coordinator, administrative personnel, representatives from CIVIS partners engaged in CIVIS Stream 3 (SUR, NKUA, and UB), and a representative from the University of Glasgow.

The CMC has undertaken various supervisory tasks to ensure the project's collective efforts remain aligned. Recognizing the dynamic nature of project management, the committee has shown flexibility by agreeing to reschedule meetings when they coincide with other significant events, thereby maintaining an adaptive and responsive management structure.

These meetings have been instrumental in addressing both the financial and administrative dimensions of the project, alongside scrutinizing the advancement of activities and work packages. This dual focus has ensured not only the adherence to budgetary and procedural frameworks but also the dynamic alignment of project activities with overarching objectives. Deviations and delays have been seriously taken into consideration, discussed, and agreed upon by all Committee members.

The CMC, supported by the Extended Management Committee (EMC), was primarily established to oversee the planning phase of the pilot project. Its initial meeting took place in May 2023, yet subsequent communications predominantly occurred via email, reflecting its composition of Institutional Coordinators from CIVIS who primarily provided administrative support. This setup facilitated efficient coordination and ensured that the pilot project's planning and execution aligned with the overarching objectives, leveraging the CMC in managing and guiding the project's strategic direction.

By employing a comprehensive and continuous approach to assessing CMC quality, the SMARTT consortium has ensured that its governance structures not only adhere to best practices in project management but also actively contribute to the project's success through effective leadership, strategic decision-making, and responsive adaptation to challenges and opportunities. The evaluation

of CMC quality has posed a unique challenge, bridging administrative efficacy with the broader impact on project outcomes. A multifaceted approach to this assessment has encompassed various metrics:

- **Key Performance Indicators**: Utilizing indicators such as the number of meetings held, minutes and recordings, and attendance rates (90%) can offer quantitative measures of the CMC's operational efficiency. These indicators are evaluated in the section assessing the quality of the management work package.
- **Questionnaire Feedback:** Incorporating specific questions related to the CMC's performance in our internal questionnaires has provided direct insights from consortium members regarding the effectiveness, responsiveness, and leadership of the CMC.

About 80% of the total number of partners responded to the internal questionnaire addressing the quality of the CMC. The items evaluated in this part have been the strategic guidance, the internal communication, and the overall decision-making process. The results are as follows.

How do you rate the strategic guidance of the project by the management committee?
12 respuestas
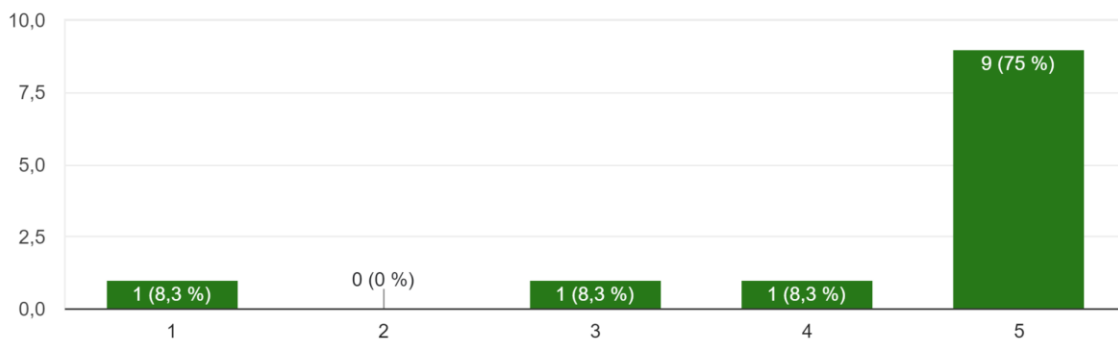
How was communication between partners handled internally?
12 respuestas

How do you rate the overall decision-making process?
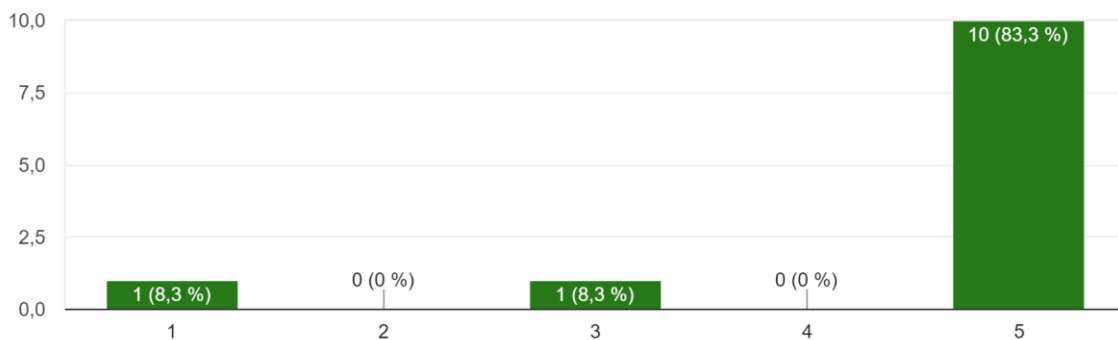
12 respuestas
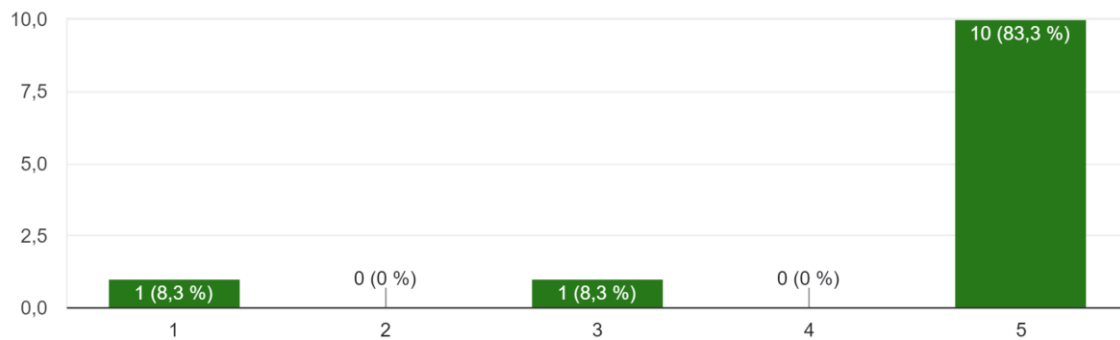
All criteria have been rated from poor to excellent, and the large majority of all partners measured the communication, decision-making process, and guidance of the CMC as excellent. One partner evaluated these elements as "adequate" and another one as "poor". Since this is exceptional feedback among the tendency, the management team has sought further clarification from the partner that provided that feedback, with the aim of gaining deeper insights into their perspective and improving the management actions in upcoming challenges, such as the context of the CIVIS alliance.

