



EUniQ Pilot Evaluation
Public summary

Una Europa





Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

This public summary was established in view of the pilot evaluations for the EUniQ project.
The pilot was coordinated by the following agencies:

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Public summary

Una Europa was evaluated by the National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance – NEAQA and Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders – NVAO in the context of the pilot evaluations that were conducted as part of the EUniQ project (<https://www.nvao.net/nl/euniq>). The EUniQ project partners agreed, after consultations with European Universities, on the formulation of a European framework to be used for the pilot evaluations of four alliances. This “European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities-4th draft” was also tested through these pilots and the evaluation of the pilots may lead to amendments of the framework. The Roadmap Group of EUniQ nominated experts for the pilot evaluations and from this list of experts the coordinating agencies convened an evaluation panel for each pilot. The experts were briefed on the evaluation framework and approach of the EUniQ project, and discussed the programme for the site visits during a workshop with the coordinating agencies held on 11 March 2020 in Brussels. The panel studied the information provided by the alliance and prepared themselves through discussions in online panel meetings and e-mail exchanges, and by preparatory consultations with the alliances. Although onsite interviews were envisaged these had to be postponed and finally replaced, as the Covid-19 pandemic persisted, by online interviews. The panel undertook online interviews with representatives and stakeholders of the alliance on 24 June 2020, 12 October 2020, 30 October 2020, 4 November 2020, 6 November 2020 and 1 December 2020.

Even though Una Europa is young, its current realisations are quite impressive according to the panel. The alliance is composed of eight considerably diverse but complementary leading research universities with global reputations and reach. The panel considers that the creation of Una Europa as an alliance and 1Europe as a project answering the Erasmus+ Call for European Universities was a rather top-down process by necessity, given the limited timeframe and the complexity of the format. This was partly confirmed during the interviews. However, top-down must be put in perspective. During the one-year development process – mid-February 2018 till mid-February 2019 – Rectors, Vice-Rectors and a considerable number of academics and professional staff were actively involved. In this period the alliance organised a wide range of meetings, educational workshops and research activities in which hundreds of students and staff were involved. Moreover, building on past collaborations and on joint activities in networks, all partners had sufficient commonalities in their respective visions on the quality of education, research and innovation to merge ideas for the future into a joint mission and vision for the Una Europa alliance. Nevertheless, the alliance has to further build and consolidate a true Una Europa community to future-proof the possible evolution towards a true European University.

Through the active engagement of internal and external stakeholders, the alliance wants to further develop the common vision for which the 1Europe project provides a solid foundation of active bottom-up participation and coordination. Although there is an inherent tension between a focus on the deliverables for 1Europe and the development of a long term joint vision and strategic policies as Una Europa, and as a result between the Quality Assurance of the deliverables for 1Europe (which appear to be well in place and given attention) and the Quality Assurance of the overall policy and strategy of Una Europa (still in a too early stage to assess), the impression of the interviewed stakeholders, and also of the panel, is that this will develop in the coming years in an interactive, co-evolutionary

and subsidiary way. Enriching this co-evolution, the panel considers the diversity of the alliance as expressed in its mission as a strength.

The panel sees another strength in the fact that the partners have declared to form a Non-Profit Association under Belgian law pursuing a long-term deep, broad and integrated cooperation between its members in high-quality education, research and service to society. Strategy, aims and goals are therefore defined at the level of the Una Europa alliance and already go beyond the limited perspective of the current and future projects that nonetheless form an important basis to transform the alliance's mission into concrete strategic plans, policies, actions and results that should be delivered in time. Hence, the panel considered the long-term perspective of Una Europa as a formalised alliance and its objectives and activities, the long-term vision and goals of Una Europa as articulated in the 1Europe project proposal and the goals related to the progress that is planned towards 2025 and that should be made possible through the 1Europe project. The aim of 1Europe is to create a true virtual campus, whilst Una.Resin (Horizon 2020 funding) aims at a common Una Europa eco-system of research and innovation. Both projects are important catalysts for the collaboration that the alliance partners have only recently started.

