CESAER

The strong and united voice of universities of science and technology in Europe

Inside European University Alliances: Institutional insights from universities of science and technology

Evidence from leadership, faculty and students on conditions for success in long-term cooperation, and effective pathways for the future

White paper dated 20 April 2026

Table of contents

Authors and contributors

The co-authors for this report are:

- Mara Baccolla (Politecnico di Torino)
- Justyna Lubośna (Gdańsk University of Technology)
- Touko Närhi (CESAER Secretariat)
- Roberto Zanino (Politecnico di Torino)

The work of this report was steered by the Co-Chairs of the Task Force Learning & Teaching 2024–2025, Roberto Zanino (Politecnico di Torino) and Justyna Lubośna (Gdańsk University of Technology), with drafting led by Touko Närhi (CESAER Secretariat) and valuable contributions from the Secretary of the Task Force, Mara Baccolla (Politecnico di Torino).

We sincerely thank the leaders, academic and administrative staff representatives, and student representatives who contributed through interviews, consultations and discussions, and whose insights underpin this report, and whose insights form the foundation of this report.

We also thank all participants of the CESAER Annual Meetings 2025 high-level roundtable, as well as our hosts at Brno University of Technology, for sharing their expertise and helping to frame the discussion. Special thanks go to the members of Task Force Learning & Teaching for their valuable insights and feedback throughout the drafting process.

Approval

This report has been approved for publication by the CESAER Board of Directors.

Contact

For more information, please contact the Advisor for Benchmark & Higher Education Touko Närhi.

This document can be referenced using: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19660020

Rooted in advanced engineering education and research, CESAER is an international association of leading specialised and comprehensive universities with a strong science and technology profile that advocate, learn from each other and inspire debates. Our Members champion excellence in higher education, training, research and innovation, contribute to knowledge societies for a sustainable future and deliver significant scientific, economic, social and societal impact.

Executive summary

This report provides an evidence-based account of how participation in European University Alliances is experienced internally by universities of science and technology, drawing on leadership interviews, staff and student consultations as well as on a stakeholder roundtable organised as part of CESAER Annual Meetings (CAM) 2025. Leaders increasingly describe Alliances as long-term institutionalised cooperation frameworks engaging the whole institution, characterised by strategic alignment, shared governance and a growing mutual trust. This institutional depth matters: it is difficult to build cross-border strategic capability quickly, and Alliances that have already achieved durable alignment are better positioned to mobilise action at scale.

Across the consultations, there is growing interest in strengthening connections and synergies across education, research and innovation (R&I), although levels of engagement remain uneven across faculties and departments. The evidence confirms that Alliances remain primarily education-focused, reflecting how Alliances were initially organised within institutions, given that their main funding source from the outset was Erasmus+. At the same time, respondents identify promising early developments that point towards knowledge ecosystems in which education, R&I and external partnerships reinforce one another. These include initial steps towards joint doctoral activities, thematic research collaborations, exchanges among research support teams and, in some Alliances, preparation of and success of joint Horizon Europe proposals. Leaders also refer to early discussions and examples related to shared laboratories, core facilities and research infrastructures.

These emerging developments are seen as part of the long-term evolution of Alliances, yet remain exploratory and are often constrained by fragmented funding structures and short cycles. Sustainability emerges across leadership, staff and students as the enabling condition that shapes continuity of roles, depth of cooperation and the ability to move from pilots to stable cooperation. Respondents emphasise that short-term project funding creates discontinuity in key coordination functions, limits staff engagement, undermines student continuity due to regular turnover, and hampers planning for activities that link education with R&I. Leaders, in particular, link financial sustainability to Europe's long-term capacity to develop talent, support research excellence and maintain access to high-quality research environments, including advanced and costly research infrastructures.

Institutional embedding is progressing but remains uneven. Leadership commitment is strong, yet staff and student participation depends on workload, the presence of engaged individuals, clarity of mandates, communication and recognition. Students report widespread formal inclusion but varied influence and limited continuity due to turnover as students graduate or move on. As a result, involvement can concentrate around a relatively small group of consistently active individuals rather than being broadly rooted across faculties and departments.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that universities of science and technology view Alliances as promising platforms to mobilise cross-border knowledge ecosystems capable of strengthening talent pipelines, enabling access to shared infrastructures and progressively deepening R&I cooperation, in addition to their already well-established educational contribution. However, structural barriers—especially fragmented programme logics across funding instruments, short funding cycles and limited synergies between education and R&I instruments—limit this ambition. The findings point to the need for predictable multi-annual support, clearer pathways connecting education, talent and R&I funding, and conditions that enable stable roles, meaningful participation and sustained institutional engagement. These conditions are necessary for Alliances to develop as long-term, deep cross-border cooperation frameworks that can contribute credibly to the European Education Area and the European Research

Area—and, increasingly, to Europe's competitiveness agenda through more coherent connections across excellence in science and education and accelerated technological development and impact.

The high-level recommendations presented at the end of this document (as set out in Section 8) build on the extensive institutional consultation undertaken during 2024 and 2025 for this report, combined with the latest European developments up to early 2026, translating the collected evidence into strategic actions for EU institutions, member states, Alliances and universities.

1. Introduction

European University Alliances have become one of the most notable developments in Europe's higher education landscape. Originally launched to deepen transnational cooperation through inter-university campuses and cross-border learning pathways, and framed from the start as part of a broader strategy to strengthen Europe's excellence, skills, innovation and competitiveness, the initiative is now entering a more mature phase. As Alliances progress through successive funding cycles, discussions increasingly focus on their potential to strengthen research and innovation (R&I) collaboration, contribute to Europe's long-term skills and competitiveness agenda and serve as long-term university cooperation frameworks. Against this evolving backdrop, questions of governance, sustainability, institutional embedding and the connection between education and R&I have moved to the centre of policy and institutional debate.

This report provides an evidence-based account of how universities of science and technology experience Alliance participation. Drawing on leadership interviews, faculty consultation, student perspectives and a stakeholder roundtable organised during the CESAER Annual Meetings 2025, the study examines how Alliances are evolving in practice, what forms of added value universities see emerging, and which structural conditions enable or constrain deeper cooperation. The analysis focuses on six dimensions central to the development of Alliances:

- strategic alignment;
- education and R&I integration;
- competitiveness and the European added value;
- governance and decision-making;
- sustainability and funding outlook;
- institutional engagement and participation conditions.

Rather than evaluating individual Alliances, the report identifies shared patterns that can inform the ongoing European and national policy debates.

The existing work has already underscored the importance of robust foundations for long-term cooperation. The European University Association, through its report on the governance models of the European University Alliances (2021), highlighted the importance of coherent coordination structures, leadership continuity and stronger alignment between Alliance-level arrangements and institutional strategies. Within the FOREU4ALL Community of Practice, Alliances are comparing governance models, monitoring developments related to legal status and investment pathways, and sharing experiences to address administrative and legal challenges.

CESAER's 2024 position frames the Alliances as experimental spaces for long-term institutional cooperation, where universities pursue high-risk, high-gain approaches and use the Alliances as laboratories for knowledge development, learning across barriers and establishing good practices. It emphasises enabling conditions for innovation in areas of high European added value - such as postgraduate studies and research collaboration. Central to this vision is an iterative experimental cycle that allows Alliances to build on what works and capture "lessons learned". The position also stresses the need for predictable multi-annual support, coherent funding across education and R&I and reduced administrative burden - closely mirroring the structural conditions identified in this report.

At the EU level, the Draghi report frames the competitiveness agenda around a clear priority: "first – and most importantly – Europe must profoundly refocus its collective efforts on closing the innovation gap with the US and China, especially in advanced technologies." Given the central role of universities of science and technology in educating talent, advancing frontier research and translating knowledge into innovation in

these fields, this places Alliances with a strong science and technology component in a strategically important position. Unlike ad hoc partnerships or project-based consortia, European University Alliances are increasingly developing as long-term and university-wide frameworks rooted in strategic alignment, shared governance and long-term trust building at leadership level, enabling them to pool capabilities (including world-class infrastructures, facilities and expertise) and capacity in terms of scale, diversity and reach across borders in ways that individual institutions or looser networks cannot achieve at continental scale. When properly enabled, Alliances can therefore accelerate cross-border collaboration in advanced technologies - more structurally and durably than typical project-based consortia - by linking research, innovation ecosystems and talent pipelines, widening access to cutting-edge laboratories, core facilities and research & technology infrastructures, and strengthening European-oriented knowledge ecosystems that help turn excellence into sustained competitiveness and technological leadership.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this report is to provide timely and grounded insight into how Alliances are perceived, organised and implemented inside universities of science and technology. By connecting institutional experiences with wider European policy developments, the report aims to support constructive dialogue among EU institutions, national authorities, Alliances and universities as decisions are taken on the future direction and support frameworks of the European Universities Initiative.

2. Scope and methodology

This study provides an evidence-based analysis of how universities of science and technology experience and organise their participation in European Universities Alliances, and the added value derived internally and externally. It examines shared patterns in institutional strategies, governance, cross-mission integration, competitiveness and sustainability.

2.1 Data sources

The analysis draws on four complementary sources:

- **Leadership interviews:** 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted by the Task Force Learning & Teaching Co-Chairs with senior university leaders (including 12 Rectors or Presidents, some with leadership position in their Alliances) from CESAER Member institutions participating in European Universities Alliances, comprising leaders from nine universities in comprehensive Alliances and four in specialised Alliances. Participating institutions and alliances are listed in Annex A (Table A1), and the interview guide is provided in Annex B.
- **Academic and administrative staff consultation:** Academic and administrative perspectives were collected during annual CESAER Summer Consultation 2025, during which one response per each institution was submitted. 26 institutional respondents provided input on governance participation, representation of science and technology (S&T) fields, and education–R&I integration. Respondents answered on behalf of their own university. Participating institutions and alliances are listed in Annex A (Table A2), while the questionnaire is provided in Annex C.
- **Student representative consultation:** 20 student representatives from 10 Alliances, each part of their Alliance's student body, contributed to our data collection through an online survey disseminated via Secretaries General. Respondents held formal governance roles, such as serving on Alliance-level Student Boards or Student Councils, holding leadership positions such as chair or vice-chair, representing their university in Alliance coordination bodies, and participating in governance teams, advisory groups or work packages. Respondent affiliations are listed in Annex A (Table A3), whereas the student questionnaire used in this study is provided in Annex D.
- **Additional qualitative evidence:** A high-level panel discussion organised and managed by the Task Force Learning and Teaching Co-Chairs held on 22 October 2025 during the CESAER Annual Meetings (CAM) hosted by Brno University of Technology (Czech Republic) provided further insights from university leaders, students and external stakeholders. Panel discussion was enriched by live polling of the audience of 41 participants, representing over 30 universities, covering a range of institutional functions, including rectors, vice-rectors, directors, heads of unit, senior advisers and administrative staff. These inputs contextualise the institutional perspectives within wider policy discussions.

2.2 Anonymisation

All data used in this report are fully anonymised. University leaders, staff and student representatives were invited to speak openly about challenges, internal processes and strategic considerations. Anonymisation also keeps the focus on broader structural patterns rather than on individual universities or Alliances.

Quotations in the report reflect the voices of the respondents. They have only been edited only where necessary for clarity and anonymisation, while preserving their original meaning. Each quotation is identified by respondent group and Alliance type.