Additionally, the questionnaire also included the assessment of specific management aspects and actions, such as financial management, the efficiency of PM tools, and improvement capacity. Again, the great majority of respondents have rated the management's actions as "excellent", and one response has been evaluated as "poor" by these criteria. The management team sees value in this feedback as it shows that this partner has identified an area for improvement that others have overlooked. Therefore, further clarification on the evaluation has been sought, as it will help the team to better reflect, understand and proactively address the concerns for the next projects together.

How do you rate the financial management?

12 respuestas
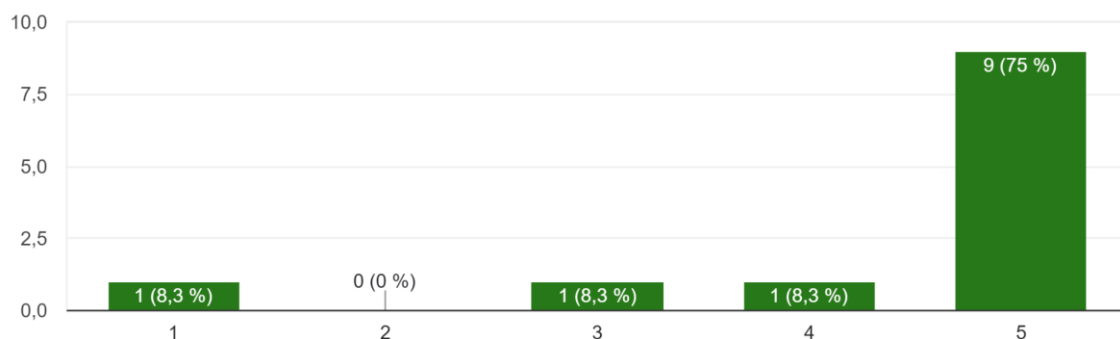
How would you rate the efficiency of the project management?

12 respuestas
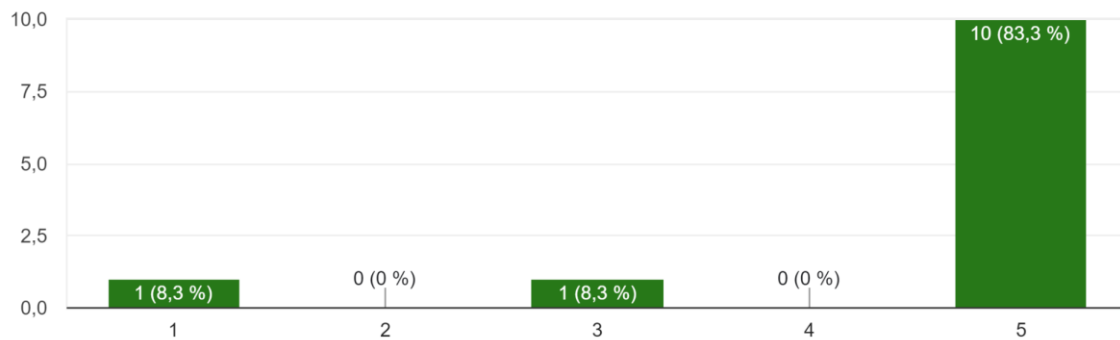
Do you think the management actions have improved the weak areas of the project?

12 respuestas
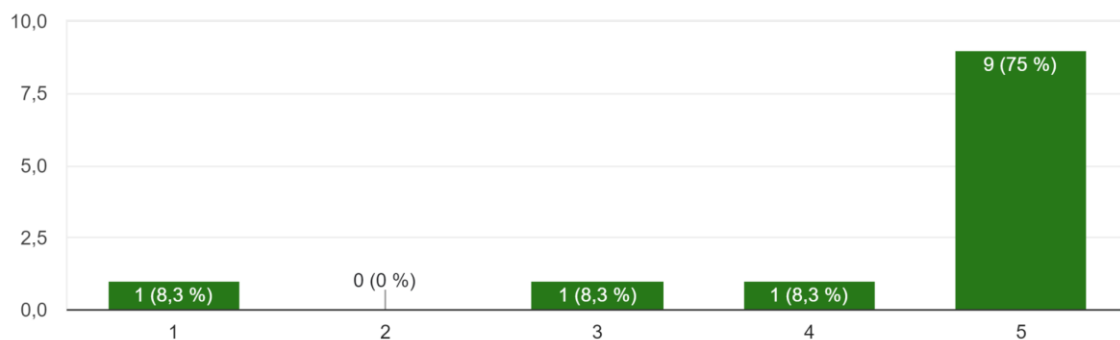
3.3. Experts' groups

A fundamental objective of the SMARTT project was to integrate stakeholder feedback into its recommendations and proposals, ensuring they were both high-quality and effective. This integration was pivotal as it allowed the project to be directly informed by the diverse challenges and perspectives surfaced during stakeholder consultations. Such an approach has enhanced the relevance of the recommendations.

To achieve this, SMARTT established two distinct yet complementary expert groups: the Core Experts' Group (CEG) and the Enlarged Experts' Group (EEG).

Core Experts' Group (CEG)

The CEG is formed by experts from CIVIS Universities with a crucial understanding of the project (UB, NKUA, SUR, UofG, AMU, UAM). This group plays a critical role in the initial analysis of feedback and data gathered from stakeholders, ensuring that the insights extracted were both accurate and profoundly relevant to the project's aims. The CEG's responsibilities include the preliminary synthesis

of recommendations, ensuring they were grounded in solid expertise and a deep understanding of the project's thematic scope.

Enlarged Experts' Group (EEG)

The EEG represents a broader consortium of expertise, encompassing experts from the CIVIS Universities (ULB, SU, TU, Salzburg, UNIL, Casablanca) as well as from other educational alliances such as UNITA, NeurotechEU, and EUTOPIA. This diverse assembly of experts ensured that the recommendations and proposals are scrutinized and enriched from a wide array of perspectives, enhancing their robustness and adaptability to varied educational and institutional contexts.

The EEG's role extended beyond validation to include the expansion and refinement of the CEG's initial recommendations. By incorporating a wider spectrum of insights and expertise, the EEG has ensured that the project's outputs were validated by a broad set of stakeholders with different perspectives.

