European Universities Community VOICES

#EUSAF24
Ambassador Forum

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

of the European University Student Ambassadors Forum 2024

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01 | INTRODUCTION

This document presents the recommendation resulting from the first edition of the European University Student Ambassadors Forum (EUSAF) which took place in Warsoaw from the 12th to the 14th of September 2024. The event, part of a wider Erasmus+ project named EUC-VOICES, aims to empower and connect European students to shape the future of Higher Education in the region while fostering a stronger European identity.

EUC Voices

The EUC Voices project is an Erasmus+ initiative under the KA220-HED – Cooperation Partnerships in Higher Education action, which is aimed at supporting European universities in fostering greater student engagement across their alliances. The project began on September 1, 2023, and will run for 36 months The primary goal of EUC Voices is to empower students across European University Alliances (EUAs) and provide them with the necessary skills and knowledge to play a leading role in shaping the future of European higher education.

EUC Voices focuses on actively involving students in the decision-making processes of their respective alliances, and on promoting a stronger sense of European identity through collaborative initiatives. The project achieves this by organizing key events and providing platforms for student representatives to engage in meaningful discussions and actions.

European University Student Ambassador Forum

The primary objective of the European Universities' Student Ambassadors Forum is to serve as an interactive platform that brings together one student ambassador from each European University Alliance.

It seeks to promote a culture of knowledge-sharing and collaboration. By providing a structured space for the exchange of best practices in student engagement, EUSAF enables ambassadors to learn from each other's experiences and share insights effectively. This forum acts as a valuable conduit for disseminating information on student engagement across alliances, enhancing involvement and participation within the European Universities network.

Another essential aim of EUSAF is to foster a sense of community and identity among ambassadors. Through direct collaboration, the forum cultivates a sense of belonging, strengthening the connections within and across alliances. This engagement helps create a deeper, shared identity among students involved in the European University Alliances, further aligning them with the broader mission of the initiative.

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EUSAF also functions as a multiplier within the student community, encouraging ambassadors to carry forward a shared vision of student roles and impact within the alliances. The Forum enables ambassadors to expand their network, thereby amplifying the effects of their engagement across the student community, both within their home institutions and beyond.

A key part of EUSAF's mission is to support the professional and personal growth of student ambassadors. The Forum includes specialised training sessions aimed at enhancing ambassadors' knowledge of EU and equips them with practical skills and a deeper understanding of EU educational policies, empowering them to act as informed and effective representatives within their alliances.

Together, these objectives position EUSAF as a comprehensive platform for ambassadors to engage in meaningful knowledge exchange, build a sense of shared community, and grow as advocates for student engagement within the European higher education landscape.

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The following recommendations build on the inputs and feedback collected during the EUSAF 2024 and the experience of the Erasmus Student Network in supporting students all over Europe.

The recommendations focus on student's engagement, and their general experience within the European University Alliances, but this does not exclude their broader applicability to Erasmus+ and other mobility schemes.

These recommendations are structured in four parts: governance and student representation, coordination and collaboration gap, barriers to effective engagement and building an European student identity.

1. Governance and student representation

The persistence of significant gaps in formal students' engagement within the European University Alliances remains a crucial barrier limiting their participation in the initiative. Moreover, as highlighted in the report, even when student involvement is correctly taking place, inconsistencies across alliances and institutions can create unequal experiences hindering opportunities for leadership development and cross-border collaboration.

Recommendations

1.1 Higher Education Institutions within the same alliance should implement a unified election calendar to streamline and synchronise the elections of student representatives across all member institutions. This calendar would designate a shared timeframe during which all universities nominate their representatives, ensuring consistent and equitable participation in governance structures.

A unified election calendar would address gaps in student representation across alliance members by creating a structured and well-defined process. It would also facilitate better coordination and collaboration among student representatives by aligning their terms of service and enabling a smoother transition between outgoing and incoming representatives.

1.2 Higher Education Institutions should acknowledge and integrate student contributions into governance structures to ensure their voices are heard and valued. This can be achieved by demonstrating the tangible impact of student input on alliance decisions and outcomes, fostering a culture of recognition and inclusion.