2.3 Taxonomy: comprehensive and specialised Alliances

For analytical clarity, the report uses a simple categorisation, distinguishing between comprehensive Alliances, which bring together universities with broad disciplinary portfolios, including universities of science and technology alongside other institutional profiles, and specialised Alliances, which are centred on science, engineering and technology. Respondents to the staff and student consultation were invited to indicate which group their Alliance most closely aligns with, supported by a reference classification of Alliances. While acknowledging that this is not a simple binary choice, the distinction reflects meaningful differences in institutional composition and mission across the Alliances represented by CESAER Members.

Alliances in CESAER

The table 1 below lists all CESAER Members participating in European University Alliances as of March 2026, covering 47 CESAER Members across 14 Alliances. At the time of data collection in 2025, the study covered 9 comprehensive and 4 specialised Alliances. For reference, CESAER has 56 Member universities. The full list of CESAER member universities participating in each Alliance is provided in Annex A (Table A4).

Alliance	Type	Number of CESAER Members
Circe U	Comprehensive	2
ECIU	Comprehensive	2
EELISA	Specialised	5
ENHANCE	Specialised	10
ENLIGHT	Comprehensive	1
EPICUR	Comprehensive	1
EUGLOH	Comprehensive	3
EULiST	Comprehensive	5
EUNICE	Comprehensive	1
EuroTeQ	Specialised	3
EUTOPIA	Comprehensive	2
EUt+	Specialised	1
UNA EUROPA	Comprehensive	2
Unite!	Specialised	9

Table 1. Alliances CESAER Members are part of as of March 2026. Alliance type self-identified by staff and student respondents.

2.4 Limitations of the study

The findings of this report should be interpreted with some natural limitations in mind. The number of respondents differs across the three groups (leaders, academic and administrative staff, and students), while the results reflect the perspectives of single universities rather than Alliance-wide positions. Leaders, staff and students view Alliances through different roles and responsibilities, which shapes how they assess governance, integration and the practicalities of cooperation. In addition, Alliances are at different stages of maturity and strategic focus, which influences the extent of university mission integration, governance structures and internal embedding.

Despite these limitations, the combination of leadership interviews, staff responses, student perspectives and stakeholder input from the CAM 2025 roundtable discussion offers a coherent and meaningful picture of how universities of science and technology experience cooperation within their respective Alliance. Different viewpoints provide valuable insight into how Alliances are evolving internally and what conditions matter most for their longer-term development.

3. Leadership perspectives: the strategic point of view

3.1. Strategic alignment and long-term vision

Across all Alliances, leaders report strong alignment between Alliance membership and their institutional strategies. Alliances are viewed as long-term instruments for institutional transformation rather than short-term projects, supporting priorities such as internationalisation, mobility, joint programme development, learning and teaching development, interdisciplinarity and research collaboration. Specialised Alliances benefit from a shared science and technology (S&T) focus, whereas comprehensive Alliances bring together a more diverse group of universities with broader disciplinary portfolios, creating opportunities for collaboration across different academic communities.

"Our university believes that Alliances can attract global talent, accelerate knowledge transfer and strengthen Europe's strategic autonomy. We see the Alliance as part of our long-term institutional strategy."

- Leader, specialised Alliance

"We consider the Alliance a lever to support the internal transformations we want to drive within our own institution. What we develop in the Alliance is not an extra activity; it helps us change how we teach, collaborate across disciplines, and work with partners."

- Leader, comprehensive Alliance

Interviewees describe Alliances as settings where institutions can experiment with more integrated ways of working, including joint governance arrangements, co-created curricula, expanded mobility formats and more coordinated cooperation across university missions. Leaders from both comprehensive and specialised Alliances highlight that these forms of collaboration have helped build trust among partners and increased the visibility of the Alliance and its member universities within the European higher education landscape. They also emphasise that Alliances require time to mature and should not be assessed primarily on short-term outputs.

A recurring message is that Alliances should not follow a single model. Leaders call for a shared general concept while allowing Alliances to evolve according to their own strengths and contexts. Some note, however, that this flexibility is difficult to realise under the current Erasmus+ format, which structures the Alliance cooperation through work packages, deliverables and milestones that do not fully reflect how universities typically organise long-term institutional collaboration. Many describe Alliances as places to test new approaches and learn from what works and what does not. Flexibility is seen as essential, enabling Alliances to develop distinct trajectories rather than conforming to a uniform template.

Across all Alliances, leaders underline that internal incentives, stronger communication channels and reduced administrative burden would be important conditions for deeper institutionalisation. Overall, strategic alignment is strong, but more systematic engagement from faculties, departments and academic staff, and closer links between Alliance structures and everyday academic practice would be essential to reach the full embedding of the initiative into the university backbone.

3.2. Role of Alliances in education, research and innovation

"Education is the natural starting point, but research will inevitably come in. If it does not, it wouldn't be logical. Research will come at some point and Alliances will help us increase competitiveness by linking new collaborations and Horizon Europe proposals."

- Leader, comprehensive Alliance

"The Alliance was conceived equally for collaborative research and engineering education."

- Leader, specialised Alliance

"The link between research and teaching is fundamental. We have exchanged a lot on organising research, central facilities and shared infrastructures. The advantages of collaborating within the Alliance are even greater in research and innovation."

- Leader, specialised Alliance

Education remains one of the primary anchors of Alliance development across both comprehensive and specialised Alliances. Leaders emphasise that education has been the natural starting point, reflecting the Erasmus+ origin of most of the current EU funding dedicated to Alliances. At the same time, a strong majority of leaders explicitly state that R&I cannot remain separate indefinitely, and that Alliances will ultimately need to work across all core university missions to realise their full potential.

Overall, leaders report different levels of integration and strategic ambition across Alliances. The pace and pathways toward integrating R&I differ considerably. Leaders of comprehensive Alliances describe different approaches to strengthening this dimension. Some prefer a gradual trajectory, consolidating joint educational activities before progressing towards deeper R&I cooperation. Others advocate for a more rapid implementation of R&I actions, and caution that research should not remain peripheral if Alliances are to develop meaningfully and remain attractive to researchers and external partners.

Promising early developments in the direction of stronger integration between education and R&I are reported by the leaders of many comprehensive Alliances. These include interdisciplinary teaching linked to shared research strengths, initial steps in joint doctoral activities, closer cooperation between research support teams and the preparation of joint Horizon Europe proposals. While these activities are still emerging, they illustrate how educational cooperation can naturally lead to new research links and cross-mission synergies.

Across specialised Alliances, interviewees see their shared focus on engineering, science and technology as a key source of added value. Leaders explicitly mention areas where collaboration is emerging or envisaged, including joint research activities, shared use of laboratories and core facilities, coordinated doctoral activities, and work on innovation-related themes such as technology transfer and engagement with industry.

"The link between research and teaching is fundamental. We have exchanged a lot on organising research, central facilities and shared infrastructures. The advantages of collaborating within the Alliance are even greater in research and innovation."

- Leader, specialised Alliance

Regardless of the Alliance type, leaders consistently underline the need for better synergies between EU education and R&I funding programmes. Many emphasise that long-term progress depends on connecting joint doctoral initiatives, shared infrastructures and thematic research networks to funding instruments that work together rather than in parallel. They explain that existing funding structures for education and research make it challenging to deepen R&I-related collaboration, which can slow progress as Alliances mature. Further progress will require longer and more stable timeframes than short funding cycles, better synergies between funding instruments and conditions that support sustained collaboration across education, research and innovation.

"It is crucial that funding for Alliances is expanded beyond Erasmus+, and that they can take part in the next generation of research funding, in one way or another. Otherwise, fully fledged Alliances will not emerge. [...] We need more years of financial support to make these Alliances fly - short extensions of funding are not sufficient."

- Leader, comprehensive Alliance

3.3. Contribution to competitiveness and European added value

"The true competitiveness of Alliances will emerge once synergies across education, research and innovation are created - we will not implement separate projects but a coherent strategy."

- Leader, comprehensive Alliance

"STEM education is a national and European economic priority. Alliances support qualified labour for industry, which directly contributes to competitiveness."

- Leader, comprehensive Alliance

Leaders across all Alliances agree that European Universities have the potential to strengthen Europe's competitiveness, though they emphasise different dimensions of this contribution.

Leaders from comprehensive Alliances generally view competitiveness as an emerging, long-term outcome rather than an immediate effect. They describe how Alliances deepen institutional collaboration, strengthen talent development, support joint visibility and reputation, and enable pooling of strengths

across countries. These forms of added value are seen as important, though rarely immediately measurable, drivers of Europe's competitiveness. Since shared values underpin trust and cross-border cooperation, some leaders explicitly emphasise these values as essential to Europe's ability to work together effectively and respond to long-term challenges. In specialised Alliances, leaders report potential for more immediate contributions to European competitiveness, reflecting their focus on science, engineering and technology. They point to several ways in which Alliance activities are contributing to competitiveness, while also emphasising that the Alliances have not yet reached the level of maturity - nor received the right level of support - needed to realise these activities fully.

They highlight the role of shared laboratories and research infrastructures in helping partners maintain critical mass and access high-end facilities, and the importance of coordinated doctoral networks and thematic research communities in building talent pipelines in advanced S&T fields.

Leaders also emphasise that Alliances create opportunities for more coordinated, cross-border engagement with industry and regional innovation ecosystems, supporting joint technology transfer activities that individual universities would find difficult to realise alone. In several Alliances, joint participation in Horizon Europe is seen as a way to coordinate proposals and build strong thematic research links in strategically important areas.

"We are thinking about fully cross-national innovation… connecting ecosystems that bring real contribution to competitiveness, but we are not fully there yet."

- Leader, specialised Alliance

"Access to joint research infrastructures is an important lever. It is increasingly expensive to stay technologically up to speed, and without the right measurement instruments or experimental setups, you cannot publish in top journals – which directly affects international competitiveness."

- Leader, comprehensive Alliance

Despite different emphases, leaders from both comprehensive and specialised Alliances converge on several points regarding how European Universities relate to competitiveness.

- **Competitiveness is multifaceted.** Leaders describe competitiveness as shaped by several interconnected factors: the strength of European talent pipelines, including the ability to attract and train students and researchers who can work across borders; access to robust R&I ecosystems, including high-quality and increasingly costly shared infrastructures; and the capacity to address major technological and societal challenges.
- **Deep cooperation and trust are foundational.** Across Alliance types, leaders stress that long-term cooperation is essential for any competitiveness effect to materialise. Alliances help institutions and researchers work together more easily across borders by reducing fragmentation and creating stable, trusted channels for collaboration.
- **Innovation ecosystems remain local, but Alliances can facilitate cross-border access.** Leaders emphasise that innovation ecosystems are anchored in regional and national contexts, shaped by local industry, policy and funding. Alliances can nevertheless create valuable links by providing students, researchers and partners with access to ecosystems beyond their own region. Leaders also emphasise that alliances increasingly interact with wider societal actors, including industry partners, regional

innovation ecosystems and public authorities. These connections illustrate how alliances contribute to society through education, research and innovation, for example by supporting regional development, innovation ecosystems and wider societal engagement.

- **Structural conditions currently limit impact.** Interviewees highlight similar constraints: short project cycles, fragmented funding instruments, administrative complexity and a lack of synergies between Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe. These factors limit the extent to which Alliances can move from coordinated activities to more integrated strategies.