The collaborative dynamics between the CEG and EEG underpinned the project's commitment to stakeholder-centered development. By systematically incorporating HEI's experts from all the European Alliances involved in the project, SMARTT ensured that its recommendations and proposals are aligned with the latest academic and practical insights.

Advisory Committees

It is also important to highlight the pivotal role played by the Advisory Committees within the SMARTT consortium, particularly the **CIVIS Educational Committee (CEC)** and the **Global Education Committee (GEC)**. These bodies have not only advised and guided the project's educational activities and policies but have also played a critical role in disseminating the advantages of the European Degree label within their respective institutions and initiating meaningful debates on its implementation. By actively promoting awareness, facilitating dialogue, and advocating for policy changes, the CEC and GEC have significantly contributed to the project's objectives of enhancing educational quality and fostering collaboration across the European higher education landscape. Their work has ensured that the European Degree label is not only a concept discussed within the confines of the SMARTT consortium but is also debated across a broader educational community, paving the way for its successful implementation and adoption.

The GEC, in particular, has demonstrated exceptional efficacy in engaging through focus groups and interviews, querying them about the added value of the European Degree Label. This direct engagement has provided invaluable insights into the perceptions and expectations regarding the EDL. Moreover, the GEC has been at the forefront of reviewing the criteria for the EDL as suggested by quality assurance agencies, thereby ensuring rigorous and reflective priorities.

Furthermore, the GEC's involvement in gathering feedback on the criteria and the set of recommendations for the EDL has been a cornerstone in refining the framework for the label. This feedback mechanism has enabled the incorporation of ground-level insights into the recommendations, making them more relevant.

Roles and activities

The experts' groups have been actively involved in both testing phases. During the first testing phase, led by UB, both CEG and EEG have jointly set the work procedure and working documents that have defined and grouped the criteria in clusters, determined data sources, and developed indicators to

measure the criteria. The specific objectives of engaging the Core Experts and Enlarged Experts working groups were to:

- O1. Develop a SMARTT vision for the European Label criteria.
- O2. Develop a SMARTT proposal for the revised European label criteria.
- O3. Propose methods for applying the SMARTT evaluation indicators.
- O4. Identify, define, and describe the corresponding SMARTT evaluation indicators.

During the second testing phase, which was led by SUR, the EEG played a crucial role in shaping the outcomes of the SMARTT project. Their contributions were especially significant in refining and finalizing the set of recommendations that emerged from this phase of the project. These contributions have been instrumental in the development of several key deliverables, enhanced the robustness of the dataset, in dissecting the collected data and by ensuring that the recommendations were comprehensive, actionable, and tailored to foster innovation and excellence in education:

- D6 Dataset
- D7 Set of Recommendations CIVIS
- D13 CIVIS report of quantitative and qualitative analysis

Fig. 1 Varying degrees of involvement in the development of recommendations

Quality of the working procedure

The workshops and working groups' sessions were carried out both online and in person, starting with the first Core Experts Group meeting taking place online the 19th of April with a general presentation of the project. The following CEG took place face to face during the 4-5th May 2023 Project kick-off meeting in Glasgow.

With the Enlarged Experts Group, the first meeting took place on the 7th of June 2023. A shared working area was created on Google Drive and communication was carried out with representatives

of both groups throughout the process. In the beginning, the Core Experts Group comprised 14 members and the Enlarged Experts Group 21 members.

However, given the increased interest manifested from different representatives of CIVIS and partner institutions, the Enlarged Experts Group benefited from input from **more than 70 experts**. Workshops and working groups' sessions have been carried out monthly or on a case-by-case basis throughout the entire first stage of the SMARTT project. The working procedure entailed several steps, ranging from (re)defining the criteria, identifying the key dimensions (areas to be measures), determining the potential data sources that could provide the information needed to measure the criteria), developing indicators, assessing their usefulness, testing, and refining, piloting the indicators on the EUROSUD program, transposing the indicators in the programme selection questionnaire. Several drafts were created and continuously revised based on feedback and experts' feedback and input. Experts' contributions were made both on a cluster level (as the criteria was structured into clusters) and on a general level, also addressing potential obstacles in the implementation of the EDL, as well as recommendations for its development and deployment.

All the workshops with the CEG and EEG were carried out on the following dates, the total amount of meetings being 7 with the CEG and 5 with the EEG:

Number of meetings	CEG	EGG
1	19/Apr/2023	07/June/2023
2	04/May/2023	06/July/2023
3	29/June/2023	09/Nov/2023
4	26/July/2023	15/Nov/2023
5	04/Sep/2023	07/Feb/2024
6	15/Nov/2023	
7	18/Mar/2024	

Data collection from EEG insights – participants, recommendations

Work Package 3 focused on the mapping and selection of at least 50 programs. The invaluable expertise and active participation of the EEG members have played a critical role in this process. Their efforts have facilitated the identification and engagement with program coordinators within their respective universities. Indeed, it presents a formidable challenge!

This collaborative effort has enabled the project to encompass a wide array of programs across various disciplines and educational levels, specifically targeting bachelor's and master's programs within the ambit of **95 international** programs and educational activities. These programs, developed by the member universities of SMARTT, represent a broad spectrum of academic and research excellence.

Moreover, the contributions of the EEG have not been limited to program identification and selection. They have also played a vital role in enriching discussions and debates around the project, offering insightful recommendations that have enhanced the overall direction and effectiveness of WP3. Their recommendations have been pivotal in:

- **Replicating the screening and testing processes on a larger scale:** Ensuring that the methodologies applied were scalable and adaptable to a wide range of programs and educational activities.
- **Analyzing and discussing results with different stakeholders and experts:** Facilitating a multi-dimensional analysis that incorporates diverse perspectives and insights, thereby enhancing the depth and breadth of the project's findings.
- **Comparing results with those of EUROSUD:** Drawing parallels and contrasts with EUROSUD provides valuable benchmarks and insights that can inform the project's strategies and outcomes.
- **Summarizing the main findings in a guideline document:** Compiling the insights, findings, and recommendations into a comprehensive guideline document that serves as a roadmap for future initiatives and projects.

The EEG's contributions have thus been instrumental in ensuring that WP2 and WP3's activities were not only robust and comprehensive but also aligned with the strategic objectives and priorities of the SMARTT project. Their expertise and recommendations have significantly influenced the project's approach to program selection and evaluation.

