



THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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External Evaluation Report of the UNITA European Universities Alliance

FINAL EVALUATION

July 2026

Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
1.1. Context and scope of the evaluation	3
1.2. Methods used	4
2. Analysis of the Evaluation Criteria.....	5
2.1. Strategy and Policies	5
a) The strategy and policies of the alliance integrate a vision on the quality of its provision (teaching and learning with links to research, innovation and service to society).	5
b) All internal and external stakeholders, including affiliated entities and associate partners, play an active role in the development of the alliance's strategy/policies and the realization of the inter-university campus.....	6
c) The alliance's strategy and policies aim at contributing to regional development and reflect the societal and other challenges that are deemed relevant by the alliance and its stakeholders (challenge-based approach).	7
d) The QA policies for the provision of the alliance are aligned with Part 1, and where relevant Part 2, of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015).	8
2.2. Policy Implementation	11
a) The alliance has proposed specific, relevant and attainable objectives relating to the quality of its provision (teaching and learning with links to research, innovation and service to society).	12
b) The alliance has allocated sustainable resources to achieve the objectives.	13
c) The alliance is supported by relevant and efficient management structures with a clear distribution of responsibilities and tasks, demonstrating the financial, structural and organisational commitment at the highest institutional level while giving staff and students the opportunity to be part of the co-creation of the alliance.	16
d) The alliance demonstrates effective involvement with key stakeholders and the local community to foster societal engagement, diversity and inclusiveness of students and staff, as well as their entrepreneurial key competences.	19
2.3 Evaluation and Monitoring	23
a) The alliance has developed an evaluation and monitoring system that includes specific measures for the evaluation of progress, processes, deliverables and cost	

efficiency of the alliance, and provides relevant information pertaining to all policy domains, allowing for effective governance and decision-making.	23
b) The scope of the evaluation and monitoring system includes the application of innovative pedagogical models; the links between education and research and innovation (e.g. how research results and innovation feeds back into education); and, the measurement of the appropriateness and impact of mobility (for students and researchers as well as for academic and administrative staff), including mobility with other organisations than higher education institutions.	25
c) The system of regular internal and external evaluations ties in with the management model pursued and is characterized by an active role of students, staff, alumni, the professional field and external independent experts.....	26
d) The alliance monitors whether enhanced cooperation is sustained across different levels and areas of activity, building on complementary strengths and synergetic effects of the alliance's network.	28
2.4 Improvement Policy	31
a) The alliance pursues an active improvement policy based on the outcomes of its evaluations, thereby demonstrating its ability to innovate and adapt in order to improve.	31
b) The alliance demonstrates its capability for long-term sustainability, outlining how each member of the alliance will contribute to its sustainability and reducing existing (administrative) obstacles.	32
c) The alliance shares its outputs and good practices with relevant stakeholders.	33
d) The improvement policy pursued by the alliance fosters a quality culture, in which all those involved contribute to innovation and to continuous quality improvement of its provision.....	34
3. Overall Recommendations.....	37
4. Conclusions	39

Annex 1: Agenda of the External Quality Assurance evaluation of UNITA by ARACIS

1. Introduction

1.1. Context and scope of the evaluation

The present External Evaluation Report (EER) presents the process and results of the final external evaluation of *UNITA - Universitas Montium* European universities alliance, performed by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS).

The final external evaluation process was conducted following the [intermediary evaluation](#) performed in 2023, based on the [European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities](#), elaborated within the EUNiQ project with the support of the Erasmus+ program. The evaluation considered all four criteria, considering the alliance's progress over the past 6 years of existence.

The ARACIS evaluation panel was comprised of the following experts:

- National expert (Chair): Prof. PhD Romita Iucu, University of Bucharest, Romania;
- National expert (Member): Prof. PhD Giordano Altarozzi, “George Emil Palade” University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science, and Technology of Targu Mures, Romania;
- International expert (Member): Assoc. Prof. PhD Razvan Ionut Ghinea, University of Granada, Spain;
- International expert (Member): Assist. Prof. PhD Dina Sebastiao, University of Coimbra, Portugal;
- Student representative (Secretary): Irina Duma, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

The process was coordinated, on behalf of ARACIS, by Prof. PhD Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghitulica, ARACIS General Director.