3.4. Governance of the Alliance

Across the leadership interviews, governance emerges as a central and recurring challenge for Alliances. Leaders consistently describe Alliance governance structures as still in development: they are functional enough to steer large, multi-institutional cooperation, yet not fully embedded in academic communities of their universities. Several stress that Alliances remain, to some extent, experimental settings and caution against prematurely settling into heavy or overly formalised models while the initiative is still evolving. This reflects a shared tension between the need for continuity and predictability on the one hand, and the importance of agility and proportionality - ensuring governance structures remain light and appropriate to the Alliances' stage of development - on the other.

In comprehensive Alliances, leaders emphasise the difficulty of balancing inclusivity, representation and operational efficiency. The diversity of institutional profiles and wider disciplinary scope means responsibilities often remain concentrated among rectors, vice-rectors and a small circle of administrators, while communication of mandates within universities is uneven. Respondents underline that governance roles and responsibilities are not always clearly understood outside senior leadership. Some leaders favour keeping governance light and flexible, whereas others argue for stronger institutionalisation to ensure continuity and shared responsibility. The risks of over-bureaucratisation are frequently noted, along with the challenge of embedding Alliance activities at the faculty level in large, heterogeneous institutions.

In specialised Alliances, leaders often describe governance as comparatively straightforward to operate, mainly because partners share similar profiles and a focused mission in science and technology. This coherence can reduce the number of internal divergences they need to manage and helps streamline certain decisions. However, leaders also emphasise that governance is not without challenges. They point to the need for clearer Alliance-wide mandates and more professionalised coordination roles as the activities of the Alliance expand, and to the importance of strengthening internal communication within the Alliance partner universities. Several note that as Alliances take on a broader portfolio or contemplate more complex forms of collaboration, existing governance arrangements may need further development to remain effective.

Despite these differences, leaders from both Alliance types identify several shared challenges. The concentration of responsibilities at the top level creates vulnerability and limits the extent to which Alliances can become institutionally anchored. Significant administrative burden associated with the participation in the Alliance is pointed out as a barrier to deeper academic engagement. Many therefore stress the need for clearer distribution of responsibilities beyond rectors and vice-rectors, better alignment between strategic bodies and operational teams, and governance arrangements that remain efficient while avoiding proliferation of committees or overly complex structures.

Further development will depend on improving communication within and between the Alliance members, clarifying coordination roles and ensuring governance remains flexible enough to accommodate institutional diversity while supporting increasingly ambitious forms of cooperation.

"Some partners want the Alliance to evolve into something close to a real university, with all its bodies. Others - including us - prefer that the Alliance remains agile and avoids overly heavy structures."

– Leader, comprehensive Alliance

"Our governance model is highly effective because it mobilises all levels: students, researchers, faculty and staff, up to the top leadership."

– Leader, specialised Alliance

3.5. Sustainability and funding outlook

Across the leadership interviews, sustainability emerges as the area with the strongest convergence. Leaders unanimously state that Erasmus+ alone cannot support long-term institutional cooperation, and that short project cycles create uncertainty, limit ambition and make it difficult for Alliances to plan or invest beyond immediate funding cycles. They describe a structural mismatch between the long-term nature of institutional cooperation and the short-term, education-focused funding models currently available.

Leaders link sustainability directly to earlier observations about governance, embedding and the integration of education and R&I. Without predictable multi-annual frameworks, Alliances struggle to continue to maintain coordination roles, support or develop stable initiatives such as doctoral networks, shared infrastructures, joint courses or thematic cooperation. Several caution that, without such stability, Alliance activities risk remaining leadership-driven and insufficiently anchored within faculties and departments.

Interviewees consistently underline that long-term sustainability requires a shift from project logic to programme logic. They argue that Alliances should be recognised as long-term institutional cooperation frameworks, supported by coherent and predictable funding structures. Leaders emphasise that member states' support is important but remains uneven across countries.

Many respondents also highlight that reliance on internal institutional funds alone is unrealistic, especially given competing priorities within universities. They stress that Alliances need multi-source arrangements, anchored in EU-level funding and complemented - where appropriate - by national contributions and, in some cases, external partnerships. Several leaders describe ongoing discussions about own contributions, but none consider these viable without broader, stable frameworks.

Across all interviews, the message is clear and consistent: Alliances cannot sustain themselves on the current funding model. To develop stable cooperation, deepen integration and fulfil their intended role within the European Higher Education landscape, they require long-term, predictable, multi-annual and multi-source funding frameworks, aligned across education and research instruments and politically supported at both EU and national level.

"While our Alliance actively seeks EU funding, it is also crucial to engage in discussions with national ministries and universities to secure more stable, long-term financial support. Many alliances face the challenge of maintaining sustainability once EU pilot funding concludes. We should explore both approaches: securing our funds through industry partnerships and innovative initiatives and also lobbying for member state support."

– Leader, specialised Alliance

"Stopping the Alliance initiative would not just mean losing funding, but losing the structure that keeps activities going… It does not make sense to strive for a European Education Area and European Research Area without funding mechanisms at European level."

– Leader, comprehensive Alliance

3.6. Summary of main findings

Alliances are strongly aligned with the institutional strategies of their member universities and viewed as long-term frameworks for cooperation and transformation. Leaders value Alliances as environments to test more integrated approaches across education, research and innovation, while recognising that different Alliance types follow distinct trajectories shaped by their profiles and missions. Governance is described as functional but still underdeveloped, with responsibilities concentrated at senior level and typically carried out by representatives of each university rather than by dedicated staff with Alliance-wide roles. Institutional embedding beyond those directly involved remains limited. Leaders stress that deeper cross-mission integration and long-term sustainability depend on predictable multi-annual support, better alignment between education and research funding instruments and a reduction in administrative burden. Overall, comprehensive and specialised Alliances face similar structural challenges, despite variations in scale and thematic focus.

4. Academic and administrative staff perspectives: The operational point of view

The aim of this survey was to analyse the perspectives of academic and administrative staff with defined responsibilities or active involvement in Alliance activities within their institutions, such as project coordinators, academic leads, members of thematic or work-package groups, and staff engaged in internationalisation, curriculum development or education innovation. The dataset therefore reflects the perspectives of those most directly engaged in Alliance operations. It comprises 26 institutional responses, 12 from members of the comprehensive and 14 of the specialised Alliances, respectively. Therefore, the results reflect institutional perspectives within Alliances, rather than a shared viewpoint of the respective Alliance. Overall, 13 different Alliances were represented in this study, 4 specialised and 9 comprehensive as in the case of leadership interviews. However, unlike leadership interviews, in this survey some Alliances were represented by multiple responding universities, which may magnify the general impressions and experiences of these institutions, especially in the group of specialised Alliances. The list of universities represented in the consultation and their respective alliances is provided in Annex A (Table A2).

4.1. Staff participation in Alliance governance

Academic and administrative staff were asked to rate the extent to which they are meaningfully represented and able to inform or influence decisions within their Alliance's governance structures. As shown in Figure 1, responses show a broad range of experiences across the sample, with notable variation both within and between Alliance types. Respondents from specialised Alliances report feeling somewhat more represented in governance structures, but the overall average across all respondents remains at a "medium" level (3.1 in the 1-5 scale, where 1 stands for low- and 5 for high level).

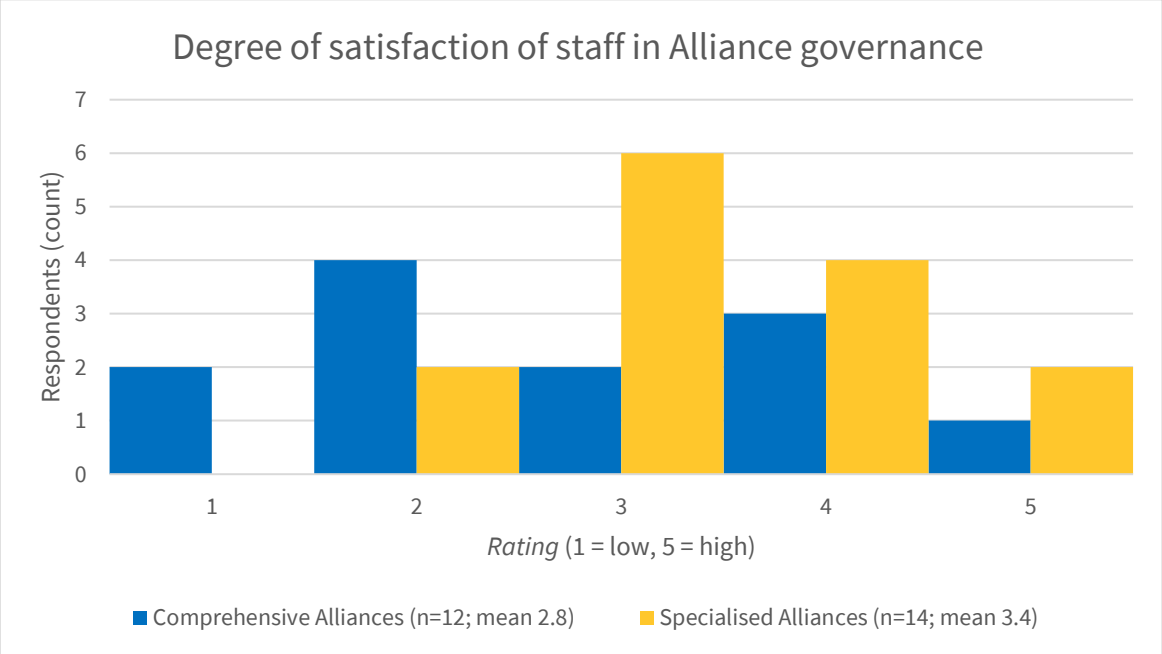

Figure 1. Degree of satisfaction of staff in Alliance governance by Alliance type.

To what extent are faculty meaningfully represented and able to inform or influence decisions within the governance structures of the Alliance? All respondents n=26, mean 3.1

4.1.1. Patterns behind ratings across Alliance types

Across Alliance types, respondents describe similar factors influencing their perception of meaningful participation:

- Higher ratings (4–5) appear where staff have clear and predictable pathways into governance discussions, stable coordination roles, regular communication, and alignment between Alliance activities and academic priorities.
- Mid-range ratings (3) reflect settings where structures exist but their influence varies - often because academic contributions flow mainly through thematic groups that do not always carry strong strategic weight.
- Lower ratings (1–2) occur where participation is concentrated in senior roles, engagement beyond a small core is limited by time or capacity, awareness of Alliance activity is uneven, or opportunities for faculty input are ad hoc.

> **"Half of the faculty members in our councils come from science and technology fields, so representation is not the problem - what we need is a more structured approach to participation."**
> *- Staff respondent, specialised Alliance*

4.1.2. Differences between Alliance types

Differences between Alliance types are visible but should not be overstated, due to the uneven representation of each Alliance and a relatively small sample size. Responses from specialised Alliances are highly concentrated, with two Alliances accounting for nearly four-fifths of all responses within this group. By contrast, responses from comprehensive Alliances are more evenly distributed across a larger number of Alliances, typically with one or two respondents per Alliance, reflecting a broader spread of institutional perspectives.

Specialised Alliances cluster around ratings 3–4, suggesting more consistent perceptions of staff involvement across institutions. Respondents often attribute this to clearer thematic focus, long-standing collaboration predating the European Universities initiative, and simpler internal coordination.

Comprehensive Alliances exhibit ratings across the full 1–5 scale, with more responses around 2–3. Respondents link this wider spread to greater institutional diversity - more faculties, broader disciplinary ranges and more complex internal communication - which leads to more heterogeneity in how participation is organised and experienced.

