April 29th-30th 2024, Brussels

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCES
Drivers of Change and Innovation
in Higher Education

SUMMARY

Multilingualism in Higher Education

- View Multilingualism as an Asset: Shift perspectives to see multilingualism as beneficial, not problematic and overcome the disconnect between the linguistic profiles of students and dominant languages in higher education. Invest in resources and initiatives that support multilingual pedagogies across all disciplines, integrating both generative AI and direct human interaction.

- Sustain Multilingual Policies: Ensure the longevity and sustainability of multilingual policies and initiatives developed by European University Alliances (EUAs), promoting cross-institutional academic collaborations.

- Promote Exchange and Networking: Encourage intra- and inter-alliance experiences, sharing of best practices, resources, and infrastructures to support multilingualism and interculturality, including smaller languages with lower linguistic capital.

"Cosmobility"

- Diverse Mobility Experiences: Continue using alliances as experimental grounds for various forms of mobility (short, long, online, hybrid) with adequate funding to support diverse approaches. Efforts should focus on making mobility inclusive by addressing obstacles that hinder participation.

- Simplify Administrative Processes: Remove administrative barriers for organizing and participating in mobility programs. Implement solutions for mismatches in academic calendars and establish paperless, one-stop mobility services.

- Global Scale Mobility: Consider mobility on a global scale, emphasizing balanced flows between Europe and Africa to enhance intercultural dialogue. Ensure discussions are guided by environmental sustainability and the proven positive impact of mobility.

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<u>Superdiversity in Academia</u>

- Define Superdiversity: Clearly define "superdiversity" to distinguish it from international mobility. Align policies on superdiversity between universities and governments, extending to broader society.

- Inclusive Classrooms: Establish inclusive academic environments by focusing on equity, professional development for teachers, balanced integration of online and offline modalities, cultural and linguistic awareness, and collaboration.

- Harmonize Policies: Align higher education policies on internationalization and superdiversity to foster global citizenship, intercultural competencies, and diverse perspectives in education and research.

<u>Pedagogical Innovation by Alliances</u>

- Experimental Sandboxes: Allow alliances to function as sandboxes for experimenting with pedagogical innovation, including joint programs and various mobility forms. Ensure high student participation and sharing of best practices.

- Flexible Learning Pathways: Develop open, flexible university alliance ecosystems with learning pathways that address short-term societal needs and long-term perspectives.

- Engage with diverse stakeholders to align education with future demands and skills required by the job market.

<u>Recommendations on the European Degree</u>

- Co-creation and Simplicity: Engage all stakeholders in creating the European Degree, ensuring it complements national degrees and includes mobility. Simplify the organization of these degrees.

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- Quality Assurance and Recognition: Establish quality assurance for all programs and make automatic recognition a reality. Reward academic staff for transnational cooperation efforts.

- Global Competitiveness and Inclusion: Use the European Degree to foster strategic cooperation and increase global competitiveness. Ensure credits and qualifications are recognized across Europe and promote inclusivity in mobility opportunities.

Recommendations on Global Partnerships with the Global South

- Integration of global partners elevates societal embeddedness and quality of higher education & research. Through equal partnerships, Alliances and member HEIs contribute to a broader understanding of societal shifts and address sustainable development.

- Minimise fragmentation especially on transversal topics important to all. Build further upon the platform and expertise roles of umbrella organisations such as VLIR-UOS, ARES and their EU counterparts. Collaborate with civil society to ensure broader impact.

- Europe should play to its strengths in human development by organising funding for global networks and partnerships efficiently. Collaborate within Team Europe, including umbrella organisations and development agencies, to maximise impact, and ensure inclusive funding.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Under the auspices of the Belgian presidency to the Council of Europe, the ten Belgian universities collaborated on the organisation of the conference "European University Alliances: Drivers of Change and Innovation in Higher Education". The conference focused on six pivotal themes central to the evolution of higher education within Europe: multilingualism, mobility and cosmopolitism ("cosmobility"), superdiversity in academia and higher education, pedagogical innovation, the European Degree, and cooperation with the Global South.

Gathering insights from academics, policymakers, and practitioners, the conference underscored the imperative for collaborative approaches to address contemporary challenges and leverage opportunities within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The resulting policy recommendations aim to foster innovation, inclusivity, and global cooperation, driving forward the agenda of higher education reform and excellence. These recommendations are based on the concluding session by Mieke Van Herreweghe (Vicerector UGent) and Jeroen Darquennes (Vicerector Internationalisation UNamur) and are intended to guide universities, policymakers, and stakeholders in their efforts to enhance educational practices and promote diversity and collaboration.

Multilingualism

In line with existing recommendations at different supranational levels, universities should continue to step away from approaching multilingualism as a problem and rather see it as an asset, taking measures to contribute to overcoming the disconnect between the linguistic profiles of students and the dominant languages in higher education. This entails the need to invest in providing adequate resources to further develop initiatives allowing higher education teaching staff to gain experience with the implementation of multilingual pedagogies and educational offerings in all disciplines and study programs and duly taking not only proxy agency (e.g. making increased use of generative AI), but also direct as well as collective agency fully into account.