4.

SMARTT QA Compliance

4. SMARTT QA performance

4.1. Quality of WP1: Management of the project

In essence, the management approach of the SMARTT project serves as an exemplary blueprint for orchestrating successful collaborative endeavors. It has emphasized on communication, engagement, and expert involvement and contributed significantly to the development of a culture that values cooperation and collective achievement across the academic landscape. The foundation of this approach is characterized by regular communication. This open communication strategy has been pivotal in ensuring that all partners maintain alignment with the overarching goals of the project, thereby solidifying their commitment to its success.

Integrated cooperation among partners

The project ensured that CIVIS members were consistently informed about the progress of the pilot. This is achieved through updates every three months, covering various levels of project management, including the management team, steering committee, and board of rectors. Such regular updates have been crucial for maintaining transparency, fostering trust, and ensuring that all stakeholders were aligned with the project's objectives and current status.

In addition, the project has successfully involved a high level of experts from all the HEIs participating in the pilot. Engaging experts not only contributes to the quality and credibility of the project but also enhances the capacity for problem-solving and innovation within the pilot.

Effective decision-making process and monitoring

Monitoring all activities and processes, and fostering open communication among SMARTT members have been the main priorities for the management team. WP1 established a robust decision-making framework that proved responsive, inclusive and gender balanced (3 women and 2 men), ensuring that decisions were timely, well-informed, and aligned with the project's objectives. Regular monthly meetings and prompt online gatherings among WP1 members have streamlined decision-making and the oversight of the project, ensuring swift consensus on actions and deliverable reviews. This framework facilitated adaptability and strategic alignment with the project's goals amidst evolving circumstances.

Through streamlined processes, clear communication channels, and minimized bureaucracy, the project management was marked by efficiency.

Financial Management and Timesheet Verification

An essential component of our project's financial management was the utilization of the intermediate report as a mechanism for overseeing and verifying financial practices and allocations among all project beneficiaries. This approach ensured that the financial resources were being utilized efficiently and in alignment with the project's goals and budgetary forecasts.

The intermediate report served a critical function in requesting all beneficiaries to submit their corresponding timesheets (from April to September 2023), reflecting the actual effort spent relative to the effort allocation. In the second phase, occurring in March 2024, WP1 once more requested the timesheets for the second period, spanning October to March. This approach allowed WP1 to verify the accuracy and timeliness of data collection by each beneficiary in two separate stages.

To ensure accuracy and standardize the reporting process, two templates were created and distributed among beneficiary partners. One template for timesheets dating from April 2023 to March 2024 and the other for financial reporting. The latter was meant to keep track of detailed staff costs and travel costs to both physical meetings in SMARTT (Kick-off meeting in Glasgow and Dissemination event in Bucharest).

This process allowed for a detailed review of effort costs, ensuring that they were accurately accounted for and consistent with the project's planned budget. By aligning the reported effort with the allocated budget, we were able to maintain a transparent and accountable record of labor-related expenses.

Supervision of Costs for Dissemination Events

Our project's commitment to effective financial management extended to the organization and cost oversight of key dissemination events. The dissemination event in Bucharest, for instance, was meticulously supervised in terms of travel and accommodation expenses. This task was undertaken by WP1, demonstrating our proactive approach to managing and optimizing event-related costs.

Additionally, WP4 responsible for communication and dissemination, played a pivotal role in ensuring that the dissemination strategies were not only effective but also cost-efficient. This included careful planning and budgeting of communication activities to maximize impact while minimizing unnecessary expenditures.

Indicators	Means of Measurement
70% Participation rate in governance & management meetings	A total number of meetings have taken place from April 2023-March 2024, divided into 7 meetings with the CEG, 5 with the EEG and 12 with the CMC. Meeting's agendas, attendance lists and minutes.
Established PM tools	PM documents shared with EC (guidelines, partnership agreement), timelines, monitoring tools, etc.
QA plan and tools	Delivered QA Plan, tools, and Reports (D1. Project guidelines and consortium agreement; D9. Presentation materials)
Management and governance bodies in place	In place all management and governance bodies.
70% positive feedback from partners to management actions	The internal questionnaire has shown that the great majority of partners (more than 70%) rate as "excellent" the management actions.

Percentage of participation of the management board members

A minimum participation rate of 70% indicates that all members contribute to the decision-making process, fostering transparency and effective governance. Likewise, high participation (at least 70%) in

these management-level meetings signifies efficient communication and collaboration among management members, resulting in improved coordination and task execution.

Number of established PM tools (guidelines, timelines, sheets, etc.)

The establishment of Project Management (PM) tools, such as a Partnership agreement, project guidelines, and monitoring tools such as timelines; ensures clarity, consistency, and accountability throughout the project's life cycle (D1. Project guidelines and consortium agreement and D9. Presentation materials).
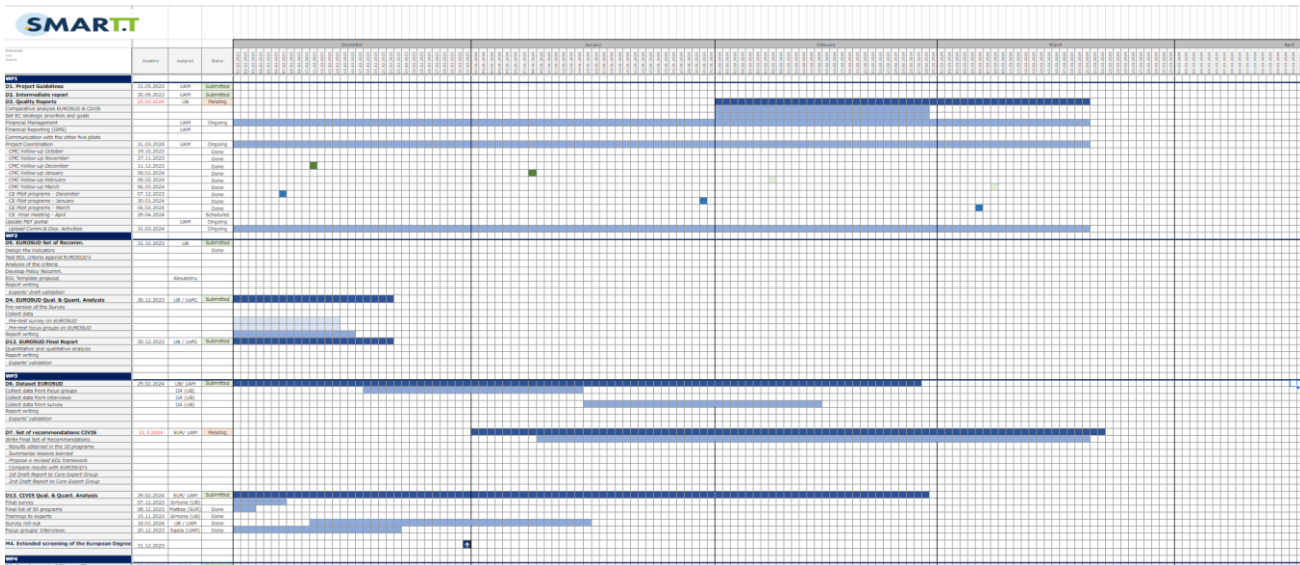

Fig. 2. Screenshot of timeline of the project, being one of the PM tools used by the management team.