> **"Comprehensive Alliances are much, much harder to set up and to operate. However, their results could possibly be transferred to other Alliances and universities more easily."**
> *- Staff respondent, comprehensive Alliance*

4.2. Formal vs. effective participation in practice

Across all respondents, a consistent distinction emerges between formal and effective participation. Staff are often formally present in Alliance governance structures through boards, committees, steering groups or work packages, but this does not always translate into meaningful influence.

Effective participation depends on whether these structures provide clear routes for academic input, whether information flows reliably between alliance governance bodies and the wider staff community within the institution, and whether staff have the time and institutional support needed to engage. Where these enabling conditions are in place, respondents report stronger influence and clearer alignment between academic priorities and alliance decisions. Where they are absent, participation remains more nominal, concentrated in senior roles or individual champions rather than embedded across the wider academic community.

> **"Faculty are represented to a moderate extent. Governance structures are largely composed of individuals in managerial roles, which limits direct faculty participation in high-level decision-making. Faculty members are formally represented in advisory structures, yet their role remains largely advisory. More meaningful influence tends to occur particularly in areas related to education, where academic staff are more directly involved."**
> *- Staff respondent, specialised Alliance*

4.3. Representation of science and technology perspectives in the governance of comprehensive Alliances

Staff responses from comprehensive Alliances (12 institutional responses from 9 alliances) present a varied picture of how science and technology (S&T) perspectives are represented in governance and decision-making. While half of the respondents consider that the governance model adopted by their Alliance allows it to achieve an appropriate balance between S&T and other fields, the other half disagree.

The explanations provided by respondents can be grouped into three recurring categories. These are derived from respondents' qualitative comments on the perceived balance between science and technology and other fields, as well as on how alliance governance structures and activities reflect the strategic priorities of participating institutions.

Explanation	Source of responses
Programme structure limits S&T participation	Mainly those not perceiving a good balance between S&T and other fields
Governance treats all faculties equally	Primarily those perceiving a good balance between S&T and other fields
Activity profile shaped by existing institutional collaboration	A smaller mixed group

Table 3. Illustrative summary of how staff explain perceptions of S&T representation in comprehensive Alliances.

Among those who did not perceive balance, the main explanation relates to the structure of S&T programmes. Respondents note that engineering and natural science degrees often have mandatory course sequences, substantial laboratory requirements and therefore few elective spaces, making it harder for staff and students to take part in Alliance activities built around flexible modules or mobility formats. They stress that these formats can be easier to integrate in some social sciences, humanities and other programmes if and when curricula are more flexible. This is not seen as exclusion in governance but as a practical consequence of the structured programme requirements common in many S&T disciplines.

Those who perceived the governance model as balanced describe Alliances where disciplinary distinctions play no formal role. In these cases, faculties are treated equally, and collaboration develops through institutional partnerships, strategic priorities and concrete opportunities rather than through any form of predetermined disciplinary prioritisation.

A smaller group of respondents highlight situations where the Alliance's activity profile reflects the interests and availability of universities that were already actively collaborating prior to or at the early stages of the Alliance. When initial work develops in areas with more flexible curricula or established cross-institutional networks, activities may take forms that do not easily translate into traditional S&T programme structures. Respondents view this as path dependency - that is, the Alliance continuing to build on areas where early activities and existing networks created initial momentum - rather than intentional prioritisation. As a result, priorities and activities tend to build on these existing areas of collaboration, shaping the focus of the Alliance's work.

4.3.1. Participation of S&T faculties in governance structures

Half of all respondents rated S&T participation in governance structures at the highest level (5, scale 1-5), and the average rating across comprehensive Alliances is 3.7, see Table 4 below. This indicates that many respondents view the S&T participation as strong or very strong. At the same time, the spread of scores across the full 1–5 scale shows that others encounter more limitations.

Rating	Count (and %) of respondents	Explanations provided
1	2 (17%)	Very limited participation; S&T academic staff have no explicit role in governance structures; participation confined to senior leadership.
2	1 (8%)	Limited channels for academic input; involvement depends on individual roles rather than structured mechanisms.
3	2 (17%)	Governance viewed as formally neutral; academic input occurs mainly through working groups with limited strategic influence.
4	1 (8%)	Stronger involvement through thematic groups or work packages; influence visible but not yet fully consistent.
5	6 (50%)	S&T academics consistently engaged in governance (work packages, thematic boards); or Alliance with several S&T-strong institutions making S&T perspectives naturally visible.

Table 4. Participation of S&T faculties in the governance structures of comprehensive Alliances, with explanations (1–5 scale; n = 12).

In the Alliances with good participation of S&T in the governance structures, S&T academic staff have clear roles in thematic groups, work packages or academic boards. The Alliance composition or internal coordination ensures their perspectives are naturally and consistently included. In other Alliances,

academic involvement and impact remains limited - S&T staff lack explicit roles or structured channels for meaningful academic input, leaving participation confined to working groups with no strategic influence or senior institutional leaders.

4.3.2. Structures supporting S&T-specific initiatives in comprehensive Alliances

Two-thirds (67%) of respondents from comprehensive Alliances state that their Alliance has structures or mechanisms that support science and technology–specific initiatives.

These include thematic working groups, research and education work packages, academic councils, steering boards and structured communities in areas such as AI, sustainability, health or materials. Respondents note that these bodies help coordinate inputs, support proposal development and create spaces where S&T academics can align curricula or develop joint research activities.

The other respondents (33%) explain that although their Alliances have formal structures, these do not translate into S&T-specific channels or opportunities. Their comments highlight limited visibility of S&T-focused initiatives, the absence of mechanisms at faculty level, or reliance on individual staff rather than systematic processes to initiate or sustain cooperation.

4.4. Integration of education, research and innovation in Alliances

"If Alliances are to have a genuine impact, efforts must be connected not only in education but also in research and innovation."
- Staff respondent, specialised Alliance

"The Alliance must go beyond educational collaboration to fully matter for S&T universities."
- Staff respondent, specialised Alliance

Across the responses, the dominant pattern is that Alliances describe themselves as engaging in both education and R&I. In total, 17 of 26 respondents (65%) were coded as 'both', signalling that roughly two-thirds of Alliances consider education-R&I integration to be part of their identity, strategy or ambitions. Among comprehensive alliances, 8 of 12 responses were coded as 'both', while among specialised alliances, 9 of 14 responses were coded as 'both'.

This classification is based on qualitative interpretation of open-text responses. 'Both' includes responses that explicitly refer to both education and R&I, as well as those describing both in practice. Responses coded as 'primarily education' may still refer to research and innovation, but frame education as the dominant focus. For some Alliances, integration of the knowledge triangle reflects a strategic orientation still in its early phases: the Alliance remains education-led but increasingly aware of opportunities for R&I collaboration. For others, integration is described through concrete activities, emerging or ongoing initiatives, or a structured strategy to link education more closely with R&I collaboration.

4.4.1. Examples of R&I integration in the Alliances

> **"While Erasmus+ primarily supports education and mobility, our alliance also prioritises R&I through defined scientific focus areas and seed funding. Strengthening the R&I dimension is crucial for sustainability and long-term impact."**
> *- Staff respondent, comprehensive Alliance*

Respondents describe several types of activities that illustrate how universities of science and technology are engaging with R&I integration within their Alliances.

- **Research-based education**
  All universities offer research-based education, and several Alliances highlight forms of research-based education where teaching draws directly on institutional research strengths, shared research scope, or joint educational offerings informed by ongoing research activity.
- **Involving early-stage researchers**
  Multiple respondents mention the involvement of doctoral candidates or early-career researchers through participation in Alliance events, joint training, or exploratory steps toward joint doctoral initiatives, including in some cases discussions around industrial joint PhD programmes.
- **Thematic or field-based research collaboration**
  Several specialised Alliances describe emerging research collaboration aligned with their disciplinary focus. Examples include identifying shared research priorities, organising thematic scientific workshops and initiating small pilot activities in fields where partners have clear scientific coherence and complementary strengths.
- **Strategic attention to R&I at governance level**
  Some Alliances report that their governance bodies already structurally discuss R&I topics alongside education, signalling awareness and strategic intent, even where activities remain exploratory.

Taken together, these examples show that universities of science and technology are increasingly experimenting with education–R&I integration, though at varying levels of maturity.

4.4.2. Constraints observed across Alliances

Respondents identify several challenges that influence the pace and depth of integration of R&I in the Alliance model:

- **Uneven participation and interest across partner universities**
  Some Alliances report that enthusiasm or readiness for R&I integration differs across institutions or faculties, which affects engagement and slows collective progress.
- **Fragmented or small-scale activity**
  Many Alliances describe early, localised or exploratory initiatives rather than systematic or Alliance-wide R&I structures.

- **Difficulty translating institutional research strengths into Alliance-level action**
  Respondents note that even where institutions have strong and potentially complementary research capabilities, Alliances often lack the coordination mechanisms, mandates or resources to activate these strengths jointly.

These constraints highlight that while the strategic direction is clear, the operational transformation toward a more integrated knowledge square model is still developing.

4.5. Summary of main findings

Staff report varied experiences of S&T governance participation in the governance of Alliances, with more consistent involvement in specialised Alliances. Effective participation depends on clear roles, regular and transparent communication channels and institutional support. Comprehensive Alliances face structural constraints linked to the rigid structure of many S&T programmes and path dependency - where early Alliance activities undertaken in the early stages of the Alliance establishment tend to continue and predetermine how the involvement of S&T faculty. Participation of S&T perspectives ranges from strong to limited, reflecting heterogeneous governance structures and coordination mechanisms. Integration of education and R&I is emerging across Alliances, but remains rather small-scale and uneven, constrained by limited capacity - particularly in terms of coordination, dedicated resources and staff time – as well as fragmented instruments and variable institutional readiness.

5. Student representatives' perspective: The point of view of the main beneficiaries

This consultation targeted student representatives with formal roles in Alliance governance to explore the topics related to participation, mandates and decision-making. This perspective may reflect the respondents' representative function and therefore may emphasises students' role in Alliance governance more strongly than their experience as beneficiaries of Alliance activities. It is worth noting that out of 20 collected responses, only 5 were given by students from specialised Alliances and their perspectives are somewhat underrepresented in the data sample. 7 comprehensive Alliances and 3 specialised Alliances were represented in this study.

Across Alliances, students describe their involvement in the governance as increasingly recognised and valued. At the same time, they highlight that their ability to contribute meaningfully depends heavily on mandate clarity, communication channels, resource availability and support systems. Student representatives express strong motivation to facilitate the long-term development of their Alliances but face structural barriers that limit continuity, representation and strategic influence.

5.1. Governance participation: formal presence, meaningful influence

> **"For student representatives in governing bodies, it would be beneficial to have written rights, such as the right to speak and vote".**
> *- Student representative, comprehensive Alliance*

Nearly all respondents report formal inclusion in Alliance governance, typically via student boards, steering bodies, thematic working groups or institutional representation. However, the degree of effective influence varies substantially:

Symbolic versus strategic engagement

Several respondents note that while they are routinely invited to governance meetings, their role can often remain largely advisory. Students often feel consulted rather than empowered to shape strategic direction, especially on issues involving long-term priorities or resource allocation.

Mandate clarity and uneven structures

Students frequently describe ambiguity around responsibilities, voting rights and escalation procedures - that is, the processes through which student concerns or proposals can be raised and addressed at higher levels of Alliance governance. In some Alliances, clear frameworks and charters exist; in others, expectations depend on informal practices or individual initiative.