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By showcasing how student feedback has directly influenced alliance accomplishments—such as policy changes, programme improvements, or enhanced collaboration—institutions can validate the importance of student engagement. Regular updates during executive meetings and close collaboration with local coordinators can further reinforce the significance of student perspectives.

This approach would not only encourage more active student participation but also build trust and motivation, ensuring that students feel empowered to contribute meaningfully to the development and success of EUAs.

1.3 Higher Education Institutions and EUA's Student Councils should improve the continuity of student representation by establishing a comprehensive onboarding process for new representatives. By dedicating time for knowledge transfer between outgoing and incoming representatives, institutions can foster a sense of continuity in leadership and work.
The creation of onboarding materials, which outline both day-by-day tasks and ongoing projects and initiatives, would help bridge the gap between mandates. Additionally, organising a series of meetings or shadowing sessions between outgoing and incoming representatives can further enhance the onboarding process.

This approach would ensure that new student representatives are well-prepared, leading to better continuity in governance and a greater impact on alliance decisions.

1.4 European University Alliances should formally recognise student bodies within their governance structure to ensure that students have an equal and essential role in the decision-making processes. This can be achieved by establishing formal student bodies that are officially recognised and integrated into the alliance's governance framework.
By officially acknowledging the role of students within EUAs, institutions can ensure that student input is valued and considered in key decisions, fostering a more inclusive and democratic environment. These formal bodies should have clear representation, responsibilities, and the authority to participate in governance activities alongside other stakeholders.

This approach would not only empower students by giving them a voice in the alliance's governance but also ensure that their perspectives contribute to the development and success of EUAs.

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1.5 Higher Education Institutions should formally recognise students' volunteer work and participation in civic engagement activities within the local community. This can be achieved through existing tools such as ECTS recognition and the diploma supplement. Additionally, European University Alliances, through the development of the student board, can play a pivotal role in fostering such practices. By integrating formal recognition of student board activities into their frameworks, alliances can better motivate students to engage in these initiatives. This approach can also pave the way for the adoption of such practices across the entire higher education sector.

1.6 Higher Education Institutions should seek to incorporate service learning as an integral part of their internationalisation strategy, encouraging students to engage in activities within the local community as part of their educational experience. International students should also be actively encouraged to take part in service-learning activities. Their involvement in community engagement can serve as a transformative step towards embedding civic participation within the learning mobility framework. To further emphasise the value of these activities, institutions should strive to align them with ECTS credits or, where this is not feasible, ensure they are recognised in the diploma supplement, highlighting the importance of participation in such activities.

1.7 Higher Education Institutions should ensure that representatives of student organisations are granted greater flexibility in their academic schedules to accommodate their responsibilities. This could include adjustments such as rescheduling academic obligations or providing justified exemptions from attendance when necessary. Such measures would enable student representatives to effectively balance their academic commitments with their leadership roles, fostering meaningful contributions to institutional governance and community engagement.

2. Coordination and collaboration gaps

Students reported interinstitutional difficulties in coordinating day-to-day activities such as joint programmes and events. Moreover, student bodies face significant hurdles in collaborating effectively. Differences in timetables, organisational structures, and procedures hinder their ability to plan and execute alliance-wide projects cohesively. Communication problems further exacerbate these issues, leading to fragmented engagement and missed opportunities for students to connect and participate.
This lack of coordination creates a sense of disconnection from alliance goals and diminishes the impact of student voices in governance and decision-making. Addressing these challenges

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is essential for creating a unified, integrated network where resources are shared, collaboration is seamless, and student engagement is meaningful and impactful.

Recommendations

2.1 Higher Education Institutions should increase student civic engagement by promoting active participation and a sense of community. This can be achieved through collaborative social media campaigns that highlight the importance of elections and encourage students to get involved.
By leveraging social media platforms, alliances can create awareness, foster discussions, and generate excitement on topics such as student representative elections. These campaigns should focus on how students can help shape the direction of European Higher Education and strengthen the sense of belonging within the broader student community.
This approach would not only boost election participation but also create a stronger connection among students, reinforcing their role as active contributors to the success of their EUA.

