

# 2023 Learning & Teaching Thematic Peer Groups

## CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

Deadline for application: **23 January 2024**

### 1. Introduction

Across our [activities on learning and teaching](#), the European University Association (EUA) aims to draw attention to its importance in European higher education and invite EUA member universities to exchange practices and discuss key considerations. To do this, EUA coordinates [Learning & Teaching Thematic Peer Groups](#) that provide participating universities with an opportunity for peer learning and exchange of experiences, while at the same time contributing to the Association's policy work on learning and teaching, e.g. in the context of the Bologna Process. The groups' work also feeds into EUA's annual [European Learning & Teaching Forum](#).

Through this call EUA seeks participants for the 2024 round of Thematic Peer Groups (TPGs).

### 2. Objectives

The main objectives of the groups are:

- to discuss and explore practices and lessons learnt in organising and implementing learning and teaching in European universities;
- to contribute to the enhancement of learning and teaching by identifying key considerations on the selected themes.

### 3. Themes and expected outcomes

This year's call offers four group themes, of which the three most popular ones will be implemented. The groups are dedicated to one umbrella theme, with each of them delving deeper into one particular aspect.

#### **Umbrella theme: Learning to adapt and thrive in disruptive environments**

Recently, an increasing number of stakeholders have started to call for higher education to ensure that graduates are equipped for a future marked by economic, societal and environmental challenges. At the same time, universities are already operating in increasingly disruptive environments, as technological advances, demographic changes, environmental crises and other phenomena demand that higher education institutions and their staff swiftly adapt. Against this backdrop, the 2024 EUA Learning & Teaching Thematic Peer Groups will explore three potential pathways to ensure that students, staff, and institutions are resilient actors in ever-changing, disruptive environments:

**1) Exploring strategies for institutions to leverage the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning**

Previous EUA Learning & Teaching Thematic Peer Groups on the [“Evaluation of learning and teaching”](#) (2018) and [“Evidence-based approaches to learning and teaching”](#) (2019) have delved into institutional policies and practices that ensure the quality of their education, as well as which evidence institutions (can) use to enhance learning and teaching. Both groups concluded that approaches that embed evidence in the design, organisation and evaluation of learning and teaching have, among many other benefits, the potential to support parity of esteem between research and education. Following up on this work, in 2024 this group will explore how institutions can assess the fitness-for-purpose of learning and teaching using scholarly, evidence-based approaches, taking into account the major recent developments in digitalisation and artificial intelligence.

**2) Learning and teaching in situations of crisis: needs and support provision**

The availability of infrastructure and resources, a stable environment and the ability to plan and design reliable schedules for teachers and learners are key conditions for the success and quality of education. But what if one (or several) of these conditions are no longer fulfilled – due to external factors, such as natural disasters, pandemics, war or changed geopolitical circumstances?

Practically all higher education institutions experienced elements of this during the Covid-19 pandemic, and in several countries, universities are exposed to natural disasters, war and other conflicts. Such crises significantly impact the functioning of universities as learning institutions. They also take a toll on staff and students, as individuals who must cope with and adjust to abruptly changed circumstances.

This group will discuss how to prepare for and address crises, such as how to adopt a resilient and agile mindset within the institutional community and the key leadership capabilities required to take urgent action. It will also share good and feasible practices and develop some advice. It is open to applicants who can share experiences in being affected by a crisis and/or mobilising support for affected institutions.

**3) Learning and teaching to empower students**

Societal expectations for higher education to help learners develop into engaged, responsible and resilient citizens of the world are on the rise. Therefore, this group will explore a crucial prerequisite for cultivating these qualities in graduates: an empowering learning and teaching environment. The group will investigate co-creative, student-centred approaches that foster learner agency, as well as pedagogies that empower learners to become graduates who are ready to thrive in society and contribute to its development (e.g. through service learning or transdisciplinary approaches). This group will also engage with questions of empowerment and power structures within institutions, looking into the roles of leadership and staff members in creating a learning and teaching environment that encourages learner autonomy and supports students’ growth and development.