Limited doctoral representation

PhD involvement remains minimal in most Alliances, even where Alliances emphasise stronger links between education and R&I. Student governance structures still primarily reflect undergraduate and master's-level engagement.

Overall, student participation is viewed as improving but fragile; too dependent on individual personalities, informal arrangements and personal networks rather than on durable institutional mechanisms.

5.2. Communication challenges and representation gaps

> **"I think communication is the biggest challenge. We as student council do not get our information centrally, so often large parts of the council are not up to date on what's happening and therefore less involved.'**
>
> *- Student representative, specialised Alliance*

Across Alliances, student representatives identify communication as one of the most persistent barriers to effective governance participation.

Limited time and structured channels

Respondents highlight the difficulty of managing governance work alongside demanding academic schedules, particularly in S&T programmes. Many lack dedicated channels, such as mailing lists, forums or institutional support, to gather input or report back to the wider student body.

Low visibility of Alliance activities

Students frequently report that only a small fraction of their peers are aware of the Alliance or understand its purpose. This limits the extent to which representatives can genuinely reflect the views of the broader student population and weakens the perceived legitimacy of student involvement.

Complex and layered governance environments

Alliances often consist of multiple boards, committees, projects and institutional structures. Students describe this landscape as difficult to navigate, with unclear information flows and inconsistent coordination across institutions. This complexity reduces their capacity to contribute effectively and to communicate developments back to students at their home universities.

These challenges collectively hamper accountability, limit student-driven initiatives and reduce the overall impact of student participation in Alliance governance.

Conditions for participation: recognition, incentives and support

Student representatives consistently emphasise the need for structured recognition and practical support to sustain meaningful engagement.

Recognition mechanisms often missing or inconsistent

Respondents identify gaps in:

- remuneration or stipends,
- ECTS credits for governance activities,
- mobility or travel support,
- funding for student-led initiatives,
- administrative or secretarial assistance,

- flexibility in study workload or options to prolong study periods.

Where such measures are in place, participation is more stable and inclusive. Without them, Alliances rely heavily on the voluntary effort of a few highly committed individuals, which cannot be assumed to be sustainable.

Turnover and continuity issues

High turnover due to graduation, mobility periods or workload pressures creates significant loss of institutional memory. Students highlight the need for structured onboarding, formalised handover processes and, where possible, longer or overlapping mandates to safeguard continuity.

5.3. Differences between comprehensive and specialised Alliances

The consultation reveals distinct patterns between Alliance types regarding disciplinary representation and engagement. However, as the representation of specialised and comprehensive Alliance respondents is unbalanced, these conclusions should treated with caution.

Comprehensive Alliances

Respondents from comprehensive Alliances report that:

- S&T students are often under-represented in student governance, even when Alliances include strong engineering institutions.
- Their participation is often constrained by rigid curricula (including substantial fixed laboratory components), heavy workload and limited flexibility in degree structures.
- Some S&T students describe challenges in navigating governance and policy terminology and processes compared to SSH students, highlighting the need for more systematic onboarding.
- As a result, governance discussions tend to be dominated by students from more SSH-focused disciplines.

> **"Student representation often skews towards students from other fields, partly due to more interest in governance processes and to the time they can allocate to extracurricular roles. As a result, S&T perspectives may be underrepresented even in Alliances with strong S&T academic communities."**
>
> *- Student representative, comprehensive Alliance*

Specialised Alliances

The challenges faced by respondents from specialised S&T-focused Alliances relate to:

- communication and visibility within institutions,
- uneven support and recognition,
- continuity issues linked to turnover,
- navigating institutional variations despite shared disciplinary focus.

> **"Communication is the biggest challenge. The student council often does not receive information centrally, so parts of the council are not always up to date on what is happening in the Alliance".**
>
> *- Student representative, specialised Alliance*

5.4. Summary of main findings

Student representation in the governing bodies of Alliances is formalised across Alliances but their influence remains uneven. Participation is constrained by heavy workloads, often unclear mandates, limited visibility of Alliances among the wider student body and complex governance structures. Recognition and support mechanisms are often insufficient, and high turnover undermines continuity. Comprehensive Alliances face disciplinary imbalances, while specialised Alliances encounter primarily structural support challenges. Students remain motivated and propose practical improvements centred on mandate clarity, recognition and communication.

6. Connecting institutional evidence with the wider European policy dialogue

To complement the perspectives gathered from leaders, staff and students, this report also draws on insights from a high-level roundtable held during the CESAER Annual Meetings (CAM) on 22 October 2025 hosted by Brno University of Technology (Czech Republic). The roundtable discussion brought together university leaders and key stakeholders:

- Enora Bennetot Pruvot, (Deputy Director for Governance, Funding and Public Policy Development at the European University Association);
- Vanessa Debiais-Sainton (Member of Cabinet of Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu at the European Commission);
- Ludmila Hrachovcová (Chair of the EULiST Student Board);
- Ladislav Janíček (Rector of Brno University of Technology);
- Ena Voûte (Pro Vice-Rector for International Affairs at Delft University of Technology);
- Roberto Zanino (Co-Chair of CESAER Task Force Learning & Teaching, Director in CESAER's Board, and Rector's Senior Advisor for International University Networks and the European University Alliance Unite! at Politecnico di Torino);

The session was moderated by Justyna Lubośna (Co-Chair of CESAER Task Force Learning & Teaching, Director in CESAER's Board, Chair of Internationalisation Committee & Rector's Representative for International Educational Programs at Gdańsk University of Technology). The discussion evolved from the initial findings from the interviews and surveys presented by Roberto Zanino. Live polls conducted via Slido with 41 in-person participants provided useful context for the roundtable discussion. Feedback gathered via Slido is presented in Figure 2. For questions with multiple answers percentages do not sum up to 100%.

The roundtable examined how European University Alliances can most effectively contribute to Europe's competitiveness by strengthening links between education, research, and innovation. Participants discussed governance models, funding, and institutional integration as key factors for ensuring sustainability and impact, and underlined the need for a clearer articulation of each Alliance's purpose and added value. Half of the audience (51%) viewed long-term purpose of Alliances as strategic partnerships driving education and skills transformation, while 44% perceived Alliances as integrated European institutions combining education, research, and innovation.

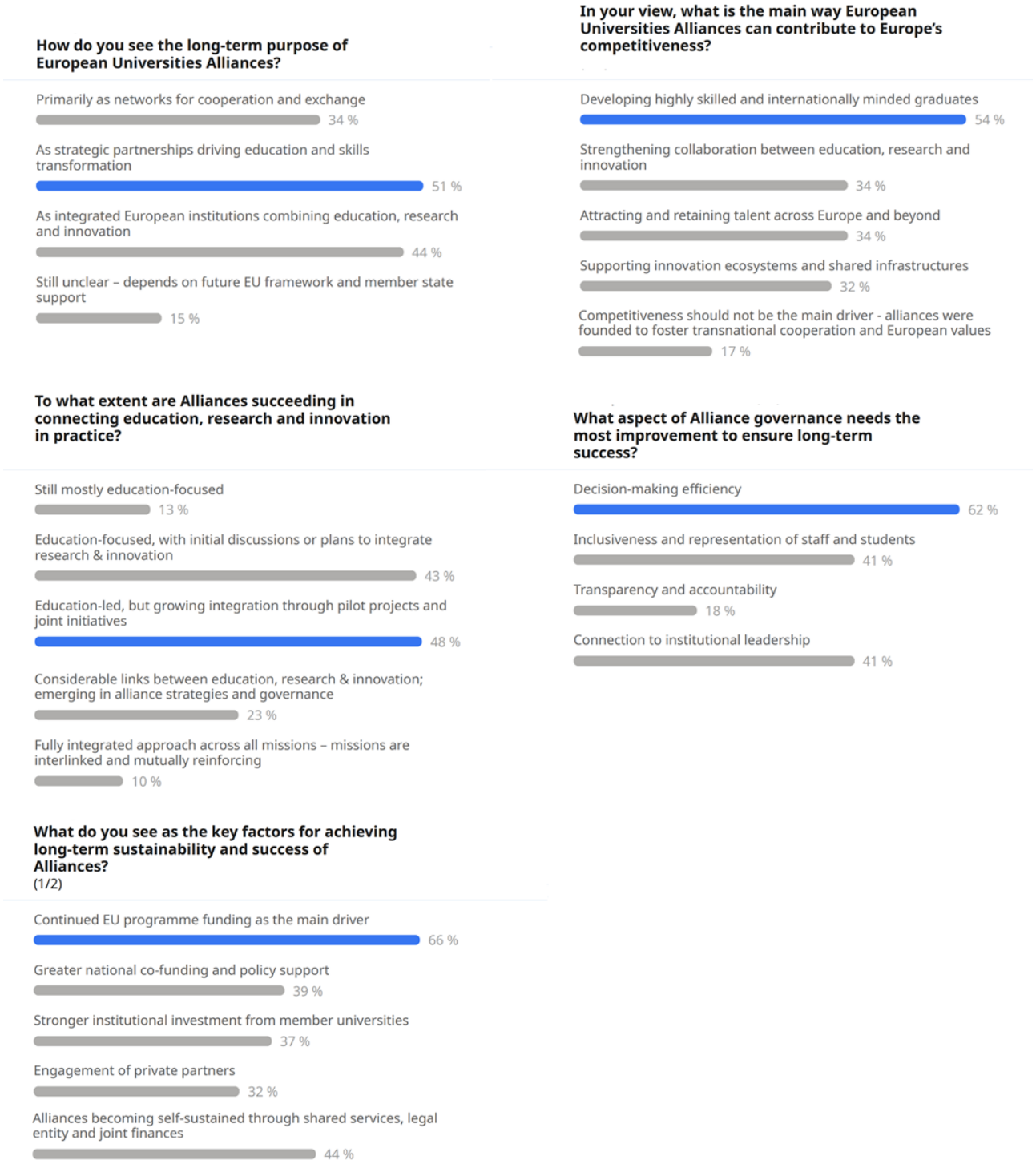

Figure 2. Feedback gathered via Slido. For questions with multiple answers percentages do not sum up to 100%.

6.1. Contribution to European competitiveness

Several panellists saw Alliances as viable and potential instruments to strengthen Europe's competitiveness by connecting higher education more closely with economic and industrial priorities.

In a live poll, see the outcome in the Figure below, more than half of respondents (54%) identified the development of highly skilled and internationally minded graduates as the main way Alliances can strengthen Europe's competitiveness, followed by collaboration across education, research, and innovation (34%), the attraction and retention of talent (34%) and building innovation ecosystems and shared infrastructure (32%).

Some panellists noted that Alliances' should focus their efforts on building the highly qualified workforce required in strategic sectors such as AI, clean technologies, and biotechnology. Others pointed out that while strengthening the competitiveness of higher education institutions has been a central objective from the outset, the recent shift towards framing Alliances as direct drivers of Europe's overall competitiveness represents a considerable change. From this point of view, universities and Alliances already contribute to Europe's competitiveness through the quality of their education, research, and cooperation, while remaining guided by broader societal missions. Some panellist cautioned against portraying Alliances solely through the lens of competitiveness, noting that this new framing could create additional pressure and risk overshadowing the wider societal purposes of universities and their collaborative consortia.

6.2. Synergies across education, research, and innovation

The need to strengthen links between education and R&I featured prominently in the discussions. Poll responses reflected this emphasis. Nearly half of the audience (48%) viewed Alliances as education-driven but growing in integration through pilot projects, while only 10% saw a fully integrated approach across missions, underlining the work still ahead in connecting the three dimensions.