Percentage of positive feedback from internal questionnaire

The indicator concerning at least 70% positive feedback from partners regarding monitoring and QA actions assesses their satisfaction with the project's quality management. More than 70% of partners have responded positively, indicating that the monitoring and quality assurance measures have been effective and well-received. Positive feedback includes recognition of improvements, successful issue resolution, and overall contentment with the project's quality management practices.

4.2. Quality of implementation phases

The implementation of the project was characterized by a structured approach to work processes, which aimed to achieve the set objectives within the stipulated timelines. Despite meticulous planning, the project encountered delays and challenges related to dependent deliverables. These issues underscore the complexities inherent in coordinating tasks that rely on the completion of preceding activities. To address these challenges, several strategies were employed to navigate obstacles and ensure the project remained on course:

- **Proactive Communication:** Regular updates and meetings were held with all stakeholders to keep everyone informed of progress and any changes to the project timeline. This approach

facilitated timely identification of potential delays and allowed for quick adjustments to the project plan.
- **Flexibility in Implementation:** Adaptability was crucial in managing dependent deliverables. The project team demonstrated flexibility by reallocating resources and adjusting deadlines where feasible, to accommodate unforeseen delays without compromising the overall project timeline.
- **Mitigation Strategies:** To overcome obstacles, the project employed a variety of mitigation strategies, such as engaging additional expertise, conducting targeted workshops, and revising work packages to reflect real-world challenges and solutions.

Reflection on Survey Responses:

A significant reflection from the implementation phase concerns the difficulty in obtaining accurate responses to surveys. The challenge is not merely in soliciting responses but ensuring that those responses are informed and reflect a deep understanding of quality. It became evident that:

- **Expertise Requirement:** Effective participation in the surveys necessitated a high level of expertise, implying that not just anyone could provide the needed insights. The subject matter of quality, being both broad and complex, requires respondents to have a substantial understanding of the topic to offer valuable feedback.
- **Value Perception:** Academics and experts are often hesitant to engage in surveys without a clear understanding of the added value, both to themselves and to the broader academic community. Given the time investment required, the importance of communicating the purpose and potential impact of the survey findings was paramount.
- **Training and Education:** Offering resources or brief educational sessions on the importance of quality within the context of the survey can help elevate the respondents' understanding and contribute to more informed responses.

4.2.1. Quality of WP2: Pre-test on EUROSUD

With a specific focus on the EUROSUD program, Work Package 2 aimed to validate the European Degree Label (EDL) criteria, identify alignment gaps, and gather insights from various stakeholders to inform the optimization of the EDL.

A comprehensive methodological framework was established, encompassing workshops, interviews, focus groups, program selection questionnaires, and a pre-test survey. This multi-faceted approach facilitated in-depth analysis and stakeholder engagement, ensuring a robust dataset for validating the EDL against the EUROSUD program.

Among the expected outcomes: were: the effectiveness of the screening action; and the quality of designed indicators, testing tools, and procedures.

Indicators	Means of Measurement
100% of criteria screened against EUROSUD program	All criteria screened against EUROSUD as shown in the delivered Reports D4, D5, D12.
70% Participation in the meeting for label co-creation	Attendance at all meetings with the EC to continuous collaboration.

Data collection guidelines and tools created	Templates from surveys, interviews, and focus groups are all included in the deliverables, especially D6: Dataset.
At least 5 people interviewed (at least one per category: students, academics, administrative, etc.)	The minimum number has been achieved as shown by internal logs of meeting data that will be reflected in the SMARTT final report on meetings and events.

This alignment underscores the program's commitment to high standards.

The initial phase of the SMARTT project, spanning from April to November 2023, used EUROSUD as a focal case study. This period was marked by an iterative methodology where each subsequent phase was developed upon the findings of the preceding one, incorporating the necessary flexibility. A systematic methodological framework was constructed to guide the process. Although distinct plans were in place for WP 2 and WP3, several activities were executed concurrently to maintain the coherence of our strategy, enabling the integration of findings from EUROSUD's pre-testing into the evaluation of the 50+ programs from CIVIS and its associated partners.

The procedure was composed of several key activities:

- Preliminary EUROSUD Evaluation
- Assessment Criteria Refinement
- Involvement of Experts

The project commenced with a preliminary evaluation of the EUROSUD program to determine how well an Erasmus Mundus Master conformed to the European Degree Label criteria, pinpointing both areas of adherence and potential disparities.

The project undertook a critical review of the existing criteria and their descriptors to enhance the precision of the assessment, establishing clear indicators as benchmarks for this evaluation.

Regarding stakeholder engagement, we can ascertain that feedback from the Core Experts Group, Enlarged Experts Group, EUROSUD team members, students, and alumni provided valuable insights into the program's strengths and areas for improvement. This engagement highlighted the EDL on solid empirical evidence and input from stakeholders. There is a recognized need to clarify which entity will guarantee or issue the label and to ascertain who will receive this importance of clear communication, relevance, and the applicability of the EDL criteria across diverse educational and cultural contexts. Opportunities for enhancing program visibility, student support services, and engagement with the labor market were also noted, emphasizing the need for continuous improvement and adaptation.

By initially planning for a label co-creation phase, the project aimed to foster a collaborative environment involving all pilots and the European Commission. This inclusive strategy was poised to leverage the collective insights, experiences, and expertise of a broad spectrum of participants, directly influencing the EDL's formation to ensure it met the diverse needs and expectations across the European Higher Education Area.