UNITA is an alliance of 12 comprehensive universities from countries sharing romance languages, 10 of them being full partners (Universidade da Beira Interior, PT; Instituto Politécnico da Guarda, PT; Universidad Pública de Navarra, ES; Universidad de Zaragoza, ES; Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, FR; Université Savoie Mont Blanc, FR; Università di Torino, IT; Università degli Studi di Brescia, IT; Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara, RO; Universitatea Transilvania din Brașov, RO) and two associate partners (Haute École Spécialisée de Suisse Occidentale, CH; Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University, UA).

The alliance was created based on a shared geographical and cultural context, given that UNITA Universities are located in rural, mountain and cross-border regions across Southern, Western and Central-Eastern Europe, in ecosystems sharing similar challenges and impacted by core-periphery dynamics.

The UNITA's vision is accomplished through its mission and the following key objectives:

- Achieve innovation in education;
- Promote research and innovation in the six priority areas (green energy, cultural heritage, circular economy, inclusive societies, digital transition and global health);
- Create an international virtual campus;
- Promote European citizenship and multilingualism through the intercomprehension between Romance languages.

Engagement with quality assurance processes allows European higher education institutions in general, and European universities alliances in particular, to demonstrate quality and increase transparency, thus helping to build mutual trust and recognition of their qualifications, diplomas, and other certificates. Quality assurance processes should support a learning environment in which the content of the study programs, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose.

1.2. Methods used

The timeline for the evaluation process was established following the intermediary evaluation held in 2023. Several discussions were held between the ARACIS process coordinator and UNITA representatives to clarify the objectives of the final evaluation and to set the agenda of the site visit, based on the input of the ARACIS panel members.

The evaluation panel members were appointed through the ARACIS Council Decision no. 53/H/05.02.2026. Several internal coordination meetings took place online to discuss the evaluation methodology and prepare for the on-site visit. The site-visit was hosted by Polytechnic Institute of Guarda, in Portugal, between 11th - 12th March 2026, on the occasion of UNITA Week, where all higher institutions involved were gathered.

The UNITA representatives provided the Self-Evaluation Report and other relevant documents for the purpose of the final external evaluation, which were made available at the end of January 2026. The ARACIS evaluation panel performed a comprehensive analysis of documents, data and information available both in the SER and its annexes, as well as on the alliance's and partners' websites. During the on-site visit, the panel met representatives of UNITA management structures, the rectors and vice rectors of the UNITA member universities, the quality evaluation board, academic, administrative and research staff, members of the students' assembly, followed by two remaining online meetings with the IT department and external stakeholders, as depicted in **Annex 1**.

The draft external evaluation report was submitted to the UNITA representatives for factual checks in June 2026, and the final version was submitted for approval to the ARACIS External Quality Evaluation Department and ARACIS Council in July 2026.

2. Analysis of the Evaluation Criteria

2.1. Strategy and Policies

The European University's strategy and policies enable the realisation of an inter-university 'campus' which assures, in close collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, the quality of a joint provision that responds to societal challenges.

Recommendations on further developments and quality enhancement from the previous external evaluation:

- Establish a precise feedback mechanism to monitor the implementation of Advisory Council recommendations.
- Establish a precise feedback mechanism to monitor implementation of Research Assembly recommendations.
- Explore the possibility of increasing engagement of key stakeholders in decision making processes at alliance level.
- Increase awareness on UNITA-specific activities in and outside the Alliance. Also, design a strategy and action to promote UNITA as an alliance addressing societal needs, with the mission to increase awareness of the alliance and attract more interest from stakeholders.
- Continuously modify and adapt collaborative processes and bodies involved in QA, as the UNITA alliance grows and changes, to ensure a smooth integration of new partners and stakeholders.
- Ensure a synergy between the Quality and Evaluation Board (QEB) and the Quality Ecosystem, to provide data-driven and evidence-based proposals for the improvement of the QA Policy and processes within UNITA.
- Design actions to actively promote UNITA's Students Assembly recruitment in the partners' student communities.
- Increase efforts towards continuously benchmark QA policy for research and management services across the UNITA alliance.

Reference points:

- a) The strategy and policies of the alliance integrate a vision on the quality of its provision (teaching and learning with links to research, innovation and service to society).**

The UNITA European University established its fundamental purpose, mission and objectives for the second phase of UNITA (2023-2027), stated in the **Mission Statement** approved in January 2023 and published on the [alliance's website](#).

