

European Universities Networking Day

10 December, 2024

Finnish National Agency for Education, Helsinki

Summary of Roundtable Outcomes



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University Network for Innovation,
Technology and Engineering



FINNISH NATIONAL
AGENCY FOR EDUCATION

On December 10, 2024, over 110 participants representing 23 European University Alliances convened at the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) in Helsinki for the European Universities Networking Day.

The day of networking and solution-building was collaboratively organised by EDUFI, Aalto University (Unite!), Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences (Ulysseus), and the University of Helsinki (Una Europa).

The summaries of the discussions at each of the 17 roundtables are presented here.



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Morning Session

1. Alliance outreach with external stakeholders

2. Joint programmes accreditation and European Degree Label

3. Engaging academic staff into alliance education collaboration and recognition of their work

4. Mobility: innovative virtual mobility solutions

5. Student engagement in alliances

6. Operational management within the alliance

7. Satellite projects/external funding of alliances

8. Future and the sustainability of the alliance

9. Doctoral students and doctoral education in alliances



1. Alliance outreach with external stakeholders

During this round table discussion, we share experiences and best practices on each alliance's outreach activities and the results achieved. We will discuss collaboration with the industry and collaboration with the public sector and NGOs.

Chair: Katinka Käyhkö - YUFE

Roundtable Summary:

General good practices:

- Ensure that the alliance activities respond to existing or emerging needs
- Define roles (partners, associated partners, stakeholders....)
- Provide continuous support (onboarding is needed also for externals)
- Make use of existing structures, provide added value
- Facilitate so that the key stakeholders can meet and find each other (online / in person)
- Leave room for bottom-up initiatives and co-creation
- Give time for the shared culture to grow
- Dream big, celebrate the victories (no matter how small)

-> Make your alliance a European stakeholder matchmaker!

2. Joint programmes accreditation and European Degree Label

This round table is about sharing insights and experiences from a recent European Approach accreditation process: triggers, preparation, workload, requirements, and alliance-level cooperation. Discussion on future and ongoing accreditation processes across Finnish members in various alliances.

Chairpeople: Heta Koski – Forthem & Marjaana Mäkelä - Ulysseus

Roundtable Summary:

Joint programme accreditation

- Institutional accreditation model vs. programme based accreditation model
- Trust between partners is key and a challenge
- Programme level accreditation is expensive and resource intensive - not included in alliance budgets.

European Degree Label:

- Criteria is a good starting point for joint degree programmes but implementing requires further discussion on details and interpretations.
- What is the actual added value. There is a need to clarify the reasoning and target group needs behind this process.
- Good label but needs lots of discussions on the details

3. Engaging academic staff into alliance education collaboration and recognition of their work

A challenge seemingly faced by many institutions is how to engage and motivate academic staff in the education collaboration activities undertaken within the alliances. This round table will explore questions such as: What are the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivate academics to undertake this collaboration? How can universities support these? How can academic work be recognized in a meaningful way? Chair: Raisa Asikainen / UH, Una Europa

Roundtable Summary:

Different sources of motivation:

- awareness and access
- additional funding creates resources
- prestige and strategic support
- co-developing one's own teaching and learning from others
- sense of purpose: right place and right time for participation

4. Mobility: innovative virtual mobility solutions

Alliances are expected to develop and deliver new and innovative mobility solutions. In this round table discussion, the focus will be on innovative virtual mobility solutions (e.g. virtual exchanges, COIL etc): what kind of forms are there and what is the added value of such mobility opportunities for participants? Chair: Anni Kallio - EDUFI

Roundtable Summary:

Virtual mobilities are the future! - to reach the mobility targets - but not without quality

The alliance has to agree in advance on what counts as a virtual mobility and then collect statistics based on the common definition.

What kinds of virtual mobility implementations and support do the alliances have?

- COILs: International cross-enrollment between higher education institutions.
 - Teachers from different institutions adapt existing courses into COILs.
- Seed funding or a dedicated resource for teachers to support course implementations.
- Offering own online courses to students from partner institutions.
- Joint course offerings within the alliance on a shared learning platform.
- MOOCs, webinars, and online conferences are also considered virtual mobility by some alliances

COILs are considered as a good practice, as they ensure genuine collaboration between both teachers and students. They also enhance international and intercultural skills.

What motivates teachers to engage in COILs?