Moreover, SMARTT, as the other 9 pilots, has maintained regular meetings with the European Commission, adhering to their requests and the structure they have organized. This ongoing engagement reflects a commitment to ensuring that, while a formal co-creation process may not have been established, a fluid and productive dialogue has been sustained between the project's pilots and the Commission. Through these efforts, SMARTT highlights its commitment not merely to achieving its

immediate goals and deliverables but also to ensuring the project stays in sync with the Commission's expectations, thereby continually offering significant contributions to the future landscape of higher education in Europe.

However, the European Commission's redirection to emphasize testing existing criteria and deeply analyzing barriers and challenges signals a strategic adaptation to emergent needs. SMARTT, while moving away from the co-creation phase, places a significant emphasis on grounding the EDL in robust empirical analysis and stakeholder feedback. SMARTT underscored the importance of basing accreditation. The proposal of introducing varying levels of recognition emphasizes the necessity for a well-articulated and adaptable framework that can adapt to the evolving dynamics of European higher education. This strategy is designed to pinpoint potential areas where the EDL may encounter resistance, operational difficulties, or misalignments with the actualities of the higher education environment.

Despite the absence of a co-creation phase, the project remains a crucial source of information for refining the EDL. The inclusion of three potential scenarios for the future implementation of the EDL further enriches this contribution, offering foresighted perspectives that can guide strategic planning and decision-making processes.

In summary, the unexpected change in the co-creation phase of the project highlighted the project team's adaptability, redirecting efforts towards another fundamental aspect of the project, which was to reflect on to whom, who, and how the EDL could be awarded and implemented.

4.2.2. Quality of WP3: Screening of programs

WP3 provided an in-depth examination of over 50 programs within the CIVIS alliance and partner alliances from a quality perspective, focusing on their alignment with the EDL criteria.

The analysis employed a comprehensive methodology, a program selection questionnaire, and the SMARTT survey, integrating workshops with Core and Enlarged Experts Groups, interviews, and focus-groups with stakeholders. This multi-faceted approach aimed to validate the EDL criteria across diverse programs and educational activities, ensuring a robust data set for analysis. The project adopted a thorough methodological framework for the quantitative and qualitative analysis of programs, emphasizing the importance of a detailed, structured approach to assessing the alignment with EDL criteria. Programs were rigorously evaluated against a set of EDL criteria, which were divided into the four clusters tested in EUROSUD (WP2).

This process entailed a sequential phase of pre-selection, selection, exploration, and clarification to map the programs against the EDL criteria effectively. This dual approach enriched the analysis and provided a nuanced understanding of the programs' quality and the criteria's implementation.

The procedure for the pre-selection of programs underwent a meticulous, structured process spanning five months, from July to December 2023. This process, due to its complex nature and the detailed analysis required, was meticulously planned and executed by WP 3 in several stages. Initially, there was Phase 1, involving the pre-screening of programs, which took place from July 31st to November 12th, 2023. This was succeeded by Phase 2, the internal selection of programs, carried out in November 2023. The process culminated in Phase 3, the validation of results, and the creation of program lists or rankings, conducted in December 2023, all of which were systematically aligned with the criteria of the European Degree Label. As a result 95 double, multiple and joint programmes from fourteen HEIs are

part of CIVIS and from the project's partner alliances. The scores were distributed through a weighting system based on the relevance attributed - autonomously by the experts - to each criterion and sub-criterion. The aim of the pre-screening phase was not to rank existing programs, but rather to assist in choosing pertinent programs that can facilitate the examination and affirmation of the EDL criteria. Essentially, it is the EDL criteria that are being evaluated through this process, rather than the programs themselves.

Actions:

- Assessing the international programs of all participating Higher Education Institutions
- Developing recommendations
- Delivering reports

In a second stage, the evaluation process highlighted the programs' alignment with the high academic standards and quality assurances that the EDL represents. The final selection process aimed for a representative sample of programs across various fields of study and geographical locations, ensuring a wide-ranging assessment that reflects the diversity of the European Higher Education Area. The SMARTT survey was administered from December 2023 to February 2024 to representatives (academic and administrative staff) of 50 double, multiple and joint programmes from HEIs selected through the initial mapping of the CIVIS and partners' programmes based on the EDL criteria.

Expected outcomes:

- Quality and quantity of mapping process
- Quality of recommendations towards the EC

Based on the analysis of the data from the Pre-Survey and final Survey conducted, several best practices, perceptions of the added value of the EDL, and challenges and barriers to achieving full alignment with EDL criteria were identified. In addition, the project was able to engage stakeholders, including Ministries of Education and Quality Assurance Agencies, through focus groups and interviews adapting to their timetable and availability, and with the Core Experts Group and the Enlarged Experts Group. This engagement facilitated a multi-perspective evaluation of the EDL criteria's relevance and applicability. The results of the two phases can be found in D6. Dataset, D7. CIVIS Set of recommendations and D13. CIVIS report of quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Indicators	Means of Measurement
At least 50 Multiple/Joint educational programs mapped	Dataset report with survey responses of 95 double, multiple and joint programmes.
Guidelines and tools created	Reports delivered: D6. Dataset, D7. CIVIS Set of recommendations, and D13. CIVIS report of quantitative and qualitative analysis.
At least one person interviewed/ analysed, per category (student, academics, administrative, coordinator) and per HEI coordinating the program	Report on Extended screening of the European Degree Label criteria. Interviews and meetings logs, calendars. Documents provided and feedback received.

All mapped programs checked against European Degree Label criteria	Final set of recommendations (D.7).
At least 70% attendance in experts meeting	Minutes of meetings, attendance lists of all meetings carried out in the SMARTT project.

Analysis of accomplishment of Quality indicators

Given the data provided in the table, the analysis of the accomplishment of quality indicators can be summarized as follows:

- **Program Mapping Achievement**: The project surpassed the target of mapping at least 50 Multiple/Joint educational programs by cataloging 95 double, multiple, and joint programs, demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of the current educational offerings aligned with EDL criteria.
- **Survey Response Collection**: A substantial dataset report was created, which included survey responses that provided a deep dive into the effectiveness and alignment of the programs with the EDL. All mapped programs were thoroughly evaluated against the European Degree Label criteria.
- **Guideline and Tool Development**: The project successfully developed guidelines and tools to aid in the evaluation and enhancement of the educational programs. Detailed reports on these guidelines and tools have been delivered, although specifying which reports were delivered would provide additional clarity (D13: CIVIS Report of quantitative and qualitative analysis).
- **Stakeholder Interviews**: Each category of stakeholders (students, academics, administrators, coordinators) and each HEI coordinating the program had ensured to reach the 50 programs. The project aimed for at least 70% attendance at expert meetings. While meetings and minutes were recorded, confirming or providing the exact attendance figures would validate this quality indicator.
- **Documentation and Feedback Integration**: There has been diligent documentation of interviews and meetings, with the calendar maintained despite several constraints. Furthermore, documents provided and feedback received have been systematically incorporated in the deliverables indicating active engagement and iterative improvement based on stakeholder input.