According to this strategic document, its long-term vision is *"to transform the way we cooperate, educate, research, innovate, and reach out to society"*. The long-term objectives resulting from the Mission Statement are:

- *"Learners should be able to choose their personalised, multilingual and international study paths from a rich learning offer."*

- *Students, academics and administrative staff should benefit from mobility opportunities across the Alliance and beyond, including Rural experiences.*
- *Partner institutions should function as innovation incubators within and across their territories matching the ambitions of the European Innovation Agenda and of the European Skills Agenda.*
- *UNITA should have deepened and formalised cooperation with global partners.*
- *The European University should have substantially diminished carbon emission and implemented strategies for financial sustainability.*
- *UNITA aims to be a forum for citizen science, a catalyst for European integration and a reliable global player with solutions for digital and green transition, addressing labour market challenges and social or societal issues through the excellent education and training, interdisciplinary knowledge and competencies and innovative research solutions”.*

Some of the objectives above are more directly expressed in the strategy and policy definition of UNITA (like the ones concerned with fruition of policies by students, academics and administrative staff), while others, which comprehend a broader audience of stakeholders and concern addressing global societal challenges are more indirectly present. Efforts to a deeper integration of all long-term objectives in strategy and policy definition are welcome.

Looking ahead, UNITA appears to be orienting itself toward a longer-term horizon, one that extends well into the next decade.

Its vision includes deeper institutional harmonization, stronger student involvement, and the gradual alignment of governance and strategic priorities across all members, as well as integrating its strategic goals within the framework of global societal challenges. However, this last aim remains underdeveloped within its strategies and policies.

b) All internal and external stakeholders, including affiliated entities and associate partners, play an active role in the development of the alliance’s strategy/policies and the realization of the inter-university campus.

Since the previous external evaluation conducted in 2023, UNITA has evolved to a more inclusive model of defining and developing strategies and policies, putting forward ways of consulting and engaging the different stakeholders of the Alliance.

The promotion of closer strategic links between research, education, scientific and pedagogical outreach, and a common mindset for internationalisation within the UNITA space is recognised, as well as the efforts to a more inclusive participation of students in the UNITA’s strategy definition. Although the organisational structure has made an effort and improvement for inclusion and deeper previous assessment to design strategy and policies, the success of policy definition and implementation relies on individual and particular institutional contexts and interests - as some institutions already have a stronger research culture, or a deeper culture of student engagement. The dependency on the decentralized institutional levels in high-level policy making and implementation within an alliance aiming to overcome constraints

of peripheral areas, may risk incrementing already existing asymmetries within its territory. For example, this was noted on the linkages between research and education, in the initiatives to create joint or multiple degrees and in students' involvement in the UNITA governance bodies.

The mechanism for improving and redefining policies and strategies consists of collecting data fed into the Quality Review Reports, based on the input from internal and external stakeholders (teaching and administrative staff involved in UNITA activities, students, external partners for rural mobilities). However, as it was found during the interviews, some stakeholders such as students and external partners, do not seem to play an active role in the definition of these strategies, mainly because they are consulted more in the implementation phase rather than in the defining phase.

Furthermore, some stakeholders' participation is dependent on the local institutional cultures, as is the case of students' active participation. The same was perceived with the external stakeholders, who appear to have limited participation, particularly confined to rural mobilities. Most of the external stakeholders are rather partners of individual higher education institutions involved in their own context (such as public authorities and partners for implementing rural mobilities), than alliance-level partners. Moreover, the local contribution for policy definition and execution is also very much dependent on each member's policy for allocation of human resources to UNITA, which brings the peril of aggravation of asymmetries between members.

Equally important is the strengthening of a shared identity across the alliance. A sense of belonging has taken root not through formal declarations alone, but through everyday collaboration and consistent communication. Faculty, researchers, and administrators alike contribute to a growing organizational culture that feels both authentic and stable. This cohesion has been further supported by the thoughtful expansion of the alliance, where new members were selected with an eye toward compatibility in structure and mission, reducing the risk of fragmentation and ensuring a more harmonious integration.

c) The alliance's strategy and policies aim at contributing to regional development and reflect the societal and other challenges that are deemed relevant by the alliance and its stakeholders (challenge-based approach).

The UNITA European universities alliance established mechanisms to identify common problems to border and mountain regions where partners are located in order to create common Research Hubs which are also connected with institutional educational and research interests.

