



EUniQ Pilot Evaluation  
Public summary

**UNITE!**





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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

The alliance UNITE! was evaluated by (chair) Daniel Schneider, former Associate Professor, TECFA, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Geneva, Nataša Vaupotič, Professor of Physics, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, University of Maribor and Maurizio Ferrari Dacrema, PhD student in Information Technology, Research Assistant, Department of Electronics Information and Bioengineering (DEIB), Politecnico di Milano, 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 on-site 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 via ZOOM on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September and 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2020. The report was submitted to Unite! for comments on November 12 and received back with a few comments regarding facts on November 26. All comments were judged appropriate by the panel and led to minor changes in the final version.

The panel’s evaluation of the stage of development of UNITE! is based on the documentation received and the information obtained during the site visit. The panel points out that the site visit was made at a very early stage of the development of UNITE! with the covid-19 crisis being a significant drawback for the development of UNITE! activities. The panel received four documents related to UNITE! beyond the Erasmus+ project, i.e., the UNITE! Charter, UNITE! Mission Statement, and early drafts of the Quality Management Manual and the Project Management Manual of UNITE! In the draft of the Quality Management Manual, it was clearly stated that the version given to the panel reflects the ongoing discussions within UNITE! and no formal decision had been made so far. Thus, in order to evaluate the compliance of UNITE! with the criteria of a fully developed European University, the panel also reviewed the UNITE! Erasmus+ project documentation, especially the UNITE! Detailed Project Documentation in search for activities that will lead towards the fully developed European University.

The partners of UNITE! have a long-standing co-operation in education, research and student exchange and partnerships in numerous EU research projects. The UNITE! alliance builds on top of prior collaborations, in particular the CLUSTER (Consortium Linking Universities of Science & Technology for Education and Research) framework. UNITE! has ambitious goals and plans. The panel is of the opinion that if these goals and plans are materialised, UNITE! should stand a good chance to create an added value and take this co-operation to a new level. The panel observed a strong commitment to UNITE! including the

commitment to a quality framework. UNITE! has started to create a common culture, in particular shared vision goals. Some existing activities that are based on prior cooperation are already partially developed, but the majority are mainly in the planning stages.

**Global strategies and policies of UNITE!** are partially developed. UNITE! is setting up a governance structure with three levels: The first includes global governing bodies and management composed of a governing board, a steering committee and an academic forum; the second consists of task force bodies and management, the third level concerns sub-tasks, also described as “activities.” The latter also engage some, or all, alliance partner institutions at various levels from a department to a rectorate. This governance structure and organisation has already been or is about to be developed. There is a will to connect the overall strategy of the alliance with the key activities of the task forces through multi-level PDCA-cycles but also to encourage bottom-up initiatives.

At the management level, there is an awareness of the needs for quality and the will to implement an internal UNITE! QA system. A draft of the quality management exists but will have to be further discussed by concerned stakeholders. At the task force and activities level, the joint strategic goals are not yet translated into policies that can be monitored. There is an awareness for compliance with EU guidelines, e.g., *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG 2015) and the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes* (2015).

In the draft of the Quality Management Manual as well as during the interviews, the key issue raised by the panel was development of joint study programmes and the UNITE! joint doctoral degree. For the Joint Master Programme “Industry 4.0”, which is currently under development, UNITE! pointed out that at the current state of development this programme should conform to the accreditation and quality assurance processes and standards of each of the partner university involved. The panel was asked specifically to raise this issue with the EU Commission, which should stimulate the European countries/regions and their national/regional QA agencies to enable the use of the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes (2015), especially regarding the accreditation in only one country on behalf of all partners involved.

Regarding the requirements for the UNITE! joint doctoral degree, the members of UNITE! pointed out that the partner universities had already identified a number of regulation challenges such as reference structure and PhD context, duration, PhD path and course requirements, financial support and fees, admission procedures, admission requirements for the candidates, requirements for performance and monitoring, requirements for admission to the final evaluation, requirements of final evaluation and defence, requirements for the PhD thesis and documents. The regulatory status of these requirements is in many cases based on national and regional legislation. The external stakeholders from the ministries and national or regional QA agencies that the panel had the opportunity to talk to were all willing to help in addressing those challenges. However, the panel cannot assess whether this willingness is present in all the countries or regions of the partner universities of UNITE! nor if the timespan for removing the obstacles is such as to enable UNITE! to reach the set goals by 2025.

