Highlights from EURASHE November 2023 – April 2024

Dear members of the BFUG,

We are providing you with this written update as an extension of the oral update given by our Representatives during the BFUG meeting XC in Brussels in April 2024.

Introductory words from the EURASHE President Hannes Raffeseder

Dear BFUG Colleagues,

As we get nearer to another Ministerial Conference, I would like firstly to thank you for continued cooperation in building a stronger EHEA, but also ask for more ambition to make European higher education more integrated, innovative, competitive and responsive to the needs of society.

On the one hand, EURASHE urges countries to implement the key commitments in full, since institutions and students still face many obstacles to mobility, between different EQF levels as well as countries. For example, short cycle higher education was fully integrated into the EHEA by the 2018 Paris Communique, but students that wish to continue higher education in other countries face difficulty in having their qualifications recognised.

On the other hand, we would like ministers to reflect on what higher education is good FOR? There are multiple answers to this question, but I believe that the BFUG should concern itself with more than integration, and show all citizens, not just students, that it is helping address the challenges Europe faces, most notably social and territorial inequality of opportunity. Higher education must be accountable to society if we are to retain the trust of our fellow taxpaying citizens. EURASHE urges a strong commitment in the Tirana Communique to developing competences for the digital and green transitions, as well as a concern for the local and regional impact of higher education.

Of course, I can appreciate the concerns about workload and the risk of multiplying structures. However, the answer should not be to reduce ambition, but to optimise the effectiveness and efficiency of our working methods.
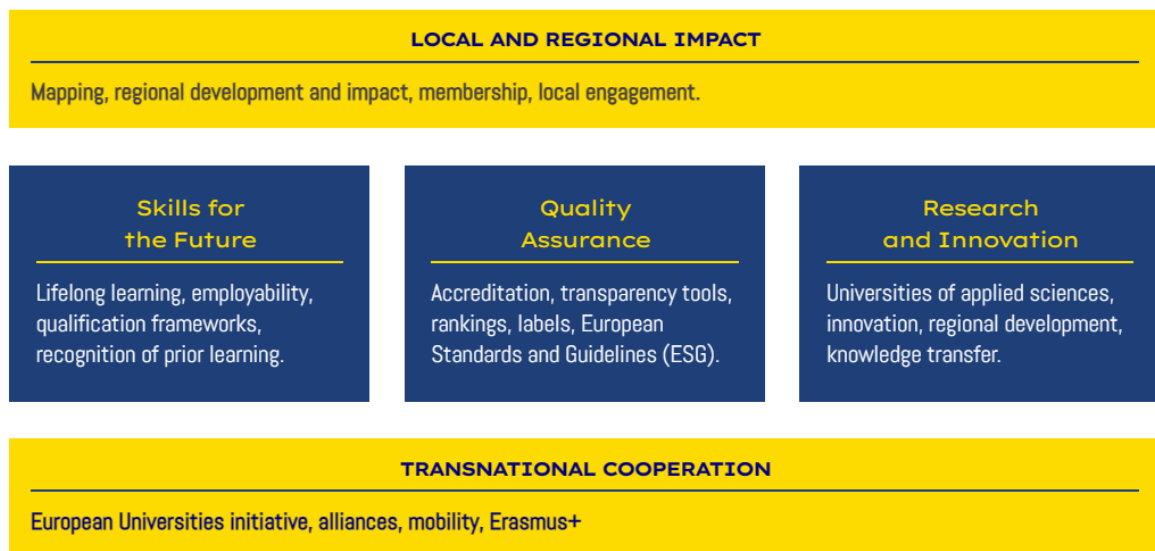
The April meeting in Brussels is the second time we have met under this semester, reflecting the intense period before the Tirana Ministerial Conference. I would like to thank the co-chairs and the Belgian Presidency for their efforts and hope this will bear fruit in Tirana, which for EURASHE means an ambitious agenda for the next cycle of the BFUG.

Best regards,

Hannes Raffaseder, EURASHE President

EURASHE Strategic Priorities

The EURASHE strategy for 2023-2025 aims to make the Association a reference point for a wide range of policymakers and higher education institutions who seek to harness the power of Professional Higher Education (PHE) to address the green and digital transitions. The thematic priorities are shown in the figure below. Three horizontal subjects (Skills, Quality in HE and Applied Research) are complemented by two overarching concerns, namely to promote both local engagement and transnational cooperation.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL IMPACT

Mapping, regional development and impact, membership, local engagement.