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Since many alliances are investing in the development and implementation of multilingual policies, higher education institutions need to secure the sustainability of the experiences gained and offerings developed by the EUAs in terms of multilingual teaching, learning and cross-institutional academic collaborations.

Universities should promote intra-, inter- and cross-alliance exchanges and the sharing of innovative, good and best practices. In order to achieve this, they need sharing resources and infrastructures supporting multilingualism and interculturality of students and staff, while fully embracing the smaller languages with a lower linguistic capital.

"Cosmobility"

Mobility is one of several ways to achieve the broader goal of experiencing intercultural exchange. That is also the reason why alliances have every reason to continue taking up their role as testbeds or sandboxes allowing to explore the diversification of short, long, online, physical, hybrid, teaching-oriented, research-oriented, or other forms of student and staff mobility types. Obviously, funding instruments should provide room for the diversity in approaches, without discarding models that have proven themselves in the past. Regarding funding, unwavering efforts should be made to make mobility completely inclusive by addressing the different obstacles that exclude large numbers of individuals from enjoying its benefits.

In order to organize mobilities for both staff and students, administrative barriers should be discarded as much as possible, without compromising on educational quality. There is an urgent need for practical solutions for existing mismatches between academic calendars and also a need for truly paperless one-stop-mobility-shops.

Mobility should be considered on a global scale, with particular attention to ensuring balanced flows of mobility between Europe and Africa as a way to enhance and enrich the necessary

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intercultural dialogue between these closely interdependent continents. Discussions on North-South-mobility should be guided by considerations on environmental sustainability, mandatory vs. optional mobility, reciprocity, the added value and the proven positive impact of mobility.

Superdiversity

Superdiversity is a descriptor, consolidated by sociologist Steven Vertovec, for the fact that since the turn of the century, diversity seems to have burgeoned both quantitatively (in terms of numbers of migrants) and qualitatively (in terms of countries of origin, but also due to digitalization and globalization). In higher education, it is important to distinguish superdiversity from international mobility. Nevertheless, a number of goals achieved by internationalization are quite similar to those achieved by superdiversity: students' ability to approach their study and research domains from different perspectives, the development of intercultural competencies and the journey towards global citizenship. In order to attain those goals, inclusive classrooms seem primordial.

Higher education can be a driver for superdiversity and internationalization management, but in order for this to work, academia and European superdiversity policies need to become aligned. A number of critical points for an inclusive academic environment (both in terms of superdiversity and internationalization) are:

- Equity: pedagogical frameworks based on fairness, flexibility and choice
- Growth: teachers need more professional development in this area
- Consideration: a balanced and thoughtful integration of online and offline educational modalities
- Engagement: online environments offer opportunities, but physical informal campus interactions remain essential
- Sensitivity: the promotion of cultural and (multi)linguistic awareness

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- Collaboration: inclusive education as a shared responsibility of all parties involved
- Rigor: high academic standards and boundaries
- Leadership: the engagement of the institution providing support

Alliances as Drivers of Pedagogical Innovation

Alliances offer a variety of models and opportunities to exchange best practices, from micro-credentials to minors to fully joint degrees. It is expected that the future will see more and more of these joint programmes, characterized by different forms of mobility. They should be able to function as sandboxes of experimentation with pedagogical innovation and innovative pedagogical practices like the COIL (collaborative online international learning) or COCREATION programme.

European University Alliances face the challenge of interacting with different types of (political, cultural, economic) stakeholders. Those stakeholders have different visions for the development of higher education and its contribution to the further development of the European knowledge society, making sure that it stays competitive, resilient, and fully embraces the role of innovation in economic development. Skills that are expected by companies include creative thinking, analytical thinking, and technological literacy. Universities should carefully analyse what these different stakeholders want and need, approach these needs from different perspectives, and translate what is being asked into open, complementary university alliance ecosystems that reconcile short-term societal demands with long-term perspectives, like joint criteria for digital content, active learning techniques, European collaboration, interdisciplinarity and multilingualism.

What is needed more than ever is flexibility. Education should be challenge-based and therefore centred around research, ensuring a constant dynamic between companies and students. Especially for lifelong learning (LLL) there is a need for flexible, dialogic learning pathways, with input from different types of stakeholders.

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In the education of the future, a high level of student participation and educational offerings by students, for students will be essential. At the same time one of the main issues will be the upscaling of the alliances to cater to the needs of all students and leave no one behind.

The European Degree as an Important Milestone towards a Strong Future for the European Higher Education Area

At the level of the European Commission, all stakeholders are urged to participate in the co-creation exercise of setting up a European Degree. The work on the European Degree cannot be seen as a stand-alone exercise. It is not a matter of one or the other: a national or a European degree; a degree including mobility or not. They should all be complementary and not in competition with each other. Institutions also need to organize these degrees in a simple way, possibly different to but not more complex than other degrees. The establishment of the European degree requires quality assurance arrangements of all programmes (from micro-credentials to fully integrated joint degrees) and automatic recognition. Careers in higher education also need to become more attractive, incorporating transnational cooperation as a valuable element in career progressions.