Student mobility is of the utmost importance for European Universities. UNITE! has set a goal to offer at least 50 percent of its students an international experience within the context of the European University (a common goal for all European Universities). UNITE!

plans to achieve this ambitious goal by significantly increasing the number of short-term credit mobility, either virtual or physical. The general standards for the short-term credit mobility still need to be developed.

UNITE! has started to develop **measures to implement UNITE! strategy and policies** in an effective manner and to enhance the quality of UNITE! education, and where possible, research, innovation and service to society. Common governance and management structures do exist and are working, but some bodies (e.g., the Academic Forum representing academics, staff and students) still have to be established. The staff and students have the opportunity to be a part of a co-creation of the alliance through the Academic Forum and UNITE! Dialogue. Task force working groups are responsible for the development of activity fields. How key activities are being developed and managed may need to be more explicit. In other words, since most activities are in an early development stage so are the related policies. The early draft of the Quality Management Manual describes management structures that are in the planning stage. Work on specific activities like common master programmes or a UNITE doctoral school is under way but may need to address more global goals, including ESG compliance. UNITE! has also started to develop quantitative and qualitative goals for the different work packages. But decisions regarding the future quality management still have to be made.

UNITE! is an important part of strategic planning of the partner universities, which have allocated substantial sustainable resources to achieve UNITE! objectives 2025. This financial, structural and organisational commitment at highest institutional level may require some continuous external funding beyond 2025 and the need for an additional support of EU was explicitly pointed out by some of the alliance partners. The panel is of the opinion that whatever further funds EU is willing to contribute, it is of utmost importance that UNITE! develops a relevant and efficient Quality Assurance System, such as drafted in the Quality Management Manual under discussion and development in UNITE!, in order to make any such claims credible.

**UNITE! is developing an evaluation and monitoring system** that allows for co-creative bottom up development. The draft of the Quality Management Manual outlines general principles and high-level processes. There are existing governance structures at the global and the task force level being currently refined, but the QA system itself needs to be developed. The Erasmus+ project does include indicators that could be reused to evaluate and monitor global alliance goals, compliance with ESG goals, as well as specific activity goals. However, these need to be adjusted to evaluation and monitoring of the UNITE! and its activities (as opposed to the Erasmus+ project goals).

There is a **clear will to create a system that allows improving activities and adapting UNITE! structures and policies**. The draft of the Quality Management Manual stresses the aim to allow fast learning from experience and to support both quality improvement and strategy adaptation through PDCA cycles. As already stated, the governance and management structures are being developed and evaluation and monitoring system that will enable PDCA cycles is in planning stages.

To conclude, at the time of the site visit, UNITE! was still at an early stage of development towards a fully developed European University. This was expected, because the site visit was performed after the first year of the Erasmus+ project, the main objective of which is to set the basis for the European University. One year *per se* is a very short time for such a

challenge, but in addition this period was marked by the covid-19 crisis. During the visit the panel could observe a strong commitment to the idea, objectives and activities of the future, fully developed UNITE! The activities that will lead to the compliance with the criteria of a fully developed European University have started to develop. Because the partners of UNITE! have a long-standing co-operation in education, research and student exchange and partnerships in numerous EU research projects, the panel is of an opinion that UNITE! ambitious goals and plans, if materialised through various action lines, will create an added value and take this co-operation to a new level.

## Annex: Composition of the panel

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

### Chair

#### **Daniel K. Schneider**

*Former Associate Professor, TECFA, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Geneva.*

*PhD in political science, 30 years of experience in introducing innovative pedagogies with technology.*

### Member

#### **Nataša Vaupotič**

*Professor of Physics, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, University of Maribor*

*Former vicerector of University of Maribor for Academic Affairs (2015 – 2018) and former Dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics (2007 – 2015).*

*PhD in Physics, research work in the field of soft matter physics and nanomaterials.*

### Student member

#### **Ferrari Dacrema Maurizio**

*PHD Student in Information Technology, Research Assistant, Department of Electronics Information and Bioengineering (DEIB), Politecnico di Milano, Italy*

The procedure was coordinated by:

- *Coordinator: Loulou von Ravensberg, Utredare/Senior Project Manager, Swedish Higher Education Authority*
- *Coordinator: Ruben Topchyan, Director, National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Republic of Armenia*

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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