**4) Learning that impacts society**

EUA’s vision for 2030, [“Universities without walls”](#), foresees universities that are responsible, autonomous, open, publicly engaged and serving their local communities and society at large towards a better future. Service to society, the so-called third mission of universities, is a complex and

multifaceted concept. It notably includes the expectation for higher education to integrate the public into the knowledge-generating processes it conducts and facilitate access to the outcomes of these processes. Drawing inspiration from the concept of knowledge transfer or mobilisation, this group will explore ways to transfer the impact of learning to society. It will delve into various strategies for universities to open up the processes and results of their learning and teaching activities to the public, for example via MOOCs or service learning. The central questions of this group will be: 1) how can institutions ensure their learning and teaching activities have a direct positive impact on society, 2) through which approaches can this impact be evaluated and enhanced and 3) how can the reach of this impact be optimised?

All groups will reflect on:

- the key challenges related to the theme and how to address them;
- what kind of institutional policies and processes can help address key challenges.

In addition, each group is encouraged to explore which evidence can be drawn on when identifying good practice, key considerations and/or recommendations.

#### **4. Activities and timeline**

Eight to ten EUA member universities will take part in each TPG. Group members will attend **three meetings** during 2024 (between March and November), each lasting one or two days. As a given, one of the three meetings will take place in person, hosted by a group member, and one online. The group is free to decide whether to organise the third meeting in person or online. Meeting venues and dates will be jointly determined once group members have been selected and the availability of selected group members has been mapped.

Based on the exchange of knowledge, experiences and practices, each group will summarise the conclusions in the form of a short **report** that will be published as part of [EUA's Learning & Teaching paper series](#).

A **final workshop** will facilitate exchange and discussion among all groups. It will be organised prior to the **European Learning & Teaching Forum** taking place in February 2025, which all group members are encouraged to attend, as workshop facilitators or participants. It will provide an occasion to present each group's outcomes to a wider audience.

#### **5. Group chairs**

The EUA secretariat will assign a coordinator to each group, who will support the group's work, organise and attend all meetings and draft the group's report.

EUA will also appoint one representative from the group to act as chair. Chairing responsibilities include the planning of the group's work (including the meetings and potential asynchronous work), facilitation and steering of the discussions during meetings and ensuring that the group stays focused and goal-oriented in collaboration with the EUA secretariat. Group chairs will receive a fee-waiver (one per group) for the 2025 European Learning & Teaching Forum.

Those interested in taking up this role are invited to express their interest as part of the application.

## 6. Eligibility

The call is open to all [EUA member universities](#), represented by a vice-rector, deputy vice-chancellor or another person in a senior position with responsibilities in learning and teaching at the university. Participating universities are expected to ensure student perspectives are included in the groups' work, preferably by inviting students to join group meetings. Applications submitted jointly with a student representative are encouraged.

Each university is invited to send up to two representatives to the group meetings. Students do not count towards this maximum number.

## 7. Selection criteria

The selection of group members will be done primarily on the basis of the motivation of the university and the experience in the selected theme, as demonstrated in the application. In addition, the following aspects will be considered:

- geographical diversity;
- balance of institutional profiles (e.g. multi-faculty, specialised);
- engagement of student representatives.

In case of strong competition for participation in a TPG, preference will be given to institutions that have previously not taken part in a group. This is to ensure inclusiveness in EUA's Learning & Teaching activities.

Each university can submit only one application and participate in only one of the groups. Applicants are thus invited to indicate up to two themes in order of priority.

## 8. Terms and conditions for participation

There is no participation fee. However, universities will participate on a self-funding basis and are responsible for organising and covering their own travel and accommodation for the physical group meeting(s) and the final workshop. EUA will cover the costs of joint meals (lunches, coffee breaks, and dinner) during the meetings.

Universities interested in participating in the Thematic Peer Groups are invited to fill in the [online application form](#) by **23 January 2024**. Applicants will be informed in mid-February whether their application has been successful. For further questions, please contact Helene Peterbauer ([helene.peterbauer@eua.eu](mailto:helene.peterbauer@eua.eu)).

### About EUA

The [European University Association \(EUA\)](#) represents more than 850 universities and national rectors' conferences in 49 European countries. EUA plays a crucial role in the Bologna Process and in influencing EU

*policies on higher education, research and innovation. Through continuous interaction with a range of other European and international organisations, EUA ensures that the independent voice of European universities is heard.*

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