In this regard, the second phase of the alliance has focused on dedicated strategic boards, composed of representatives from the management of each institution, to improve decision-making for all its activities, especially those related to learning, teaching, research and societal engagement. In this regard, strategies were developed for several areas: Education and Pedagogy Innovation (with links to open and life-long education, language policy and teaching enhancement) overseen by Vice Rectors responsible for education; Research and Innovation (with links to inter-

territorial interfaces for innovation) overseen by Vice Rectors for Research; International relations and European values, overseen by Vice Rectors for Internationalisation; Communities building (to address cooperation in all domains of university activity); Quality, Impact and Sustainability (to address quality assurance, impact, financial sustainability of the alliance and promotion of green sustainability). As it came from the interviews, this model was multiplied from the example of cooperation between Vice Rectors for Internationalization from the first phase of the alliance's development, and seems to be contributing to the internal communication.

Yet, while internal communication has matured into a reliable and structured system, external communication still seems to lag behind. Bridging this gap will be essential if the alliance is to fully articulate its identity and impact beyond its own boundaries, oriented towards a sustainable regional development.

Given UNITA's focus on mountainous, rural and border regions, as well as the capacity of fully integrating the 6 partners which joined the alliance in the second phase through ensuring their participation in decision-making and sustained students and staff mobilities, it contributed to the regional development. The challenges relevant for this type of universities coming from rather border and mountain areas are addressed through better promotion of each individual member by the alliance and inclusion of their communities into the inter-university campus, while also respecting multilingualism and cultural diversity.

d) The QA policies for the provision of the alliance are aligned with Part 1, and where relevant Part 2, of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015).

To make the objectives of the long-term vision a reality, a **Quality Assurance Policy (QAP)** was developed in November 2024 and adopted in January 2025. Taking up the objectives set out in the Mission Statement, the QAP established the steps to be undertaken:

- Developing a model for an institutionalized European University through long-term strategies for effective and inclusive governance.
- Building communities of students, teachers, researchers and staff through enabling policies for human resources, inter-comprehension among Romance languages, mobility – including the experience of “rural mobility” -, and the promotion of European way of life.
- Developing a wide variety of shared personalized, multilingual and international study paths.
- Incubating innovation through territorial engagement.
- Ensuring dissemination, financial sustainability, green resilience, impact and global outreach.
- Reinforcing gender equality.

The QA Policy recognizes UNITA members' individual quality assurance systems aligned with ESG 2015, having the aim of supporting the alliance's initiatives related to teaching and learning, research and 3rd mission/outreach activities. Given that a unified QA Policy at alliance level is still in an incipient phase, it currently aims at

supporting the organisation several educational initiatives through providing guidance. The focus is on mobility windows, rural mobilities, virtual exchanges, joint programmes, microcredentials, blended intensive programs, and collaborative online international learning (COIL). In terms of research, the policy mainly focuses on matching events and initiatives to connect research groups and facilitate working with associated partners on local ecosystems needs and technology transfer.

An improvement of quality assurance (QA) across the alliance in the last years is recognised. The process of data centralisation for the Quality Review Reports (QRR) seem to be key changes to provide a common ground of indicators for assessment and strategy discussion, a continuous involvement across the cycle of the quality report and the attempt to redesign processes.

[Documents: Evolution of UNITA governance model; Brescia_Declaration]

2.1.1. Aspects that are already developed:

- The core purposes, mission and long-term objectives of the alliance are fully established and formalized in the *Mission Statement*.
- A formal Quality Assurance Policy was developed and adopted, with clear steps to be undertaken and monitoring mechanisms in place, to ensure the synergies between quality assurance policies and practices at alliance level, while respecting the individual QA system of each university.
- Establishment of dedicated management boards at alliance level, in key areas such as Education, Research and Innovation, International Relations.
- Internal communication systems have matured into a structured framework that supports collaboration across institutions.
- A genuine sense of belonging has taken root among university communities, through shared identity and organisational culture.
- Full integration of 6 new partners was successfully managed, maintaining institutional compatibility and structural harmony.
- Creation of common Research Hubs specifically tailored to address the particularities of mountain and border regions.

2.1.2. Aspects that are partially developed:

- The direct benefits for students, teaching and administrative staff are well integrated into strategic policies, but integration remains weaker for broader external audiences.
- High-level organizational inclusion has been improved, but practical implementation is largely dependent on individual local institutional cultures.

2.1.3. Aspects that were started to be developed:

- A unified QA policy has been developed, but it functions primarily as a guidance mechanism for local educational initiatives such as rural mobilities, micro credentials and COIL, rather than a fully integrated framework.