Public recognition at the organizational level, possibility to share experiences with colleagues, praise by immediate supervisor, but also financial support and resources

5: Student engagement in alliances

Engaging students in the activities of the alliances is essential for their long-term relevance and success. This relates to the relevance and attractiveness of our offerings to all our students, but especially Finnish students. This roundtable will focus on students' engagement in the development and co-creation of the alliances to ensure that we develop the most relevant and attractive initiatives for students. What are the different mechanisms, channels, and groups we have for co-developing our activities with students? How are they consulted and involved in the development process? How are we gathering feedback and input and how are we working with students to make sure what we do is of value to them? Chair: Stinne Vognaes – Una Europa

Roundtable Summary in one sentence:

- We need to find ways work with staff to encourage/support/empower students to see and act on the potential of the alliances as a platform.

6. Operational management within the alliance

This round table is primarily intended for project managers and coordinators of the alliances to share experiences, challenges, and best practices related to operational management within the alliance. Topics of discussion could include, for example, the organization of alliance governance in general and the coordination of alliance activities at your home institution level.

Chair: Liisa Timonen - INVEST

Roundtable Summary:

1. Internally building engagement is the key for success; everyone has to be onboard from operational to top-management level
2. On the consortium level the clarity of decision making and different roles is a must. Additionally, legal entity seems to support fluent management procedures.

7. Satellite projects/external funding of alliances

Gaining external funding to advance the goals of our alliances will become a key enabler for the long-lasting sustainability of the European University Alliance initiative. During this round table discussion, we will share experiences and knowledge on the current and future means by which to achieve external funding for our alliance's actions. Chair: William O'Gorman - Ulysseus

Roundtable Summary in one sentence: Just apply!

1. Application and administrative challenges:

- The complexity of the Erasmus+ application form is a significant challenge for project coordinators
- Administrative tasks, such as coordinating with partners and managing project logistics, can be time-consuming
- Balancing top-down and bottom-up approaches to involve participants and stakeholders is crucial for project success
- Selected projects add to existing workloads

2. Task allocation and partner strengths:

- Identifying and leveraging the strengths of alliance partners is essential for effective project implementation
- Proper task allocation requires consideration of partners' capabilities, resources, and expertise
- Establishing clear roles and responsibilities within the alliance is crucial for smooth project execution

3. Alliance management and coordination:

- Developing an effective Alliance Management System (AMS) is vital for managing individual alliances, the alliance portfolio, and facilitating learning
- Ensuring clear communication and alignment of objectives among partners is critical for alliance success
- Implementing proper governance structures and coordination mechanisms within the alliance can help manage complexities and resolve conflicts

4. Differences within funding mechanisms

- Approach each differently, some may be teacher-focused, some researcher. Identify calls and match them appropriately

8. The future and the sustainability of the alliance

This round table primarily brings together operational leads from various alliances. During our discussions, we focus on the future and sustainability of these alliances. We explore actionable steps we can take and clarify which aspects fall under the responsibility of the European Union.

Chair: Minna-Kaarina Forssen – Unite!

Roundtable Summary in one sentence:

Integration of activities in the normal processes and focusing and aligning the collaboration with university strategies are keys to building long-term alliance collaboration.

9. Doctoral students and doctoral education in alliances

This round table focuses on activities for doctoral students. We will share ideas and insights from both universities and universities of applied sciences, discussing how to enhance the doctoral experience and meaningful participation. What challenges might arise in collaboration within a multicultural and diverse environment of European University Alliances when developing joint offerings for doctoral students, and how can they be overcome?

Chair: Lili Aunimo - Ulyseus

Roundtable Summary:

1. Doctoral education is best enhanced by discipline or topic specific teams - even though there are many transversal skills that the students need to learn. A bottom-up approach in selecting the topics or disciplines is encouraged.
2. A good balance between a bottom-up and top-down approach is recommended. Special attention to the needs in the field should be paid. Commitment of key actors should be ensured.
3. Attention to the needs of the doctoral students should be constant. Some ways to do this is the involvement of doctoral students in boards that make the decisions.
4. Key actors of the university should be involved in the alliance-level team developing the doctoral education. The function of the person is more relevant than the official title.
5. Discipline or topic specific structures work well. The universities call them in with different names such as virtual institutes (University of Turku) or Innovation hubs (Haaga-Helia)
6. Co-tutelles agreements work well, but establishing common doctoral schools in the consortium seems to be a source of excessive administration.