Current activities executed in the realm of the 1Europe project are directed both at the development of strategies and policies and at the realisation of the virtual campus as such. For example, the deployment of management structures, Quality Assurance mechanisms and the partnership agreement are in the initial phase of the collaboration developed simultaneously with Work Packages that aim at the realisation of innovative formats for education and for mobility, as currently defined, and the running of pilots in the strategic interdisciplinary areas Cultural Heritage, Sustainability, European Studies and Data Science & Artificial Intelligence and One Health, as a recently added fifth area. As the interdisciplinary areas were selected for having a myriad of tentacles in all of the partner universities – and for their regional and societal relevance, and hence reach out to a large community of academics, as students will be important partners in the running of the pilots, and as the Flexible Support Services may be considered the flying doctors for administrative expert advice and support, and all of them equally spread over the alliance partners, the panel witnessed a well-appreciated shift from the rather top-down start of the alliance and the project, towards a lively community of bottom-up collaborating internal stakeholders that will at well-defined moments, as learnt from the Project Proposal, the Quality Management Plan and the interviews, interact with specific groups of external stakeholders. Representation of internal stakeholders is organised by means of the Student Board, the Self-Steering Committees and their interaction during the Project-Steering Committee.

The panel thinks it is crucial to have a timely shift of representation of the internal stakeholders from the 1Europe level to the Una Europa level, as being representative in a short-term project is utterly different than being representative in discussions on the long-term collaboration of the alliance partners. Representation at the Una Europa level is also important for the sustainability of the alliance, its further development and true commitment, community building and the creation of a common identity. This clearly contrasts with the already realised representation of external stakeholders in the Advisory Board operating at the Una Europa level and the external stakeholders in the UniLab Work Package. On the other hand, the panel applauds the UniLab Work package as a vibrant think tank and living laboratory for the university of the future and appreciates the broad representation of all stakeholders, and as such also the students. This Work Package is also

in line with what was discussed in the session with the Associated Partners at European level, expressing the hope that the European University initiative will allow for a creative playground for experiment and novelty and will not prematurely lead to standardisation. In this respect, it may also have a kind of paradoxical relationship with the expectations expressed in the Erasmus + Call and in the framework currently tested.

As became clear during the interview sessions, the Coimbra Group and the Guild as associated partners, among others, have given and still give Una Europa a platform to network and discuss hot European University topics with other alliances and share best practices and issues. Their active role in Una Europa itself is rather limited. However, it is one of the gates for the open approach the alliance aims for in everything that is developed, so that all the formats developed can be scaled and adapted to the needs of other universities in Europe and the rest of the world. A topic of discussion, both as key objective in the European University enterprise, and currently as worry child of the Covid19 pandemic, is the relation between 'mobility' and the creation of an inter-university campus. Although speaking of a virtual campus, 'campus' is still largely perceived through the definition of 'mobility', even though it seems unwise to redefine a word that meant 'physical movement' to be used to mean other mixed and virtual methods for teaching, learning and research. In that respect, the panel thinks good work is already done by mapping what mobility practices are within the alliance and as such by focussing on the possible variety of practices rather than the real physical action alone. Also positive is the establishment of alliance definitions on different forms of mobility to get a common understanding.