2.1.4. Aspects that still need to be developed:

- The strategic alignment with global societal challenges remains only partially developed, while the main focus of the alliance is currently on the regional engagement, given its specific attention primarily to mountain and border regions.
- Strategic co-creation between the alliance and its external stakeholders is still to be developed. So far, the focus has been on partnerships with individual institutions, without creating significant synergies across the alliance.
- Ensuring safeguards to address asymmetries across member universities through strategic planning, based on analytical frameworks.

Overall,

UNITA has proven the capacity of fully integrating its member universities, and identifying synergies between them, while respecting each individual context. Strategic policies co-creation has proven to be based on the identified needs and opportunities of the alliance as a whole, based on the challenges and strengths of each individual member. The Alliance has clearly demonstrated that it is committed to, and already well advanced in the transition from a project-based approach, to an alliance governance philosophy, a defining characteristic of the transformational processes expected of such collaborative structures at the European level.

Therefore the criterion is already developed.

Recommendations for further improvement:

- Ensure the active involvement of both internal and external stakeholders in the development, analysis and improvement of UNITA's strategy and policies.
- Define the implementation map for the common governance model within the confederative university that can respect unification and diversification, in line with the Brescia Declaration.
- Develop an analysis of asymmetry development across UNITA member universities to ensure the mitigation of risks towards strategy and policies implementation.
- Develop adaptive governance safeguards early by introducing flexible mechanisms, such as tiered participation models or differentiated integration

pathways, at an early stage to prevent structural imbalances from becoming entrenched.

- Strengthen external communication strategy by investing in a clear and consistent external narrative that reflects the alliance's ambitions, ensuring visibility and recognition at both European and global levels.
- Enhance student integration in governance processes, through moving beyond symbolic involvement by embedding students in decision-making structures, allowing them to actively shape the alliance's strategic and operational evolution.
- Ensure the effective implementation of the QA Policy throughout the alliance, and identify means for the improvement of the document aimed at setting the basis for common UNITA activities in the fields of learning, teaching and societal engagement.

2.2. Policy Implementation

The European University takes adequate measures to implement its strategy and policies in an effective manner and to enhance the quality of its provision (teaching and learning with links to research, innovation and service to society).

Recommendations on further developments and quality enhancement from the previous external evaluation:

- *The Alliance could extend the use of micro-credentials from the current processual level of recognising learning outcomes and lifelong interconnections already in place, towards a philosophy for redesigning the academic curriculum logic to further formats and levels, ranging from individual learning and training actions to large scale developments such as joint and multiple degree programmes, especially taking advantage of the potential premises of a legal structure.*
- *The alliance should engage more students in transnational learning activities, such as Blended Intensive Programmes or jointly designed micro-credentials, developed within the UNITA framework. Through these activities, UNITA can use the Erasmus+ framework for ensuring participation of students to international learning activities, also motivating them to enhance their own international career paths. Using this framework can also support the alliance to enhance the learning recognition process at alliance level, aiming soon for an automatic recognition.*
- *UNITA can further extend its outreach in terms of partnerships and cooperation with other relevant entities and institutions, either as full HEI partners of the Alliance, or as strategic partners in other sectors and/or regions, such as Africa, Americas, and Asia.*
- *The partner universities of the Alliance should intensify the overall sense of belonging of their own academic communities to the Alliance, by local level actions and projects meant to extend the significance of UNITA to the academic life in each member HEI.*

- *UNITA could define adequate policies and actions to identify additional sources of funding as well as stakeholders who understand the added value of UNITA Rural mobilities.*
- *The Alliance can further extend its outreach in terms of partnerships and cooperation, to diversify the resources and ensure the alliance's long-term sustainability.*
- *While each UNITA Office has a specific number of employees, based on the respective partner HEI, more resources could be allocated to raise this number, improving the overall quality of the services provided by these offices.*
- *While stakeholders are already part of the Alliance's governance and consultative bodies, UNITA still needs to work on an extended stakeholders mapping exercise, starting from identifying their needs and expectations (could be developed during the UNITA2 phase).*

Reference points:

- a) The alliance has proposed specific, relevant and attainable objectives relating to the quality of its provision (teaching and learning with links to research, innovation and service to society).**

To make its long-term vision a reality, UNITA established a work-plan for the Phase II and defined milestones for the period after. For the second phase, their attention focuses on **five main objectives**:

- *Build the model for an institutionalised European university and ensure the fully operational and measurable implementation of alliance tasks and deliverables in a quality framework with academic and societal impact.*
- *Support the construction of communities of students, teachers and researchers, and administrative staff, by enabling policies for human resources, multilingualism, mobility and the promotion of the European way of life.*
- *Develop and implement shared actions, labels and tools to build personalised, multilingual and international study paths, within, across and beyond the partner institutions with the aim of enhancing the internationalisation of curricula and developing a UNITA offer in Lifelong learning, open to a large public.*
- *Energize the territories of the partner universities through research-based education, research and innovation-related activities.*
- *Ensure dissemination, financial sustainability, green resilience, long-term impact and global outreach.*

UNITA Alliance has its own QA system, aligned with the ESG 2015. The alliance has set specific, relevant and attainable objectives relating to the quality of its provision. According to the QA Policy, these objectives concerned:

- Gradually making seamless and embedded mobility both for students as well as for academic and support staff a structural feature at all levels;

- To boost the joint education activities and to encourage the designing of new collaborations in the education within the Alliance;
- Enhancing learners' plurilingual competence;
- To enable students to obtain a degree and/or the recognition of other joint educational activities;
- To boost the joint research and to encourage the designing of new collaborations within the Alliance;
- Developing interconnected masters' programmes and doctoral programmes;
- to build an industry-driven and challenge-based Teaching & Learning network.

To implement its strategy and policies in an effective manner and to enhance the quality of its provision, UNITA Alliance has set specific Quality Assurance activities, included in the UNITA Quality Assurance Plan 2023-2027, aiming to implement a framework to ensure the high-quality execution and improvement of UNITA Alliance's objectives.

The implementation of the UNITA Quality Assurance Plan is expected to have a significant and enduring impact on the alliance.

A very important step in this regard was the election process regarding the SA in March 2025, which offered to the alliance a solid and representative structure involved in the QA system. However, according to the students, their involvement is not the same at all levels, depending on the specific structure of the UNITA European University.

The full implementation of the QA system is expected by the end of the project; its implementation should allow the Alliance to measure its impact effectively and showcase its contribution to education, research, innovation, and service to society. However, the implementation of a unified quality system may encounter difficulties arising from the different organisational cultures existing in many institutions and with different mentalities. During the meeting with QA representatives, this risk emerged as a perceived one; at the same time, different approaches to QA are perceived as a risk and a chance at the same time, more than a weakness.

[Documents: [UNITA_MissionStatement_FinalWithEndorsementLetters](#); [UNITA2 QA POLICY](#); [D1.3 Quality Assurance Plan Implemented](#); [QEB_SAR04_follow_up](#); [MS14_First annual monitoring of the QA Plan implementation](#)]

b) The alliance has allocated sustainable resources to achieve the objectives.

During the first phase (2020-2023) of the UNITA Alliance, the Financial Sustainability Plan was approved to identify lines of profitability development that would enable the durability of the Alliance. According to this document, during the first phase the most important financial source was the central Erasmus+ UNITA project. Other complementary activities were sustained through the „UNITA constellation” projects, submitted and granted to the Alliance through its partners under different European funds calls. Finally, a part of activities was supported directly by partner universities, either through their own budget, or direct funding provided by regional or national authorities.

In 2023 UNITA grew up with the integration of four new partner universities, a legal entity (UNITA-GEIE) and two associated universities. This extended alliance submitted a proposal for a new Erasmus+ project that was granted to be implemented during the period 2023-2027. This new Erasmus+ project aims to initiate the consolidation phase of the Alliance. According to this, an important goal is to identify and implement the measures for sustainability. In this sense, a very important step was the conception of a new **UNITA Financial Sustainability Plan (UFSP)** for the period 2023-2027, aimed to ensure the feasibility, viability, and continuity of the activities, in accordance with the long-term strategy and objectives. This plan was approved in April 2024, starting from a critical analysis of the first Financial Sustainability Plan. Summarizing, this tool offers the guidelines for establishing the UNITA long-term financial sustainability. In this sense, UFSP suggests that the UNITA budget should consider several possible scenarios derived from both external and internal factors. Finally, to ensure the full implementation of cooperation paths, the establishment of cost accounting and financial controls is considered essential. One issue emerges from the UFSP, about the main financial sources of the UNITA institutions: most of them have a funding system in which transfers from the public sector make up most of the total funding (on average, 70%). This may represent a threat in long- and medium-term assuming that, if UNITA will not receive public funding, it should receive a significant contribution by its member universities (both financial and “in-kind”).