Afternoon Session

10. Non-academic personnel engagement and opportunities

11. Seed-funding initiatives within alliances

12. Mobility: Blended Intensive Programmes in alliances

13. Student communications within alliances

14. Microcredentials within alliances

15. Role of the alliances in building research cooperation and communities

16. Legal status of the alliances

17. Cross-alliance cooperation at European, National or Local level



10. Non-academic personnel engagement and opportunities

Professional staff play a critical role in implementing the ambitions of the alliances. However, they are also a key stakeholder in the potential benefits received by participating in the alliances. This round table will discuss how to engage and motivate professional staff but also share good case examples of formats that bring benefit for the development of members of the professional staff and their institutional ways of working. Different approaches to recognition for staff input will also be discussed. Chair: Niina Huovinen – U!REKA

Roundtable Summary:

It's important to understand staff needs and wishes, as well the obstacles that prevent them from participating. Don't assume, ask.

Different approaches work for different groups of staff. For example, for IT specialists you may want to use a fact-based, tech-focused approach.

Try to lower the threshold for participation. Examples of good practices:

- Structured concept for Erasmus staff mobility in the alliance: Live my Life concept in Una Europa alliance for job shadowing a colleague.
- Virtual mobility opportunities

Don't assume that only academic staff has expertise that is needed, your non-academic staff often has an academic education and can have even more expertise in a topic e.g. diversity, equity and inclusion topics (example from Ulysseus alliance).

11. Seed-funding initiatives within alliances

In this round table discussion, we will discuss alliances' internal funding, specifically seed funding, for teachers, students, and researchers. Our focus will be on examining the tools utilized by various alliances, the processes they implement, and the overall organization of seed funding initiatives. Furthermore, we will share valuable lessons learned from these experiences and the future steps of the alliance's internal funding. Chair: Johanna Kaila – Unite!

Roundtable Summary:

Seed Funding is an additional tool to get something new started through collaboration between teachers, researchers, and students.

Of the alliances that participated in the session, only Unite! and Ulysseus had experience with seed funding. The experiences were successful, and there was a desire to further develop them.

Unite!: 3 funding lines: Teaching&Learning, Research&PhD and Students Activities See more: https://www.unite-university.eu/about-us/unite_seed_fund

Ulysseus: Seed Fund call for teachers: <https://ulyssseus.eu/calls/seed-fund-call-for-teachers/>

12. Mobility: Blended Intensive Programmes in alliances

Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) are an essential component of today's international education, combining virtual and physical mobility to enhance learning and international experiences targeted to the whole university community. This round table discussion will explore the added value of European university alliances in promoting BIPs, share best practices and discuss lessons learned. Chair: Sofia Lähdeniemi – U!REKA

Roundtable Summary:

Allianssien BIPien lisäarvo suhteessa muihin BIPeihin:

- Toimivat rakenteet ja sujuvuus: Monenväliset Erasmus+ -sopimukset ja yhteiset mobility-ryhmät tiivistävät yhteistyötä, helpottavat järjestelyjä ja tehostavat kollektiivista oppimista.
- Verkostoituminen ja luottamuksen rakentaminen on ensiarvoisen tärkeää: Uusissa alliansseissa uusien kumppanien löytäminen ja luottamuksen rakentaminen vie aikaa. Henkilöstön liikkuvuuteen panostaminen allianssiverkoston korkeakouluissa on tärkeä alkuinvestointi, joka luo hyvän pohjan kaikelle, myös yhteisen opetuksen suunnittelulle.
- Laadukas yhteistyö: Alakohtaiset kumppanit tukevat laatua, ja aiempi yhteistyö lisää opetuspuolella onnistumista. Yhteistyön tiivistäminen allianssien puitteissa myös hallinnon ulkopuolisten toimijoiden kesken luo edellytyksiä sisällöllisesti laadukkaille BIPeille.
- Opiskelijoiden sitoutuminen: Opiskelijat sitoutuvat paremmin Allianssien BIPeille (vähemmän peruutuksia), ja partnerit hoitavat tunnollisesti osallistujat Beneficiary Moduleen.

13. Student communications within alliances

This round table discussion will focus on understanding students' preferred communication methods, sharing best communication practices and assessing the effectiveness of student communication strategies. Chair: Melissa Georgiou - Unite!