In conclusion, the project has demonstrated a strong commitment to quality through a diligent, structured, and stakeholder-inclusive approach. The accomplishments across various quality indicators reflect the project's dedication to enhancing the educational landscape in alignment with the EDL criteria. Providing specific documents, numbers, and links would complete this analysis and offer a transparent view of the project's achievements.

4.3. Quality of WP4: Communication and Dissemination Plan

From a quality perspective, Work Package 4, devoted to communication and dissemination, has played a crucial role in enhancing the project's visibility, impact, and sustainability. This work package was designed to ensure that the project's findings, innovations, and outcomes are effectively

communicated to a broad range of stakeholders, including European University Alliances, European and national policymakers concerned with education, HEIs, academic communities, educators, students, and the general public.

Expected outcomes:

- Quality of dissemination tools used

Indicators	Means of Measurement
Dissemination plan defined	Delivered dissemination Plan. For the dissemination of the achievements of the SMARTT project, a dissemination plan was drafted, which was one of the first deliverables of WP4. The Dissemination Plan provides a structured framework and guidelines for all dissemination activities to be undertaken throughout the project. It presents a comprehensive set of instructions and meticulous guidelines that must be strictly followed by all project partners when conducting dissemination efforts. The plan incorporates a variety of appropriate tools that are utilized to effectively achieve the project's dissemination objectives. Furthermore, it includes a timeline that has been carefully designed to ensure consistent adherence to the planned dissemination activities (D8. Development of Dissemination Plan).
Mailing lists and contact points established	The Management Team established SMARTT mailing lists (CMC, EEG, CEG…) to facilitate communication with the various SMARTT project participants for daily operations. For broader communication and dissemination purposes, SMARTT utilized CIVIS's existing mailing lists. In addition, information about SMARTT was included in the CIVIS Newsletter. Furthermore, the dissemination of information is conducted through the existing mailing lists of all beneficiaries.
At least 1 press release per year delivered	From the beginning of the SMARTT project until March 25th, 2024, 10 press releases were issued.
Website set and functioning	A functioning subsite has been established since 28th July 2023 inside CIVIS webpage at the url: https://civis.eu/en/discover-civis/civis-alliance-projects/smartt
At least 2 major events organised	The number of organized events by SMARTT until the 30th of March 2024 includes two major events: the Kick-off meeting in Glasgow between the 4th and 5th of May 2023 and the Intermediate Dissemination Event on the 5th of September 2023 in Bucharest. On the 29th of April 2024, SMARTT will host, in cooperation with the EC, the final event for all projects on Label and Legal Entity.
At least 70% positive feedback from events	Feedback Intermediate dissemination event In a survey conducted among participants of the Intermediate Dissemination Event, 92% of respondents answered that they had a positive and very positive impression of the event organization. 71.4% agreed on the excellency of information shared and ideality of the venue and reassured their attendance to SMARTT next next event.

At least 3 social media used to disseminate information	Social media accounts disseminating about the project through CIVIS social media (Facebook, linkedin and Instagram) and each partner University's social media accounts (translated into their respectives languages).

Analysis of accomplishment of Quality indicators

WP4 emphasizes the importance of reporting and documenting dissemination activities, ensuring transparency, accountability, and a clear record of the project's outreach efforts. This documentation supports ongoing evaluation and adaptation of dissemination strategies.
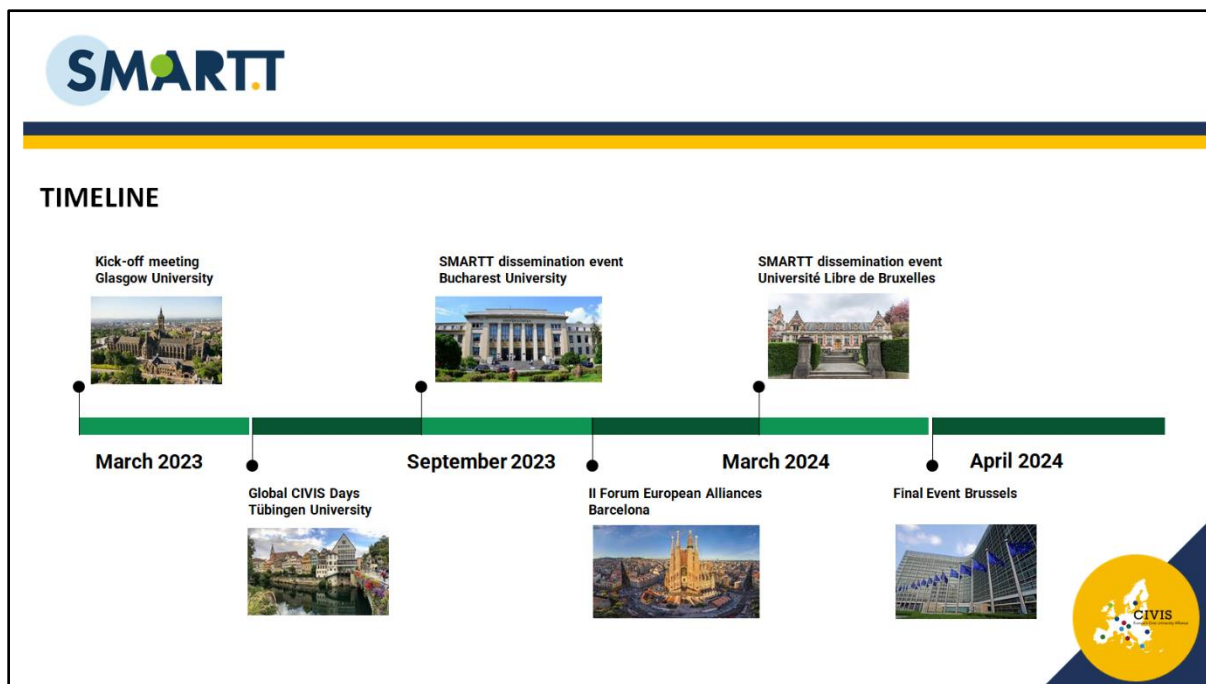

Fig.3 Schedule of programmed meetings

It is worth noting that the dissemination process that was followed was based on the following dissemination objectives:

- To share the SMARTT project's outcomes with specific external entities and audiences who can utilize or incorporate them into their own work.
- To raise awareness of SMARTT, its work, and its impact among a wider community.
- To assure external audiences of the credibility of the SMARTT project and demonstrate its added value.
- To strengthen our reporting to the European Commission and society at large by showcasing the activities, results, and outcomes of the SMARTT project.
- To encourage the participation of all stakeholders.
- To reinforce SMARTT's accountability and transparency by making data and results retrievable.