Skills for the Future	Quality Assurance	Research and Innovation
Lifelong learning, employability, qualification frameworks, recognition of prior learning.	Accreditation, transparency tools, rankings, labels, European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).	Universities of applied sciences, innovation, regional development, knowledge transfer.

TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

European Universities initiative, alliances, mobility, Erasmus+

In 2024, EURASHE will dedicate its Annual Conference to the priority of transnational cooperation (see part 4), building on the momentum of the European Universities Initiative, which includes a number

of ambitious alliances focusing on applied education and research. EURASHE hopes to be an associate partner in the Erasmus+-supported Community of Practice on transnational cooperation that is currently being established. It is also part of a Centre of Vocational Excellence to be launched this month (April 2024), and the Community of Practice for that initiative. This illustrates the position of EURASHE as a bridge between different levels of education, and urges the European Commission better integrate the two initiatives.

In February the EURASHE Board met in person at the Technological University of the Shannon in Ireland, and discussed the implementation of the strategy. The Board reviewed the identity of the association in light of changes to higher education systems, including the creation of Technological Universities in Ireland and the emergence of applied European University Alliances. The Board agreed to make proposals on how EURASHE brands itself in this new context, which will be presented to the General Assembly before the Annual Conference in May.

EURASHE Communities of Practice

The EURASHE Communities of Practice were established in 2022 and strengthened this year. Three Communities currently work on the three horizontal priorities of the 2023-2025 strategy (Skills, Quality of HE and Applied Research). The Communities of Practice are open to both EURASHE members and non-members, and the structure is illustrated in the figure below. A core group meets more regularly while the wider group benefits from virtual forms of cooperation and information sharing as well as online meetings.

EURASHE invites members of the BFUG to share the following links to join the communities among the higher education community:

📥 Join EURASHE Skills Community of Practice here

📥 Join EURASHE Quality Assurance Community of Practice here

📥 Join EURASHE Research Community of Practice here

EURASHE Annual Conference 2024

On 22-23 May 2024, EURASHE is organising the 33rd edition of its Annual Conference, hosted by the St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences (St. Pölten, Austria) on 22-23 May 2024. The title of the event is Stronger Together: Fostering Transnational Cooperation in Applied Universities and builds on the experience of the European Universities Initiative and other examples of deep transnational cooperation among applied higher education institutions.

The event will feature high-level keynote speeches and panel discussions on several topics linked to transnational cooperation, as well as breakout sessions on the EURASHE core themes of applied research, quality assurance, skills, and regional impact. There is still time to register for the conference [here](#).

EURASHE Position papers

EURASHE POSITION PAPER ON ERASMUS+

On December 2023, EURASHE published this position paper on the Erasmus+ 2021-27 interim evaluation and the 2014-20 final evaluation. [Access the document](#) to find out more about the position of EURASHE and our membership on matters of mobility, cooperation, and much more.

Towards the European Framework for Attractive and Sustainable Academic Careers

[This policy brief](#) is centred around the issue of human resource structures and incentives within HEIs, including permeability, assessment, recognition and career development. It aims to address prevalent challenges and identify key areas for improvement.

AIRinVET: Publication on AR actors, business models and case studies

[The report](#) provides an inventory of existing practices and practical examples in Applied Research and Innovation carried out by vocational education and training centres. The mapping exercise covers a wide range of organisations that provide vocational education to enhance peer learning among practitioners.

Forthcoming position papers include a package on research policy, including the next European Framework Programme (FP10), and Open Science.

Highlighted EURASHE Projects

WIN4SME CoVE Kickoff - Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) are formed by networks of partners that develop local "skills ecosystems" to provide high quality vocational skills to young people and adults, and contribute to regional development, innovation, industrial clusters, smart specialisation strategies and social inclusion.

The WIN4SME Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) will play a pivotal role in enhancing workplace innovation within SMEs through developing a talented workforce and entrepreneurial spirit. It emphasises the creation of synergistic partnerships and the facilitation of knowledge sharing aimed at elevating an area that is vital yet often underappreciated.