Roundtable Summary:

- **Go where the students are! Student communications depends on reaching students, as well as teachers, deans and trusted faculty.**
- **Multichannel communication and aiming to meet students face-to-face (and thinking in which spaces to meet them).**

Other important notes:

1. Campus visibility the 'old school' way: posters, cut outs, screens. Meet people in person!
2. Permanent infrastructure on campus: Alliance corners at universities, cutouts, posters and games.
3. Who are the best messengers? Oftentimes it's teachers. Students trust teachers for recommendations. If we can market to teachers, this two-pronged effort leads to wider promotion.
4. Most successful student communication initiatives: Instagram takeovers – student-to-student communication works better for students than institutional/project communication. Visibility in different campus events (and thinking of how to be visible: stands/booth, orienteering activities, printed materials & displays/screens on campus), internal newsletter.
5. Assess the success: Number of applicants, measuring community awareness at different events, participation rates (e.g. social media analytics/Moodle enrolment rates).
6. Using feedback to drive continuous feedback: Using feedback to improve processes/offerings/products like a website. Adding elements to educational offers based on feedback and using students as end-user testers (e.g. for a website).

14. Microcredentials within alliances

This round table discussion will focus on the microcredentials: Looking into national level discussions, how to define them, how to organize them, experiences of including executive agencies to microcredentials, sharing best practices and lessons learned.

Chair: Miia Vanhainen – EULiST

Roundtable summary:

- In terms of terminology and definitions, flexibility is recommended (e.g. lifelong learning vs. microcredential). Each alliance should have their own definition.
- We should aim for self-sustainability instead of project funding. However, different types of business models should be explored in order to offer access to certain target groups.
- The quality assurance should include both the academic quality assurance as well as the work-life quality assurance (co-operation models; need analysis, relevance).

Key message: Microcredentials are a learning opportunity for us all - the learner, the educator, the worklife, and the society

15. Role of the alliances in building research cooperation and communities

This round table discusses the strategies and actions the alliances have taken in building the research cooperation and engaging the research communities into the alliance work. How to engage early career researchers and academics, how to support the research collaboration and what added value alliances can bring to researchers? Chairpersons: Timo Taskinen – Forthem & Katja Ritari – Una Europa

Roundtable Summary:

Main Message: You need to find carrots to attract the researchers.

- Early career researchers a good group to target as an alliance can offer them opportunities for building networks and mobility. More senior researchers have already their established networks. Building collaboration and research communities starting from the younger generations. Targeted activities for doctoral and early career researchers: training and info sessions online, mobility opportunities, summer and winter schools, competitions and prizes etc.
- Funding necessary for building research communities, different schemes like seed and mobility funding that the alliance has included in their budget and gives out to researchers.
- What are the indicators of success? What are we expecting to come out of the collaboration (papers, funding proposals, funding etc.)? What is the time-scale of measuring success?
- Building communities takes a lot of time
- Erasmus funding gears the alliances towards education, building research collaboration more like an add-on and therefore it is challenging as it is not at the core of the alliances
- Bottom-up and top-down approaches: starting from the researchers' needs or from university and alliance level strategies?
- Some alliances have a platform/database for matchmaking researchers' profiles
- Collaboration between the research offices within an alliance important - opportunities networking and learning from each other

16. Legal status of the alliances

Alliances have different approaches to their organizational structures, with some have an established legal entity, some having a secretariat in the coordinating institution, and some just starting to figure out what kind of structure would work best for them. This round table discusses the lessons learned, pros and cons and challenges connected to the legal status and the central coordination of the alliances.

Chair: Anna Stina Sinisalo – Una Europa

Roundtable Summary:

- Legal entities are in the “pipeline” for many alliances and there is an interest for developing legal entities. Some things to consider:
- In which country to establish it
- How to secure the neutrality
- Distinction between the coordination and legal entity - clear toles and tasks
- Important to secure the connections and dialogue to operative level actions

17. Cross-alliance cooperation at European, national or local level

All European university alliances share common goals of enhancing education, research, and innovation, making cross-alliance cooperation essential to avoid working in silos. This round table discussion will highlight the importance of collaboration at European, national and local levels, featuring a successful example of Unite!, Una Europa and Ulysseus working together. We will discuss strategies for building effective partnerships, share experiences and explore opportunities for future collaborations. Chair: Saara Linden – RUN-EU

Roundtable Summary:

Let the information flow within the existing cross-alliance collaboration groups!