Many panellist noted that Erasmus+ has provided a solid basis for educational collaboration, but that the full potential of Alliances depends on connecting to Horizon Europe and the forthcoming European Competitiveness Fund. Doctoral training and industrial PhD initiatives were mentioned as natural bridges between the two policy areas. At the same time, some cautioned that research collaboration should emerge organically (bottom-up) rather than through administrative design (top-down). It was acknowledged that the challenge ahead is to create synergies in institutional strategies so that Alliances evolve into credible frameworks supporting the full knowledge continuum.

6.3. Towards strategic focus and shared ownership

Panellists noted that European University Alliances are entering a new phase requiring clearer internal alignment, prioritisation, and long-term vision. Many described the need to move from experimental cooperation to strategic consolidation, defining shared goals, clarifying governance structures, and determining where to concentrate efforts. Several observed that not every Alliance can or should pursue all objectives - specialisation in selected domains may lead to clearer and more demonstrable impact.

At the same time, ongoing university governance reforms in some member states are reshaping how universities participate in Alliances, for example, by introducing external members into their governing structures, including leaders from partner universities of the same Alliance. Such developments suggest a

gradual integration of Alliance activities into institutional long-term strategies and decision-making structures.

Governance was discussed as both an enabler and a point of tension. Differences in institutional cultures and legal frameworks continue to shape how decisions are made within Alliances. Some participants viewed the possible creation of a European legal status as an opportunity to streamline processes and empower joint entities, while others cautioned that legal formalisation should not come at the expense of institutional flexibility.

Co-creation emerged as a unifying principle across the roundtable discussions. Alliances were seen as most effective when they design initiatives jointly with students, staff, and external partners rather than through purely top-down actions. The discussion also reflected on the challenges of ensuring meaningful representation of students within the Alliance governance structures. It was noted that such involvement often remains voluntary and uncredited, despite the significant time commitment it demands. Participants broadly agreed on the importance of exploring ways to formalise the recognition of the students' work, whether financially, academically or linked to professional development opportunities, to sustain motivation and inclusivity and to reaffirm that Alliances ultimately exist to serve students and develop future talent.

When asked which aspects of the Alliance governance most need improvement, the audience pointed to decision-making efficiency (62%), followed by inclusiveness and representation of staff and students (41%) and the connection to institutional leadership (41%).

6.4. Funding and sustainability

During the discussions, funding was recognised as both the foundation and a constraint of the current model. While Erasmus+ remains the backbone, many panellists considered its education-centred focus insufficient to support the Alliances' growing R&I ambitions.

Looking ahead to the next EU long-term budget, there were calls for stronger complementarity between Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, and the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF), ideally through a coherent architecture that minimises fragmentation.

Several cautioned that as funding sources diversify, coordination across programmes and member states will become increasingly complex. Others suggested that Alliances should progressively demonstrate competitive results and external impact to justify continued or expanded support.

In terms of the long-term sustainability and success of Alliances, the poll results confirmed continued EU programme funding as the main driver (66%), while a significant share also pointed to the importance of Alliances becoming self-sustained through shared services and joint finances (44%), alongside greater national co-funding, and, policy support (39%) and institutional investment (37%). One-third of respondents (32%) pointed to the engagement of private partners, suggesting that such engagement is still perceived as relatively limited or not that realistic. Its feasibility and relevance may vary across Alliances, depending on their disciplinary focus, external partnerships and strategic orientation.

6.5. Ecosystem approach and the added value of Alliances

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was the idea of Alliances evolving to connect the ecosystem of their members. Several panellists viewed this approach as key to defining the distinctive characteristic of European University Alliances, particularly those involving universities of science and technology, and to linking their work to Europe's broader competitiveness and funding landscape.

It was suggested that Alliances can develop shared environments bringing together students, researchers, and partners across borders, sectors and society, enabling the exchange of talent, knowledge, infrastructures, and resources. Such ecosystems were seen by many as a natural bridge between Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, and the forthcoming European Competitiveness Fund, providing a framework for talent development and innovation that extends across borders and beyond individual projects or funding cycles.

From this perspective, Alliances are not regarded simply as consortia delivering activities but as integrated environments in which the dimensions of the knowledge square can reinforce one another. They can offer students and early-career researchers access to shared infrastructures, supervision, and entrepreneurship opportunities across partner institutions, while fostering interdisciplinary collaboration in strategic sectors, also in partnership with non-academic actors.

Several panellists observed that the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of Alliances may depend on their ability to articulate a clear value proposition, identifying the areas in which they can reach critical mass and demonstrate tangible benefits for their member institutions and for society at large, going beyond what other types of consortia can achieve. In this sense, Alliances could act as catalysts within Europe's wider higher education and research landscape, strengthening coherence between institutional, national, and European priorities.

7. Cross-analysis and discussion

This section summarises the insights from the four complementary sources: leadership interviews, the academic and administrative staff consultation, the student representatives' consultation and the high-level roundtable held during the CESAER Annual Meetings 2025, supported by a live stakeholder poll. Taken together, these sources provide a grounded view of Alliance governance across universities of science and technology and highlight the main structural conditions shaping the progress and impact of the initiative.

The policy implications presented in this section synthesise recurring patterns in the institutional evidence collected in 2024 and 2025, and frame them within the current EU policy debates up until early 2026, including forthcoming decisions on future European funding frameworks for research, innovation and education.

While there is strong convergence on the overall needs and expectations, the data also reveal meaningful differences in experience. Leaders, staff and students view Alliances from distinct institutional vantage points, that shapes how they perceive engagement, governance and mission integration. Variation between comprehensive and specialised Alliances is also visible but largely relates to differences in disciplinary breadth and organisational complexity rather than divergent intentions. Rather than being primarily linked to Alliance type, variation across both types is more consistently associated with institution-level factors - such as engagement across academic communities, the clarity and stability of coordination roles and processes, and the practical conditions for participation - which emphasise the importance of enabling conditions.

7.1. Alliances as long-term institutional frameworks

Across all data sources, one of the strongest points of convergence is the shared perception that Alliances are long-term cooperation frameworks rather than short-term projects. Leadership interviews consistently frame Alliances as strategically aligned with institutional priorities, describing them as platforms for testing new forms of collaboration in learning and teaching, governance and, increasingly, R&I. Leaders emphasise that Alliances are tools for long-term institutional transformation and that their impact should be assessed in a multi-year perspective rather than through short project cycles.

Staff respondents broadly reinforce this long-term framing. Even when they express reservations about uneven institutional embedding, they recognise Alliances as long-term collaboration platforms with transformative potential, providing opportunities for joint educational activities, thematic cooperation and, over time, joint doctoral and research activities. For many, Alliances are long-term capacity-building investments rather than short-term deliverable-focused projects.

Student representatives also support this long-term perspective. They express strong motivation to contribute to shaping Alliances in ways that will benefit future cohorts. However, they emphasise that durable participation depends on clear mandates, formal recognition and continuity mechanisms. Without these, long-term ambitions can be easily undermined by the immediate practical challenges of participation.

The roundtable and accompanying poll reinforce this shared vision. When asked about the long-term purpose of Alliances, most respondents saw them as strategic partnerships driving education and skills transformation, while a large majority also viewed them as as frameworks advancing the integration of education with R&I. The discussion underscored that Alliances are increasingly perceived not as projects situated within Erasmus+, but as evolving institutional ecosystems in their own right.

Across leadership, there is also broad agreement that Alliances should not converge toward a single uniform model. Differences in institutional profiles, missions and internal structures require flexibility, allowing Alliances to evolve in ways that reflect their distinct contexts.

These findings indicate that the view of Alliances as long-term institutional frameworks is widely shared, but the key question now is what conditions are required for that long-term cooperation to become anchored across and within the institutions.

7.2. Strategic alignment vs. institutional engagement

Looking across all sources, Alliances are clearly embedded in institutional plans, yet this strategic commitment has not fully translated into consistent engagement across academic communities. Leadership, staff, students and stakeholders all recognise a participation gap between long-term ambitions and the practical structures needed to support involvement across faculties, departments and student bodies. While this gap is present in both comprehensive and specialised Alliances, the underlying reasons differ slightly: in comprehensive Alliances it often reflects scale and disciplinary diversity, whereas in specialised Alliances it is linked more to limited capacity as activities expand.

Leaders acknowledge this participation gap directly. They describe strong alignment between Alliances and institutional strategies, but note that engagement varies widely across faculties. Ineffective internal communication, lack of sufficient incentives and administrative burden are frequently cited as the main barriers to broader ownership. Leaders emphasise the need for agile, proportional governance that supports participation without generating unnecessary complexity.

Staff and student perspectives make these challenges concrete with a clear distinction between formal representation and effective participation. They report that having a seat in governance structures does not automatically translate into influence unless roles, mandates and participation routes are well defined. Staff respondents additionally highlight inconsistent communication, unclear responsibilities and the perception that Alliance work sits on top of existing duties rather than being integrated into academic workloads.

> **“All our Alliance partners find difficulties to convey to the faculty community the opportunities of the Alliance and struggle to disseminate it internally.”**
>
> *- Staff respondent, specialised Alliance*

Student representatives report challenges of similar kind but distinct in nature. While formal student representation is widespread, students emphasise that their ability to participate meaningfully depends heavily on mandate duration and continuity, access to information and the practical conditions needed to consult peers. They point to limited visibility of Alliance activities among the wider student body and the difficulty of gathering input across institutions. High turnover and demanding academic schedules further restrict the extent to which students can engage consistently.

These staff and student experiences align with broader concerns about governance effectiveness. While all Alliances have established governance bodies, effectiveness varies considerably. Staff ratings of S&T representatives engagement show a full spread across the scale, with higher score where participation routes are explicit, coordination roles stable and communication consistent. Student representatives highlight unclear voting rights, limited clarity on how their input is taken forward within governance processes, and insufficient recognition or workload adjustments.

The roundtable discussion validated these observations. Stakeholders stressed that Alliances cannot be embedded institution-wide unless governance roles are stable, predictable and adequately resourced, and they linked governance challenges closely to sustainable funding - short funding cycles make long-term planning and continuity roles difficult to maintain.

Across all perspectives, the analysis suggests that effective institutional embedding depends less on designing new structures and more on ensuring clarity, communication, predictable participation pathways and a manageable workload. Leaders, staff and students consistently identify these conditions as essential for enabling Alliances to evolve from leadership-driven projects into institution-wide frameworks for cooperation.

7.3. Connecting education with research and innovation

Across all sources, respondents converge on a clear trajectory - Alliances are education-driven by design, but their longer-term value depends on becoming credible knowledge ecosystems in which education, research and innovation reinforce one another. Leaders emphasise that Alliances that have already achieved durable strategic alignment, robust structures and mutual trust are vehicles to accelerate this transition. They underline that building such cross-border strategic capability takes years. Leveraging Alliances that have already accumulated institutional depth is therefore the fastest way to mobilise action at European scale.

The evidence confirms that most Alliances remain anchored in education, reflecting how Alliances are organised internally and the Erasmus+ programme logic. At the same time, the consultations show growing momentum towards stronger cross-mission activity. Leaders and staff point to early, tangible developments that illustrate how Alliances can begin to bridge education and R&I, e.g. joint doctoral activities, thematic research communities, exchanges among research support teams, and, in some Alliances, seed funding to support the preparation of joint Horizon Europe proposals. Several leaders also refer to emerging practices around shared laboratories, core facilities and research infrastructures - often still exploratory, but strategically important as the access to advanced and costly cutting-edge facilities is increasingly decisive for research excellence and technological capability.