SMEs are currently navigating through the challenges posed by technological progress, globalisation, and demographic shifts, necessitating ongoing innovation to address issues such as:

- A growing shortage of skilled workers and young entrepreneurs
- Limited engagement in vocational education and training (VET)
- A skills mismatch, with training programs not tailored to the specific needs of SMEs
- Insufficient collaboration between universities and a lack of SME-focused curricula
- Minimal international presence of SMEs and VET providers

The initiative, available at www.WIN4SMEs.eu, collaborates with 20 partners across 9 countries and involves 70 associated organizations. It aims to confront these challenges by connecting VET providers, higher education institutions, and SME associations. Together, they will establish CoVEs dedicated to "Workplace Innovation" in seven countries (Germany, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland), all coordinated under a single overarching CoVE

QA-FIT (2023-2024)

The key project in the field of QA is conducting a comprehensive mapping exercise of the state of play of internal and external quality assurance in the EHEA, taking a critical look at the ESG and seeing how they have been adapted to different contexts. Explore how quality assurance activities address recent and emerging developments in higher education, including activities that go beyond the focus of the ESG and that use innovative approaches to gather perspectives on the future of quality assurance in the EHEA. EURASHE organised focus group meetings with the Universities of Applied Sciences representatives to better understand the sectoral specificities in the QA landscape. The key messages from the EURASHE community will be published soon within the project framework

Meridies Consortium (2021-2024)

The Consortium MERIDIES (a Latin expression referring to South) brings together a set of Portuguese Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) strongly committed to the development of the territory in which they operate, i.e., the Alentejo region, integrating the Polytechnic of Portalegre (Coordinator), the Polytechnic of Santarém, the Polytechnic of Setúbal, the Polytechnic of Beja and the University of Évora. Based on the characteristics of this territory, the project translates a strong commitment of the HEIs involved with the development of the territory, contributing not only to meet the educational and training needs, but also to retain and attract qualified human resources, in strategic and crucial areas for development, aligned with the objectives inherent to the agendas under the RRF framework. There are three proposed training areas (Digitalisation & New Technologies; Circular Economy & Sustainability; and Renewable Energies & Decarbonisation) equally articulated towards upskilling and reskilling of the young and working population, by issuing micro-credentials. EURASHE's role in this project is mostly to bring the European and international levels, mainly by disseminating the courses and micro-credentials through various communication channels and events.

ATHENA (2023-2025)

ATHENA responds fully to one of the main Erasmus+ programme priorities: Inclusion and Diversity. By developing a set of recommendations on integrating accessibility and design for all into the HE

curricula, we want to take another step forward in promoting equal opportunities, access and social inclusion of people with disabilities.

The leading principle of Erasmus+ is to address "equal opportunities and access, inclusion, diversity and fairness across all its actions". ATHENA addresses this objective for one of the most marginalised and excluded groups of the last centuries – people with disabilities. The potential of digital technologies for personalisation and adaptation of interaction opens a unique possibility for people with disabilities.

To exploit the digital potential for equal opportunities and access, inclusion, diversity and fairness across all actions, accessibility must be treated as a basic human right in the digital society.

Recent and Upcoming Events

Apart from the Annual Conference, which remains EURASHE's flagship event, we would like to showcase several other past and upcoming events:

STUDENT MOBILITY SUMMIT (January 2024): The summit brought together the most authoritative speakers on the digitalisation of the Erasmus+ programme, shared analysis and novelties, involved participants through hackathons on key topics, and enabled access to in-depth trainings catering to both beginners and advanced EWP users.

EURASHE QA Community of Practice
Algebra University hosted a joint event in partnership with the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and its Quality Assurance Community of Practice. The joint event comprised a Core Group Community of Practice meeting held on 18th March and a Wider Community of Practice meeting titled Flexible QA Fostering Transnational Interinstitutional Cooperation on 19th March.

1ST EUROPEAN DUAL HIGHER EDUCATION CONFERENCE (10-11 April, 2024): Join us at the forefront of innovation and policy as we embark on an intellectual journey into the Future of Work and Dual Higher Education. Our conference will delve into the ever-evolving landscape of work and educational policies, offering a platform for visionary discussions and practical solutions.

International Staff Training Week (May 6-8) on research at Vilnius University of Applied Science, where EURASHE will deliver modules on researchers' competences, regional impact and open science.

European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF 2024) – November 2024 **-** The Forum will engage participants in discussions on quality assurance policies and practices that support emerging forms of internationalisation. Key questions to be addressed include the role of quality assurance in promoting sustainability in transnational mobility, the adaptability of European tools like the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for the future, and how the European framework aligns with quality assurance beyond the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).