The deliverables of Una Europa described in the 1Europe proposal and currently worked on are all specific, relevant and attainable. Despite a foreseeable delay in activities due to the Covid19 pandemic, the panel was able to observe significant progress in the project This was all visible in the 'Summary of the first 1Europe Progress Report', the '1Europe Quality Management Plan – Skeleton' and most of all became tangible during the site visit session with the Project Steering Committee and the chairs of the Clusters. The project is alive and kicking. The panel highly appreciates the Pilot Project Team Approach in which academics from all eight partners work together with professional staff from the Clusters to implement courses or programmes. One academic institution takes the lead and in first instance Cluster members part of the same institution are involved in the project team. As academic members liaise with colleagues in their home institution and as Cluster members are in close contact with their home colleagues and their Cluster colleagues in the partner institutions, many are involved in the project without all of them being subjected to an even workload. It allows many to be engaged without getting burdensome. The Project Team Approach relies on trust between the alliance partners and at the same time allows for the spreading of responsibility and a true bottom-up development of the planned activities. Simultaneously, the contact between the different alliance partners is always safeguarded to ensure a process of co-evolution and co-learning. Moreover, the Cluster activities go beyond the time frame of the 1Europe project and as such contribute to the continuity of the alliance. The panel recommends consolidating the Project Team Approach and the clusters beyond the 1Europe project universe.

Based on the documents and interviews the panel concludes that the Una Europa alliance in its 1Europe project, has taken adequate measures to implement its strategy and policies in an effective way. The panel also observes that the Una Europa alliance still needs time to develop and elaborate policies and strategies beyond the 1Europe project and its

deliverables. At the same time, the panel stresses that there is a risk of too much focus on the implementation of the deliverables without starting to further develop the broader vision, strategy and policy of Una Europa, as the current implementation phase offers ample opportunities for reflection on what is happening and what could be viable alternatives for the future. The current focus on the timely delivery of project outputs might result in a reactive project approach at the cost of the broader vision of the development of Una Europa as a European University. It is the panel's impression that this risk is most probably not unique to Una Europa. The panel thinks that both the European University alliances and the European Commission should be well aware of this risk and its potential implications for the development of European Universities. Thinking of the saying he who pays the piper calls the tune, European funding mechanisms should not stay all too dominant in the development of the alliance, so they do not become a straitjacket in terms of too narrowly defined expectations and timing, even though they are utterly welcome and even necessary in this initial phase of collaboration between the different alliance partners. To some extent one can say that through the creation of the Una Europa vzw ('vereniging zonder winstoogmerk') – a Non-Profit Association under Belgian Law –, its main objectives to facilitate long-term deep cooperation between its partners, and its funding by the partner members, the alliance already was aware of this risk from the start. Although the 'Una Europa vzw work plan for 2021', because of its timing, was not truly part of the current evaluation, a glimpse on it by the panel provides high hopes that the Una Europa vzw is looking well beyond the project horizon of 1Europe.

The panel thinks that the project governance strongly supports the project's realisation and is in line with its process of co-evolution. Moreover, it allows for a well-appreciated subsidiarity allowing actions to be executed and problems to be solved at the level that is best suited for the actions or problem-solving activity, but also allowing for a timely flow of information and the timely addressing of problems at a higher level if required. However, as we cannot speak of a fully integrated European University yet, the governance, control structures and especially decision-making power of the alliance, in relation with that of each of the alliance partners, becomes quite important and is not fully clear yet for the panel. Currently, there is a certain disbalance between each of the partners being able to monitor and analyse the added value their membership of the alliance offers, and the alliance not having structures to monitor the evolution of mission, vision and strategic policies, except for the mapping of Quality Management Structures in the realm of the 1Europe project. The panel fully understands this, as the alliance is only taking its first and successful steps of intense collaboration under the umbrella of a European University of which the characteristics are far from established. Still, the panel thinks the alliance should look beyond the project time and start developing governance structures sustainable after 1Europe and Una.Resin (that will have a similar governance structure as 1Europe). Moreover, the alliance should be able to assure itself that the broad alignment of vision, mission and strategic policies from which the alliance originated are maintained in the future if it truly wants to develop into the direction of an integrated European University. Even more, creating the conditions for sustainability and commitment to Una Europa is one step, knowing these to be effective is another. Of course, the panel knows very well that Rome wasn't built in a day. Internal stakeholders are mainly involved at the operational level of creating the backbone of Una Europa through collaborating in the current and future projects. The panel thinks it is wise to soon take the first steps in further developing the Una Europa governance level through a mirroring of relevant bodies that are already test running in the 1Europe project. This could be a true Una Europa Student Board, and a

Una Europa Quality Assurance Board, that could originate from the already existing Quality Assurance Board of 1Europe by extending its role and composition.