At the level of the HEI/alliances, the European Degree could be beneficial as a driver for strategic cooperation and a lever to increase global competitiveness & attractiveness of Europe, as a vehicle to foster interdisciplinary collaborations in education, as well as a tool to foster research-based education at all levels. However, questions remain on how the Commission will take up and support the collaboration and dialogue among key stakeholders, i.e. member states and universities. Strong coordination from the European Commission will be needed, for the implementation of the Degree as well as for the development of a Label with a real, legal meaning. Although this will not be easy, it is highly recommended to establish a shared competence of the European Commission and Member States in higher

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education, which would significantly simplify the current complexities of transnational collaboration in European higher education.

The European Degree should be delivered at national, regional and institutional level, in full respect of subsidiarity, institutional autonomy and academic freedom. It is also important that it gets anchored in regional and/or national legislation. The aim should also be to reduce the administrative burden on universities and their faculty and staff.

In relation to the perspective of students, the credits and qualifications obtained through the European Degree should be recognized as if it were a nationally delivered diploma in terms of validity to enter the labor market, while recognizing the specificity of the European Degree as hyper mobile and intercultural per nature. In order to achieve this, it seems essential that the EU administrative and political contributors engage in meaningful discussions with actors of the labor market in various fields in order to align the Degree's academic input with the entry expectations of the labor market.

Moreover, mobility should become the norm rather than the exception, while inclusivity is an important starting point for all types of mobility. Not everyone should obtain a European degree, but everyone should get the opportunity to do so, irrespective of their nationality, gender, SES, age (in terms of LLL). The experience of multiculturalism should be accessible to students from outside Europe in regions where borders are not as open as within Europe. It is important to reach out to those students that would not consider embarking on an international journey.

Global partnerships – cooperation with the Global South
There are many reasons to involve global partners within European University Alliances. Global partnerships elevate not only the societal embeddedness and quality of higher education and research projects, but also address the challenges of sustainable development and contribute to a broader understanding of worldwide societal changes.

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Through global long-term institutional links, HEIs can act as more broadly informed, innovative drivers of change on, among others, transversal themes such as diversity, equity & inclusion, digital transformation and climate change. Connecting European HEIs globally through networking enables them to learn from each other and to jointly engage in policy-making initiatives, joint training programmes, and exchanges on higher education management – continuously involving not only students, teachers, and researchers, but also professional and support staff. Globally connected universities can impact local and global societies through innovative solution-focussed research projects and globally embedded service-level training. Finally, globally trained graduates can become better skilled and can act as critical and committed world citizens to ultimately become ambassadors of Europe and European values. As such, the path forward for both new and existing European Alliances can only be to integrate a global dimension and to support equal partnerships.

Involving global partners within European University Alliances is a shared responsibility at the level of the alliances themselves, the HEIs globally, the EU, the EU member states, umbrella organisations, and finally local and regional entities in partner countries and regions. Administrative hurdles should be minimised to allow for a smoother integration process. Some level of funding should be foreseen to avoid alliances choosing for the more established global partners, while potentially ignoring HEIs in need of more capacity building.

The platform and expertise roles of umbrella organisations such as Belgium's VLIR-UOS and ARES, and their European counterparts, should be reinforced. VLIR-UOS and ARES operate in a unique way through 5-year multifaceted portfolios focused on societal impact, made possible by the long-term support of the Belgian Federal Government through the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid. Fragmentation of international partnerships within the Alliances should be minimised, especially on transversal topics relevant to all.

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Finally, partnerships also need to extend beyond academia to include civil society at large, collaborating with NGOs and governments, to ensure impact on society. Such impact is easier to achieve when focusing on specific themes identified by partners.

The ambition to strengthen international partnerships should also be reflected in a renewed Global Gateway strategy of the EU. Europe must play to its strengths, with a strong emphasis on human development. Funding is going to be more and more granted to networks and partnerships, as opposed to individual HEIs. Alliances can act as stepping stones for global partners to attract funding from additional sources and build regional partnerships. Funding mechanisms should be organised as efficiently as possible to achieve optimal impact. Therefore, working collectively in a structured way through a Team Europe approach is very important, combining the experience of EU member states and umbrella organisations. This process can be supported by the EU while mobilising its current flagship programme Erasmus+. Reinforcing the structural collaboration between European higher education umbrella organisations, such as VLIR-UOS and ARES & European development agencies such as Enabel, is needed to go beyond the vision of researchers as consultants in some cases. And finally, higher education should remain a priority for international solidarity whereby diversity and inclusion in terms of access to funding is at all times ensured.

Towards a Bright Future for the European University Alliances

The European University Alliances can be catalysts for change and innovation in higher education. By implementing the proposed recommendations on multilingualism, "cosmobility", superdiversity, pedagogical innovation, the European Degree, and cooperation with the Global South, European universities will enhance their global competitiveness, foster inclusivity, and contribute to the development of a more integrated and resilient higher education landscape.