In addition, the dissemination activities provided opportunities for feedback from stakeholders, which was used to refine and improve the project's outcomes. This two-way communication has been vital for ensuring the relevance and applicability of the project's contributions.

WP4 outlined a series of dissemination activities tailored to specific target groups. These activities include social media campaigns, a dedicated section on the CIVIS website, participation in conferences, and dissemination events in Bucharest and Brussels. Such targeted efforts ensure that the project's messages reach the most relevant audiences effectively.

The use of varied dissemination materials, including press releases, roll-ups, infographics, and newsletters, caters to different preferences and needs of the target audiences. This variety enhanced engagement and ensured that SMARTT information is accessible and understandable.

Final Event in Brussels

As SMARTT assumed responsibility for organizing the final event, the project dedicated part of its time from January to the end of March to ensure proper communication with the European Commission and the pilot projects. Acting as the intermediary, SMARTT facilitated the establishment of communication channels with the pilot projects, as well as with the Commission. The Université Libre de Bruxelles in close collaboration with WP1 and WP4 led the organization of this final event, ensuring that the agenda, technical, and spatial conditions would be optimal.

This additional effort highlights the project's commitment to efficient coordination and communication, ensuring that all involved parties, including the European Commission and pilot project representatives, were well-informed and actively engaged. The leadership of ULB and SMARTT in organizing the event underscored their pivotal roles in managing logistics and operational aspects, guaranteeing that the final event would meet the highest standards of organization and facilitation.

The detailed presentation of all dissemination and communication activities carried out for the SMARTT project is included in the final deliverable of WP4 D4.4, "Report of project communication and dissemination," which will be delivered according to the timeline by the EC on April 30, 2024. This report will include all the communication and dissemination actions and activities undertaken in the project to achieve the proposed tasks and objectives, mentioning the channels, audience, target groups, and impact.

5.

Concluding remarks

5. Concluding remarks

The SMARTT project, through its innovative approaches and collaborative efforts across European university alliances, has made significant strides in analyzing, testing, and proposing optimizations for the European Degree Label criteria. Despite encountering challenges such as survey fatigue among academics and institutional changes affecting project continuity, the project successfully engaged a wide range of stakeholders, validated the set of EDL criteria, and offered actionable insights for the advancement of European Degrees. We can state that at least 90% of the project's indicators have been successfully accomplished.

Despite these accomplishments, the project encountered delays in deliverables due to factors like overwhelmed staff, difficulties in identifying suitable survey respondents, and gaps in understanding the benefits of participation among the academic community. These challenges underscored the need for clear communication strategies and the importance of establishing a strong network to facilitate research and engagement activities.

Addressing these challenges, the project formulated several key recommendations to enhance future engagements and improve the overall project quality. These recommendations are grouped into six main areas:

I. Staff Overwhelm and Survey Fatigue: The purpose of conducting two pivotal surveys to select programs for criteria validation was not always fully grasped, leading to what is known as survey fatigue. There is often a hesitancy among academics to partake in surveys, particularly when the direct benefits are not immediately evident, which is compounded by the time investment required.

II. Selecting Suitable Respondents: The process of identifying and approaching individuals with relevant expertise in specific areas (such as quality assurance, legislation, and administration) is crucial to enhancing the precision and relevance of survey responses.

III. Information Discrepancy: Despite the SMARTT project's endeavors in conducting interviews, the benefits of participating in these surveys were not always clearly understood within the university community. These obstacles are inherently related to institutional communication barriers. Effective communication regarding the objectives of the survey and its potential contributions could drive academic engagement. Highlighting the specific advantages for their domain or professional practice may increase their willingness to contribute.

IV. Changes in Institutional Governance: During the SMARTT project's 12-month span, some Higher Education Institutions underwent governance shifts, resulting in the replacement of individuals initially assigned to oversee the project's progression. Such changes disrupt effective communication and obstruct project delivery. The importance of a robust network of contacts became especially clear, revealing that a well-established network is essential for identifying key individuals and ensuring the success of research initiatives.

V. Variability in Governmental Support: The project experienced varied impacts due to changes in government across member states. While certain governments recognized the strategic importance of the project and participated in follow-up activities, the consistency and degree of support varied. Additionally, the process of identifying the right individual for project follow-up led to delays in some interviews.

VI. Stakeholder Engagement Overlap: It was observed that multiple projects often engaged the same stakeholders (such as quality agencies and ministries) with similar queries. This

redundancy indicates a need for enhanced information exchange and support systems to eliminate duplication, thus enhancing project efficiency and effectiveness.

Recommendations for Future Initiatives:

Reflecting on these insights, several recommendations for improving future survey participation and overall project quality have been formulated:

- Emphasizing clear and purposeful communication is paramount, especially for initiatives with policy implications, as it facilitates the engagement of partners. This approach ensures that all stakeholders are well-informed, aligned with the project's objectives, and actively contributing to its success.
- Building robust support networks and creating strategies to navigate through institutional and governmental changes are critical. These actions will not only improve project efficiency but also lead to a more strategic and unified approach in stakeholder engagement, creating an environment more conducive to achieving project goals.

Summary

In conclusion, effective management within the SMARTT project has established a robust groundwork for the ongoing evolution of the pilot. Thanks to a meticulously organized plan, and effective communication, this project has delivered essential insights and recommendations that will shape future policy and practice. The benefits of adept management have been manifest in the project's ability to navigate complexities, foster collaboration among diverse stakeholders, and ensure adherence to timelines and quality standards.

These qualities have played a crucial role in producing an in-depth analysis and a series of recommendations poised to markedly impact the advancement of the European Higher Education landscape.