The panel studied the skeleton 1Europe Quality Management Plan in the state of its development at the time of the evaluation and some of its products and discussed them during the sessions. The panel is convinced that the Quality Management suffices for the current project-state in which the alliance takes its first steps towards a European University and that the tools and products for process and product control are indeed used for checking and improving. Moreover, they stimulate the intense interaction between different 1Europe bodies and representatives of the different partner institutions, and allow for a lot of bottom-up information on the realisation and realisability of deliverables. As such, they also initiate a more long-term and sustainable collaboration between the representatives of the different alliance partners.

Two bodies are specifically responsible for the Quality Assurance side of the 1Europe project, the Quality Assurance Cluster (eight members that all belong to the institutional educational quality monitoring unit of their respective institution) and the Quality Assurance Board giving advice on the quality of the project's progress and processes and performs a control of the quality of the project's outputs. The four external stakeholders of the Quality Assurance Board will also advise Una Europa on the extent to which 1Europe deliverables prove to be innovative and how they contribute to the further development of the EHEA. The Quality Assurance Cluster has a double role to play: co-creation and permanent evaluation of the 1Europe pilots with regards to their Quality Assurance (done by the Quality Assurance bodies of the institution taking the lead on the development of a particular course or programme) and the mapping and sharing of expertise related to institutional educational Quality Assurance (amongst others also leading to a sustainable joint Quality Assurance framework).

Notwithstanding the panel being positive on the Quality Management Plan for 1Europe and the system of trust and subsidiarity for the Quality Assurance of developed programmes and courses, a focus on the sustainability of the alliance activities beyond the project horizon and covering all layers of the alliance is still missing, which at this stage is also fully understandable, but should not be overlooked when the focus is very much on the projects and their deliverables. Therefore, the panel has suggested a Quality Assurance Board at the Una Europa level to keep a long-term Quality Assurance perspective on the alliance, without replacing what already functions well in the 1Europe project.

The 1Europe project has proved to be agile and responsive to changes. The panel is convinced that the governance structure of 1Europe and its Quality Management Plan allow for reactivity and are also directed at improvement. Several actions taken in the first months of the collaboration between the alliance partners create high hopes. First of all, the alliance already introduced the new strategic interdisciplinary area One Health, truly facing current societal challenges. Secondly, 1Europe has proven to be agile in view of the Covid19 pandemic as the panel has witnessed during the sessions and in the Summary of the first 1Europe Progress Report. Evidently, the pandemic has caused delays, at the same time 1Europe has proved 'being' responsive. Important realisation is the 'Mobility in Emergency' strategy that was developed preparing for a virtual campus knowing that physical staff and student mobility would remain problematic for the first several months and allowing to test three different models given the current restrictions.

Annex: Composition of the panel

The panel of experts was convened and consisted of the following members:

Chair

Prof. dr. Hans de Wit – Professor Emeritus, Distinguished Fellow and Former Director of the Center for International Higher Education, Boston College, USA

Member

Prof. dr. Donald Clark (member) – Professor at the University of Derby, EdTech Entrepreneur, CEO of Wildfire Ltd. an AI-driven learning company, former CEO and founder of Epic Group plc

Student member

Anna Klampfer (student member) – BSc Technical Physics at Technical University of Vienna (Austria) and currently Master's student MSc Material Science and MSc Physical Energy- and Measurement Engineering at the same institution

The procedure was coordinated by:

- Coordinator: dr. Ana Jakovljević, LL.M., Secretary of the National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NEAQA) – Serbia
- Coordinator: dr. Dagmar Provijn, Senior Policy Advisor of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) - Flanders

The coordinators also acted as secretaries to the panel.

All panel members and coordinators signed a statement of independence and confidentiality.



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