Respondents are explicit that progress remains constrained less by ambition than by fragmented programme logics and short project cycles. Academic staff emphasise that many R&I-related activities are still small-scale and dependent on individual initiatives or project opportunities rather than embedded Alliance-wide well-developed strategies. Students reinforce this picture through the limited involvement of doctoral candidates and early-career researchers in governance and structured activities, signalling that the R&I dimension is not yet systematically integrated into Alliance development.

In general, the data point to a common conclusion: Alliances can connect education with research and innovation most effectively when they are enabled to function as institutionalised cross-border frameworks that (i) sustain doctoral and early-stage researcher involvement, (ii) translate shared research strengths into joint actions, and (iii) provide reliable access to shared infrastructures and platforms where frontier knowledge and talent pipelines continuously renew one another. All of these are areas where the institutional trust that has been built over years is leveraged, which cannot be easily replicated in ad hoc consortia. This is the knowledge-ecosystem logic respondents increasingly describe - and it is the condition for Alliances to contribute credibly beyond education alone.

7.4. Competitiveness and European added value

Competitiveness and European added value are consistently framed as system effects that build over time through deep cross-border cooperation, not as immediate outputs. Leaders and stakeholders describe Alliances as uniquely positioned to help Europe translate excellence in science and education into technological and industrial leadership because they combine strategic alignment, shared governance and accumulated trust - features that ad hoc consortia typically lack at the continental scale. This institutional depth matters because it enables Alliances to share resources (infrastructures, facilities and expertise) and capacity (scale, diversity and outreach) across borders in ways few, or no other, type of consortia can achieve.

Across the interviews and roundtable, respondents repeatedly link Alliances' competitiveness contribution to three mutually reinforcing pathways:

1. **Talent pipelines and talent attraction**: Alliances can strengthen Europe's ability to attract, develop and retain top talent originating both from within and beyond Europe by offering visible, high-quality cross-border and interdisciplinary environments for study, research and innovation. Respondents emphasise that predictable mobility and career frameworks - especially for doctoral and early-stage researchers - are central to turning Alliances into genuine talent magnets.
2. **Integrated research and innovation cooperation**: Alliances can reduce fragmentation and catalyse critical mass by structuring cross-border cooperation around shared priorities, joint proposal development and doctoral networks. Leaders stress that deeper R&I cooperation becomes most valuable when it connects systematically to education and talent development, rather than remaining a parallel activity.
3. **Shared access to advanced infrastructures, platforms and facilities**: leaders highlight access to cutting-edge laboratories, core facilities and research & technology infrastructures as one of the most concrete European value-add mechanisms. Pooling access and coordinating investment

helps reduce duplication, increases efficiency of public spending, and strengthens Europe's ability to remain at the scientific frontier - an increasingly decisive factor in advanced technologies.

Stakeholders in the roundtable reinforce this framing. Poll responses point to highly skilled and internationally minded graduates as the most significant competitiveness pathway, alongside mission integration and talent attraction and retention. At the same time, several respondents caution against reducing Alliances to a single competitiveness narrative; they underline that European added value also lies in strengthening Europe's capacity to cooperate effectively across borders through stable, trusted frameworks.

Overall, the cross-analysis indicates that Alliances can contribute to competitiveness most credibly when they operate as connective tissue across the knowledge continuum - linking frontier research, innovation ecosystems and talent development - and when their outputs can flow coherently from scientific excellence to accelerated technological development.

7.5. Financial sustainability: the central enabling condition

"Alliances cannot sustain themselves on the current funding model."

- Leader, comprehensive Alliance

The need for financial sustainability emerges as the strongest and most consistent finding across leadership interviews and the stakeholder roundtable, and it is treated as the central enabling condition for every other ambition discussed in this report. Leaders are unequivocal that Erasmus+ alone, with its short-cycle and primarily education-centred logic, cannot sustain long-term institutional cooperation - especially as Alliances are increasingly expected to connect education with research and innovation and to contribute to Europe's competitiveness agenda.

Respondents describe a structural mismatch: Alliances are long-term cooperation frameworks, but the support environment remains fragmented across programmes and time horizons. This fragmentation undermines continuity in coordination and representation roles, weakens planning horizons for joint education–R&I activities, and slows the transition from pilots to stable cooperation.

The staff and student evidence makes the consequences of a limited financial sustainability visible. The staff describe fluctuating coordination capacity, reliance on small number of individuals, and insufficient incentives and time to engage. Students emphasise the turnover, loss of institutional memory (knowledge and experience built up over time) and lack of continuity mechanisms, with participation often remaining voluntary and difficult to combine with demanding curricula - especially in S&T programmes. These dynamics show how short cycles and unstable support do not only limit strategic ambition but determine who can participate and whether cooperation becomes institution-wide.

Crucially, leaders and stakeholders link sustainability not only to "more funding" but to coherent interaction across instruments. They stress that Alliances cannot realistically deepen education–R&I integration if education funding and R&I pathways remain separated in practice. Predictable, multi-annual support frameworks are therefore presented as necessary to enable Alliances to mature into knowledge

ecosystems capable of sustaining doctoral training linkages, shared infrastructure access and longer-term collaboration with innovation ecosystems.

7.6. Participation conditions and workload: practical barriers with systemic effects

Beyond governance structures, participation conditions (time, workload, mandates and support) emerge as key determinants of whether staff and students can take part meaningfully in Alliance activities.

Students describe the difficulty of combining governance responsibilities with demanding academic schedules, limited tools for gathering peer input and low visibility of Alliance initiatives among the wider student body. High turnover and the absence of continuity mechanisms further weaken sustained involvement.

Staff report similar pressures, highlighting workload constraints, unclear expectations and the challenge of contributing beyond a small group of motivated individuals. Alliance activities are often experienced as additional tasks rather than integrated elements of academic roles.

Staff and student perspectives show that these constraints are not minor operational issues: they shape whether participation is broad and representative, or limited to a small core group. Addressing participation conditions is essential to complement governance improvements and enable wider engagement across academic and student communities.

8. High-level recommendations

These high-level recommendations build on the extensive institutional consultation undertaken during 2024 and 2025 for this report synthesised together with the latest European developments, up to early 2026, to translate the collected evidence into strategic actions for EU institutions, member states, Alliances and universities.

We call on EU institutions to:

- **Recognise Alliances as long-term institutional cooperation frameworks** and capitalise on the existing structures by designing policy that can mobilise their capacity. Enable differentiated trajectories rather than imposing uniform models, allowing Alliances to develop diverse forms of cooperation across education, research and innovation that reflect institutional strengths and national system diversity, while valuing strategic alignment, shared governance and strong mutual trust as core assets.
- **Equip Alliances with stable, multi-annual support** that matches long-term cooperation and allows maturation beyond pilots, including continuity of coordination and representation roles, and credible planning horizons for joint education–R&I activities.
- **Create coherent interaction between Erasmus+, FP10 and the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF)** so Alliances can function as connective tissue between (i) excellence in science and education, shared infrastructures and ecosystems and (ii) technological development, deployment and scale.
- **Strengthen support for shared research and technology infrastructures and facilities** as a concrete European value-add: promote open and interoperable access across Alliance partners and regions, and reduce duplication by enabling pooled investment and coordinated use.
- **Boost talent pipelines and enable talent attraction through more predictable mobility and career frameworks**, including stronger support for doctoral and early-stage researcher involvement in Alliances, and recognition and support for participation that make engagement feasible alongside demanding programmes, particularly in science and technology fields.

We call on member states to:

- **Complement EU support with targeted national measures** that enable long-term institutional participation in Alliances, especially stable capacity for coordination, staff engagement and student representation.
- **Facilitate structured links between Alliances and national systems** (research infrastructures, doctoral frameworks, innovation and industrial ecosystems), so that cooperation is not slowed by divergent national procedures and support environments.
- **Promote regulatory and funding coherence** across higher education, research and innovation instruments, reducing friction caused by differing national rules and support environments and enabling Alliances to operate as integrated knowledge ecosystems.

We invite Alliances and universities to:

- **Clarify each Alliance's value proposition and strategic focus** (where to concentrate effort, what to scale, and what to stop), aligning education, R&I and external engagement with institutional strengths and capacity.
- **Invest in stable coordination capacity and clear mandates,** ensuring that Alliance participation is anchored within partner universities and supported by meaningful representation and participation opportunities across the partner universities, rather than concentrated in a small core of roles or individuals. Strengthen predictable information flows between leadership, faculties, departments and student bodies.
- **Build participation pathways that are feasible in practice**, especially for science and technology faculties, students and early-stage researchers: recognition, workload adaptation where possible, onboarding and handover processes, and support for continuity across turnover cycles.
- **Develop education–R&I linkages that operationalise the knowledge-ecosystem logic**, building on joint doctoral activity, thematic communities, research-support collaboration and shared infrastructure use, and connecting these to credible funding pathways across programmes.
- **Strengthen links with industry and regional ecosystems where relevant**, using Alliances to expand cross-border access to innovation platforms and to support talent development connected to real technology development trajectories.

9. Conclusions

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that European University Alliances have moved beyond their initial project phase and are increasingly understood by universities of science and technology as long-term, institutional cooperation frameworks with strategic depth. Their distinctive potential lies in the combination of strategic alignment, shared governance and accumulating trust, which enables partners to progressively use individual and collective strengths across borders in ways that short-term consortia cannot easily replicate. At the same time, their future impact of Alliances depends decisively on enabling conditions: predictable multi-annual and multi-source support, coherent pathways across education, research and innovation instruments, manageable governance and workload structures, and meaningful participation by staff and students. Where these conditions are in place, Alliances can evolve into cross-border knowledge ecosystems that connect talent pipelines, shared infrastructures and thematic collaboration to Europe's broader competitiveness and societal ambitions. The question is therefore no longer whether Alliances matter, but whether policy and institutional frameworks will allow them to consolidate, scale and deliver on the long-term European value-add they are structurally positioned to provide.

Annex

Annex A: Tables

The tables below list the institutions represented in the consultations. Individual responses were treated anonymously and are reported only in aggregated form in the report, with references made only to the type of Alliance (comprehensive or specialised).

