The next leap forward for transnational cooperation
Supporting sustainability and impact within and beyond European Universities alliances

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The European University Association (EUA) calls on European and national policy makers to make a substantial leap forward in supporting transnational university cooperation including the alliances under the European Universities Initiative, through policy reform and funding based on a long-term vision.

The goal for the next years, until 2030, must be to create a strategic, transparent and smooth system of transnational university cooperation that benefits the entire university sector and builds on best practices from within and beyond alliances under the European Universities Initiative. This is crucial to promote high quality in education and research, and thereby unleash the potential of European universities in contributing to Europe's sustainable future and its international competitiveness.

Regulatory barriers and a lack of funding continue to hamper universities' efforts to deepen transnational cooperation

The European Universities Initiative has been an important catalyst for policy discussions and, at least in some cases, further reform to facilitate university cooperation across borders. It has also contributed to increasing the mobility of staff and students in several instances.

However, significant challenges remain. Universities have made considerable efforts to strengthen cooperation within and beyond alliances, across Europe and internationally. Nonetheless, regulatory barriers and the lack of sustainable funding continue to hamper their efforts.

Another challenge for universities is the overload caused by the high number of different policy objectives linked to the European Universities Initiative. While cooperation, including through university alliances, may indeed contribute to addressing different challenges and bring about innovation, not everything can or must be solved through alliances.

To unleash the potential of Europe's universities, barriers to cooperation must be removed

Transnational cooperation, including through alliances, is a unique feature of the European university landscape. It contributes to Europe's international attractiveness and competitiveness and enhances its resilience and future sustainability. To unleash the full potential of Europe's universities, make best use of capacities and resources and maximise opportunities for students and researchers in Europe, increased efforts are needed.

Further facilitating and strengthening transnational cooperation is a prerequisite to achieving Europe's full potential through research, innovation and higher education. Alliances, such as those created under the European Universities Initiative, have become an important part of the wider spectrum of cooperation, notably creating new opportunities for institutions, staff and students.

Europe and its universities need a smooth and effective system for transnational cooperation by 2030

EUA, as the voice of Europe's universities, is calling for a substantial leap forward to create, by 2030, a system where Europe's universities can smoothly and efficiently develop deep transnational cooperation, including through alliances, and through this pursue their academic goals. The following points outline several ways in which policy makers and universities can work together to achieve this.

1. **Fully implement existing tools for facilitating transnational cooperation and other necessary system-level reforms:** Universities' efforts in changing institutional cultures and ways of working to facilitate transnational cooperation must go hand in hand with system-level reforms (e.g. of legislative frameworks and funding systems). This especially includes the implementation of Bologna Process tools, robust quality assurance systems and reforms to advance the European Research Area. Implementing existing tools is also necessary to achieve the ambitions expressed in the European Commission's higher education package, including a 'blueprint for a European degree', in spring 2024. Furthermore, a continuous, thorough assessment of regulatory development needs and potential solutions to address the identified barriers is necessary both at national and EU level, also with a view to avoiding overregulation. This should build upon existing evidence (e.g. the pilot projects on the European Degree and European legal statute) as well as data on national regulatory systems (e.g. EUA's Autonomy Scorecard).

2. **Facilitate a strategic discussion to ensure that transnational cooperation benefits the entire higher education sector:** When putting forward and implementing reforms to facilitate transnational cooperation, such as university alliances, it is important to consider opportunities to facilitate cooperation for all universities. While the alliances under the European Universities Initiative may be pioneers in certain areas, we must make sure that this ultimately benefits the higher education sector as a whole and does not create a two-tier system. For example, there needs to be an assessment of the implications of having mobility benchmarks of 25% within the European Education Area and 50% within European Universities alliances and the support for this.

3. **Centre the academic purpose of cooperation and support diverse forms of collaboration:** Universities must be in the driver's seat when it comes to deciding on the type and format of collaboration and partnership in which they engage. They must remain free to develop transnational cooperation within and beyond Europe and to pursue partnerships in line with their institutional mission, profile and strategy. This also means that universities must be able to build a specific profile for their European Universities alliance and focus on what they are best placed to achieve.

4. **Enable universities to consolidate existing cooperation and establish sustainable and effective governance systems for alliances:** This means going beyond a project-based-structure and finding ways to work effectively within the different cultures and national frameworks of university governance with a long-term perspective. National regulations and national and European funding criteria must support the development of fit-for-purpose, sustainable and efficient governance models for cooperation. This should also include the possibility (but not the obligation) to establish and engage with legal entities.

5. **Make sure that funding for transnational cooperation, including for alliances, is sustainable and efficient:** First and foremost, this means that EU member states should live up to the agreed investment targets for research, innovation and higher education and ensure sufficient and sustainable core funding for universities. In addition, universities must have the financial autonomy to allocate resources to the types and formats of transnational cooperation, including alliances, which correspond

to their mission and strategy. It also means providing a longer-term funding perspective for existing and new alliances through open competitive calls based on excellence in university missions. Such funding should be supplementary and not lead to a reduction in resources for other activities.

6. **Build an interoperable European system that enhances learning and teaching:** The European Universities Initiative has piloted systems where students have access to learning resources across their university's alliance. This possibility cannot be limited to learners from institutions in alliances, nor should it create siloed systems. This experience should be used to develop an inclusive, interoperable European system, based on common, open standards, which give learners and teachers access to resources across institutions.

7. **Enable synergies between education, research and innovation and streamline application processes:** To leverage the full potential of deep transnational cooperation, universities must be able to develop it across all of their missions. Therefore, alongside the educational dimension, dedicated support is needed for universities and alliances that wish to further develop transnational cooperation in research and innovation (R&I), including societal engagement. Such support, based on open competition, should allow for the establishment of joint structures to enhance R&I capacity and advance joint R&I initiatives. Joint calls, combining funds from different EU programmes and providing one entry point for applicants, would make the application process more efficient. Within such open calls, applicants should be free to choose the focus they consider the most appropriate for their cooperation.

8. **Support multilingualism as part of efforts to foster equity, diversity and inclusion in transnational cooperation:** Transnational cooperation, especially within a multilateral setting like university alliances, requires people at different levels of the universities to work together across institutional, cultural and linguistic divides. While English is often used as lingua franca, it is important to find ways of enhancing the multilingualism of staff and students based on the principle of balanced multilingualism as put forward by the 2019 Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism in scholarly communication. Beyond language courses, this also requires universities to have the autonomy to teach in different languages and find the best ways of working with their partners. Supporting multilingualism is important to preserve and harness the richness of Europe's linguistic and cultural diversity and strengthen European identity, and it should be part of broader efforts to foster equity, diversity and inclusion.

9. **Strengthen the leadership and governance capacity of alliances:** A crucial element for the success of deep transnational cooperation within alliances is dedicated support for leadership and governance capacity. Steering these innovative, multi-system collaborations to grow into strong strategic institutional partnerships requires new skillsets from those involved in leadership and governance. To ensure their success, both European and national initiatives supporting universities should prioritise development and investment in these capacities.