2.2 European University Alliances should improve their common online space to enhance communication and collaboration across the alliance. This can be achieved by enhancing already existing tools that provide easy access to essential documents, resources, and communication channels for all students.
By intensifying the use of pre-existing online platforms, students from different institutions within the alliance would have a centralised space where they can access important information, engage in discussions, and connect with peers from other universities.

This approach would not only streamline communication but also foster a stronger sense of community across the alliance, enabling students to collaborate more effectively and be better equipped for academic and extracurricular opportunities within the EUAs.

2.3 Higher Education Institutions should address institutional differences by implementing the European Student Card Initiative to facilitate access to services and administrative procedure to ensure greater cohesion across the alliance. This initiative can serve as a crucial tool to support students in navigating their inter -institutional experience, ensuring a smoother integration process. Additionally, the card can facilitate better access to on-campus services, further improving the overall student experience and fostering inclusivity within the university environment.

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2.4 Higher Education Institutions and European University Alliances should increase opportunities for ambassadors and student representatives to foster stronger connections and deeper collaboration across the alliance while promoting green mobility.

By providing travel support mechanism, students can attend in-person meetings, events, and workshops, which will allow them to build stronger relationships and better understand the culture and priorities of other institutions within the alliance while achieve the objectives of sustainable travel, as set by the travel support measures implemented in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2024. Face-to-face interactions are crucial for creating trust and facilitating more meaningful collaboration, which online meetings alone cannot fully achieve.

This solution would enhance mobility, encourage greater participation, and ensure that ambassadors and student representatives are better equipped to contribute to the development and success of the European University Alliances, fostering a more unified and connected student community across borders.

3. Barriers to effective engagement

A critical challenge for European University Alliances is the lack of student awareness regarding the opportunities provided which ultimately results in ceiling student engagement and reducing the impact of the initiative.

EUAs offer innovative programmes such as Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs), micro-credentials, joint courses, and thematic summer or winter schools, designed to serve the diverse student needs. These programmes emphasise flexibility, making international education accessible to those with financial, academic, or personal constraints.

Recommendations:

3.1 European University Alliances should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of student representatives and ambassadors. Institutions must clearly define the modus operandi of the alliance, providing structured guidance on how students can contribute effectively to governance and activities.

A lack of commitment often arises when students do not have a clear understanding of their tasks or when their efforts do not result in visible achievements. To counter this, alliances should establish detailed role descriptions for student representatives and ambassadors as well as providing structured support for student-led initiatives. Furthermore, alliances should regularly highlight and celebrate the successes of students, such as completed projects or their contributions to alliance-wide accomplishments.

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3.2 Higher Education Institutions and European University Alliances should prioritise the use of ambassadors and alumni to promote the tangible benefits of student's engagement. By sharing personal testimonials and success stories, alliances can effectively highlight the real-world impact of their programmes and foster a deeper connection with potential and current students.

Promotion works best when it is relatable and grounded in personal experiences. Ambassadors and alumni can serve as voices to communicate the advantages of alliance initiatives, such as mobility programmes, joint degrees, and international networking opportunities. Collaborating closely with communication and marketing teams, alliances should create targeted campaigns that feature these testimonials in a student-friendly, engaging format.

This approach will not only enhance the visibility of alliance benefits but also inspire greater participation and engagement by demonstrating the value of EUAs through relatable, real-life examples.

3.3 Higher Education Institutions should involve student's representative in all the Work Packages having a student component to bridge the gap with governing bodies. These facilitate the dissemination of information, fostering collaboration, and aligning project-level work with strategic governance objectives.
A significant barrier to effective coordination arises from the lack of structured communication between those focused on specific projects within WPs and the broader decision-making bodies of the alliances. This can lead to fragmented efforts, misaligned priorities, and missed opportunities to leverage WP insights in alliance-wide strategies. Including student representatives in WP with a student component would facilitate regular dialogue, ensuring that progress and challenges are effectively communicated to governing bodies.
These would also encourage collaboration by aligning WP initiatives with alliance objectives, creating a unified vision, and streamlining decision-making processes. By fostering this link, EUAs can enhance transparency, improve the implementation of projects, and ensure that governance decisions are informed by on-the-ground insights and progress.