Table A1. Leadership interviewees and their Alliances

University	Alliance
Brno University of Technology	EULiST
EPFL - Ecole Polytéchnique Fédérale de Lausanne	EuroTeQ
Gdańsk University of Technology	ENHANCE
Ghent University	ENLIGHT
Groupe Insa	ECIU University
Karlsruhe Institute of Technology	EPICUR
Lund University	EUGLOH
Politecnico di Torino	Unite!
Poznań University of Technology	EUNICE
Technische Universität Dresden	EUTOPIA
UCLouvain	Circle U
University College Dublin	Una Europa
University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest	EELISA

Table A2. Universities participating in the academic and administrative staff consultation and their Alliances

University	Alliance
Aalto University	UNITE!
Brno University of Technology	EULiST
Budapest University of Technology and Economics	EELISA
Delft University of Technology	ENHANCE
EPFL - Ecole Polytéchnique Fédérale de Lausanne	EuroTeQ

ETH Zurich	ENHANCE
Gdańsk University of Technology	ENHANCE
Ghent University	ENLIGHT
Institut National des Sciences Appliquées Lyon	ECIU
Karlsruhe Institute of Technology	EPICUR
KTH Royal Institute of Technology	UNITE!
Lund University	EUGLOH
National Technical University of Ukraine - Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute	ENHANCE, ATHENA
Norwegian University of Science and Technology	ENHANCE
Politecnico di Torino	UNITE!
Poznan University of Technology	EUNICE
RWTH Aachen University	ENHANCE
Technische Universität Berlin	ENHANCE
Technische Universität Dresden	EUTOPIA
TU Wien	EULiST
Universidad Politécnica de Madrid	EELISA
Université Catholique de Louvain	Circle U
Université Grenoble Alpes	UNITE!
University College Dublin	UNA EUROPA
University of Belgrade	Circle U
University of Porto	EUGLOH

Table A3. Student representative respondents and their Alliances

University	Alliance
DTU	EuroTeQ
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen	CIVIS
Freie Universität Berlin	Una Europa
Gdańsk Tech	ENHANCE
Hamburg University of Technology	ECIU
Karlstad universitet	EUNICE

Leibniz University Hannover	EULiST
Leibniz University Hannover	EULiST
Politecnico di Milano	ENHANCE
TU/e	EuroTeQ
TU Wien	EULiST
Universidad de Cantabria	EUNICE
Universidad de Cantabria	EUNICE
University College Dublin	Una Europa
University of Catania	EUNICE
University of Porto	EUGLOH
University of Stavanger	ECIU
Uppsala University	ENLIGHT
Uppsala University	ENLIGHT
Wrocław University of Science and Technology	Unite!

Table A4. Alliances CESAER Members are part of as of March 2026 (Alliance type self-identified by staff and student respondents).

Alliance	Type	CESAER Members	Number of CESAER Members
Circle U	Comprehensive	• UCLouvain • University of Belgrade	2
ECIU	Comprehensive	• University of Twente, • Groupe INSA (covered through INSA Lyon)	2
EELISA	Specialised	• Budapest University of Technology and Economics • École des Ponts ParisTech (covered	5

		through ParisTech) • Istanbul Technical University • National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest • Universidad Politécnica de Madrid	
ENHANCE	Specialised	• Chalmers University of Technology • Delft University of Technology • ETH Zurich • Gdansk University of Technology • Norwegian University of Science and Technology • Politecnico di Milano • RWTH Aachen University • Technische Universität Berlin • Universitat Politecnica de Valencia • Warsaw University of Technology	10 (ALL)
ENLIGHT	Comprehensive	• Ghent University	1
EPICUR	Comprehensive	• Karlsruhe Institute of Technology	1

EUGLOH	Comprehensive	• Lund University • Université Paris-Saclay • University of Porto	3
EULiST	Comprehensive	• Brno University of Technology • Leibniz University Hannover • National Technical University of Athens • Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava • TU Wien	5
EUNICE	Comprehensive	• Poznań University of Technology	1
EuroTeQ	Specialised	• École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) • Institut Polytechnique de Paris • Technion Israel Institute of Technology	3
EUTOPIA	Comprehensive	• Technische Universität Dresden • Universidade NOVA de Lisboa	2
EUt+	Specialised	• Technical University of Cluj-Napoca	1
UNA EUROPA	Comprehensive	• KU Leuven	2

		• University College Dublin	
Unite!	Specialised	• Aalto University • Graz University of Technology • Grenoble INP Graduate Schools of Engineering and Management (through University Grenoble Alpes) • KTH Royal Institute of Technology • Politecnico Di Torino • Technische Universität Darmstadt • Universidade de Lisboa, • Universitat • Politècnica de Catalunya • Wrocław University of Science and Technology	9 (ALL)

Annex B. Leadership interview guidelines

The following questions were used as a semi-structured guide for interviews with university leadership. Interviews were conversational in nature and not all questions were asked in exactly the same order. In two cases, responses were provided in written form rather than through an interview.

1. How does participation in your Alliance align with your university's overall **strategy?** Viceversa, is there a shared view inside your Alliance about the role you imagine the Alliance will have in the **future** for your universities, or is your university's involvement in the Alliance guided by a short-term strategy (project approach), instead of a medium- to long-term vision (program approach)?

2. In the short and medium to long-term, do you see the Alliance primarily as a vehicle for joint education initiatives, or do you also see it as a platform for advancing **research and innovation**? Is there convergence on this vision in the governing bodies of your Alliance?
3. In your view, does your Alliance contribute substantially to strengthening European competitiveness?
4. What is the role played by **science & technology** in your Alliance? If it's not the focus of the Alliance, e.g. if you are part of a comprehensive/"horizontal" Alliance, do you believe the current governance model of your Alliance appropriately balances the unique perspectives of S&T souls with those of non-S&T souls, making the most of this diversity?
5. Do you have, or feel it would be important to have, more people with Alliance-wide responsibilities in the **governance (model)** of your Alliance, besides let's say president and secretary general or the like, or do you think it is sufficient if the governing bodies include members representing their own universities? In any case, are the roles and mandates of your Alliance governing bodies clearly defined and communicated within your universities and within the Alliance?
6. What do you think is the impact of the governance (model) of your Alliance on its long-term sustainability, particularly if EU **funding** for Alliances should be reduced or eliminated in the future? Is your Alliance supporting the idea to fund itself with own funds, or lobbying for MS support at conference of rectors or ministries level?

Annex C. Consultation questionnaire for academic and administrative staff

1. Which university do you represent? (Open text field; responses used solely for internal analysis and reported anonymously.)

2. Which European Universities Alliance are you part of? (Open text field; responses used solely for internal analysis and reported anonymously.)

3. Are you part of comprehensive Alliance (an Alliance comprising both comprehensive and technical universities) or a specialised Alliance (an Alliance primarily composed of technical universities)? (Multiple choice: comprehensive Alliance / specialised Alliance)

Section A: Science & Technology (For comprehensive universities only)

These questions are directed towards representatives from comprehensive universities.

Section A, Q1: In what ways are faculty members, particularly from science and technology fields involved in Alliance decision-making? (Open text response)

Section A, Q2: In your view, does the current governance model appropriately balance the unique perspectives of universities of science and technology with those of nonscience and technology partners? (Binary choice: Yes / No)

Section A, Q2.1: If you answered 'No' to Q2, please briefly explain why? (Open text response)

Section A, Q3: How well are faculty from universities of science and technology represented in the governance structures of your (comprehensive) Alliance? (5-point scale: 1 = Not represented at all; 5 = Very well represented)

Section A, Q3.1: Please briefly explain the reasons for your rating for the question Q3. (Open text response)

Section A, Q4: Does the Alliance's governance structure reflect a short-term strategy focused on immediate goals, or does it also support a medium- to long-term vision that aligns with the strategic objectives of universities of science & technology? (Answer options: Reflects a short-term strategy; Supports a medium- to long-term vision aligned with the strategic objectives of universities of science & technology; Both; Neither)

Section A, Q4.1: Please briefly explain your answer to Q4? (Open text response)

Section A, Q5: How does the Alliance address the strategic needs of universities of science and technology in areas such as research, innovation, and technical education? (Open text response)

Section A, Q5.1: Are there governance structures in place that allow faculty members from science & technology fields to steer the Alliance in a way that supports these needs? (Binary choice: Yes / No)

Section A, Q5.2: If you answered 'Yes' to Q5.1, what governance structures are in place that enable faculty members from science & technology fields to steer the Alliance in a way that supports these needs? (Open text response)

Section A, Q7: In your view, does the Alliance have appropriate structures and mechanisms in place to support science & technology-specific initiatives? (Binary choice: Yes / No)

Section A, Q7.1: Could you specify which structures or mechanisms, if any, are in place to support science & technology-specific initiatives within the Alliance, and explain how they provide this support? (Open text response)

Section B: General questions

These questions are directed towards representatives from both comprehensive and specialised universities.

Section B, Q1: To what extent are faculty meaningfully represented and able to inform or influence decisions within the governance structures of the Alliance? (5-point scale: 1 = Not at all; 5 = To a very high extent)

Section B, Q2: In what ways are faculty members currently involved in Alliance decision-making? (Open text response)

Section B, Q3: What changes could be made to increase faculty participation in Alliance activities? (Open text response)

Section B, Q4: What changes could be made to increase the political representation of faculty in Alliance activities? (Open text response)

Section B, Q5: What is the current level of awareness and understanding among faculty about the role and impact of Alliances on universities? (Open text response)

Section B, Q6: Are there additional opportunities for faculty input that should be explored? (Open text response)

Section B, Q7: Overall, do the governing bodies in your Alliance view it primarily as a * vehicle for joint education provision, or also as a platform for collaborative research and innovation? (Open text response)

Final comments: Please share any additional reflections, concerns, or recommendations. Is there anything else you would like to share? (Open text response)

Annex D. Questionnaire for student representative consultation

1. Which university do you represent? (Multiple choice with option "Other" and "Choose not to answer"; responses used solely for internal analysis and reported anonymously.)
2. Which European Universities Alliance are you part of? (Multiple choice; responses used solely for internal analysis and reported anonymously.)
3. Are you a student representative in Alliance governance? What is your role? (Open text response)
4. Are you part of comprehensive Alliance (an Alliance comprising both comprehensive and technical universities) or a specialised Alliance (an Alliance primarily composed of technical universities)? (Multiple choice: Comprehensive Alliance / Specialised Alliance)

Comprehensive Alliance

5. What are the biggest challenges you face as an science & technology (S&T) student representative involved in Alliance governance? Are there specific difficulties that arise in Alliances where S&T students are a minority? (Open text response)
6. Do you feel that student representatives from science & technology (S&T) backgrounds are adequately involved in the decision-making processes of the Alliance's governing bodies? What improvements could be made to ensure that S&T students have a strong voice, especially within comprehensive Alliances? (Open text response)

General questions

7. Do you feel that student representatives are adequately connected to and involved in the decision-making processes of the Alliance's governing bodies? What improvements could be made to ensure stronger student involvement? (Open text response)
8. Do you believe that your participation in the governing bodies of the Alliance is adequately incentivised? If not, what proposals do you have for better incentivisation? (Open text response)
9. How clear is your role or mandate within the Alliance? Are there any gaps in communication that make it difficult for you to understand your contribution? (Open text response)
10. How comfortable are you with carrying out your mandate? (5-point scale: 1 = Not at all comfortable; 5 = Very comfortable)
11. What are the biggest challenges you face as a student representative involved in the governing bodies of the Alliance? How can Alliances better address these challenges? (Open text response)

12. Should Alliances establish a special unit supporting student engagement initiatives? (Multiple choice: Yes / No / Don't know / Other)

13. What should be the long-term priorities for Alliances in terms of student involvement in Alliance governance? (Open text response)

14. Do students have an Alliance-wide mandate (e.g. Alliance-wide impact of position paper/recommendations from the student body)? (Open text response)

15. How is your role within the Alliance synchronised with your activity and role at the local university level? (Open text response)

16. Are students representatives consulting/reporting on the topics with their peers within their institutions (organizing polls, surveys, debates, etc.)? (Open text response)

17. Is the voice of all students (bachelor, master, PhD students) well represented? (Open text response)

18. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a student representative in Alliance governance? (Open text response)

CESAER

CESAER identification number in the transparency register of the European Union:

484959115993-15

Belgian business registry number:

KBO 0441894980

Kasteelpark Arenberg 1 Box 2200

3001 Leuven BELGIUM

+32 486 41 17 56

https://www.cesaer.org