3.4 European University Alliances should develop a comprehensive dissemination and reporting plan to effectively showcase their on-campus initiatives, as they exemplify the successful integration of local and international students.
The activities organised by the alliances serve as exploratory pathways for innovation in the higher education sector, and, in this way, they can play a crucial role in fostering

collaboration, inclusion and cultural exchange, further strengthening the collaboration between the local community, the international students and the local students.

3.5 Higher Education Institutions should aim to diversify their internationalisation offerings to better cater for the interests and needs of the entire student population. While Erasmus+ studies should remain at the core of the programme, new mobility opportunities should be explored as stepping stones towards longer-term mobility formats. This includes mobility options with a digital component, such as Blended Intensive Programmes, which should be particularly promoted among students with fewer opportunities, as they provide a valuable chance for international experience. Furthermore, HEIs should explore and promote other types of mobility programmes, such as the Erasmus Mundus Joint master's degrees, which can serve as a gateway for establishing more joint degree programmes soon.

4. Building a European Student Identity

One of the primary goals of European University Alliances is to foster a shared European identity among students, promoting integration and a sense of belonging across the continent. While the initiative uniquely positions EUAs to create this sense of community through joint programmes and collaborative projects, significant challenges remain.

EUAs must ensure inclusivity and accessibility to these opportunities, making European identity-building a tangible and integral experience for all students. By overcoming these challenges, EUAs can enhance a cohesive and interconnected European Higher Education Area, contributing significantly to the broader goals of European integration.

Recommendations

4.1 European University Alliances should address the language barriers among students by implementing targeted initiatives that promote multilingualism. A shared European identity is rooted in cross-border interactions and mutual understanding, both of which are dependent on the ability to communicate effectively across linguistic differences.

To overcome these barriers, alliances should offer accessible language courses tailored to the languages of partner institutions. These courses can be integrated into curricula or provided as extracurricular opportunities. Additionally, alliances should host multilingual summer schools and online workshops where students can practice their language skills in real-world contexts while engaging in cultural exchange and collaborative projects.

Regularly organised events, such as cultural festivals and thematic seminars, can further enhance interaction among students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, fostering a sense of

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belonging and shared purpose. By creating these opportunities for communication and understanding, EUAs can empower students to connect more deeply with their peers, promoting a stronger, more cohesive European identity. These efforts will also enhance students' ability to navigate and participate fully in international academic and professional environments, further reinforcing the core objectives of the European University Initiative.

4.2 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) within European University Alliances (EUAs) should actively engage students in understanding and embracing the concept of Europe and the alliances' role within it. Building a sense of belonging to Europe requires not only educational opportunities but also targeted efforts to connect students with the broader idea of European identity and integration.

To achieve this, alliances should organise specific events that highlight Europe's shared values, history, and future aspirations. Events centred around significant milestones, such as European Elections, can serve as powerful platforms for engaging students and fostering discussions about their role in Europe's development. These events should include debates, workshops, and interactive activities to make the experience meaningful and relatable.

Additionally, alliances should increase their visibility on campuses by integrating alliance-driven initiatives into university life. This could involve setting up dedicated spaces or hubs that provide information about alliance activities, showcasing alliance-led projects, and promoting opportunities for students to participate. These efforts will cultivate a deeper sense of belonging, reinforcing the foundations of a shared European identity

4.3 Higher Education Institutions within European University Alliances should create low-barrier opportunities for students to engage with international peers by offering casual online spaces. These spaces would serve as a stepping stone for students hesitant to participate in formal mobility programmes or international events, addressing their concerns about the perceived risks of cross-border interactions.

Many students may be reluctant to leave their comfort zones or commit to long-term mobility programmes. To ease this transition, alliances should provide informal opportunities where students can interact with peers from different countries in a relaxed, pressure-free environment. These virtual spaces can host social events, collaborative activities, and casual discussions about cultural and academic topics, allowing students to "taste" the European experience without making significant commitments.

By fostering these connections, EUAs can gradually build students' confidence and interest in more immersive mobility opportunities. These online interactions can also serve as a foundation for deeper cross-cultural understanding and collaboration, ultimately encouraging broader participation in the alliance's programmes and contributing to a stronger sense of European identity.

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