To reduce this risk, UFSP underlines the importance of a more systematic approach on attracting external funds through project proposals in different calls, strengthening the importance of a hybrid financial model. As a result of this recommendation, 42 Starting Grants were awarded to foster innovative research across UNITA institutions. To develop a structured financial roadmap with diversified funding resources, the Task Team (TT) is collecting cost estimates and possible incomes on the activities that will continue beyond the duration of the UNITA project as standard activities of the European University, as a preparatory step towards the update of the financial sustainability plan.

Related to the administrative sustainability, UNITA received recommendations from previous external and internal evaluations. According to the **UNITA 4th Self-assessment Report**, “UNITA is addressing staffing needs by coordinating frequent meetings among its Offices and university administrative structures, thereby launching targeted recruitment drives - particularly in an Innovation Hub - and ensuring new hires directly tackle workload imbalances”. Since 2023, UNITA has consolidated its structure establishing the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG), representing the legal support structure of the Alliance. The EEIG is designed as a tool to serve the UNITA and to facilitate the cooperation between its members, its social purpose remaining auxiliary to the institutional activities of its members. The main objective of the EEIG is to assist its members in the creation of a strong balance of higher education, research and innovation. UNITA Offices (UO), composed of staff members from each university and coordinated by a UNITA Office Coordinator, ensure the roll-out of day-by-day activities in all the action lines of the alliance, and provide support to the TTs in management and coordination matters. UO should play a crucial role in UNITA actions, embodying the presence of the Alliance in the

universities and as a landing point for stakeholders. However, as shown by the **UNITA Third Quality Review Report Follow-up**, approved in March 2025, several problems were identified: *“lack of sufficient and skilled human resources; unclear responsibilities and expectations for Task Team members; underestimation of the commitment required; overwhelming workload”*. As a recommended action, the Report suggests: *“Minimise the impact of human resource turnover, particularly in what concerns team integration and participation, ensuring constant and differentiated communication flows with and between team members”*. Based on these recommendations, the IT Department, hired by the EEIG, staffed with 3 full time persons. Nevertheless, gathering the needed human resources is the major challenge of the IT Department, perceived during the interviews, as it is functioning with one full time person, and other 50% time allocated. Moreover, some problems remain regarding the other categories of personnel involved. The external evaluation site visit reported the unstable allocation of administrative staff, due to the lack of unlimited contracts, the lack of professional communications works in the alliance, which is paramount in a context of varied institutional cultures and differentiated speeds, and levels of implementation. Therefore, it appears necessary to find solutions to recruit qualified personnel dedicated to UNITA's activities.

Regarding the sustainability of the established objectives, resources appear sufficient to ensure the sustainability of those relating to the educational component (personalization of curricula, orientation towards multilingualism, development of international study programs). Likewise, the mechanisms relating to mobility, including those related to Rural Mobilities, appear well-structured and already established. Regarding the functioning of the partner institutions as innovation incubators, some elements emerged during the meeting with external stakeholders, although limited to consolidated collaborations with already existing local and/or regional partners of each UNITA member.

Further steps should be taken regarding the medium- and long-term sustainability of objectives related to reducing carbon emissions, as well as the role of catalyst for European integration, the development of civic responsibility, and the implementation of the project.

However, the linkage between strategy and policy definition and execution is in part dependent on the particular initiative of the different stakeholders involved. Here, the success of policy definition and implementation relies on individual and institutional contexts and interests - as some institutions already have a stronger research culture, or a deeper culture of student engagement. The dependency on the decentralised institutional levels in high-level policy making and implementation within an alliance aiming to overcome constraints of peripheral areas, may risk incrementing already existing asymmetries within its territory. For example, this was noted on the linkages between research and education, in the initiatives to create common degrees and in students' involvement in the UNITA governance bodies.

[Documents: D5.2_FinancialSustainabilityPlan; D1.2_UNITA_Management_Guide; QEB_SelfAssessmentReport_4th_approved_14_05_2025; Quality Assurance Actors and Roles; QEB_SAR04_follow_up]

- c) **The alliance is supported by relevant and efficient management structures with a clear distribution of responsibilities and tasks, demonstrating the financial, structural and organisational commitment at the highest institutional level while giving staff and students the opportunity to be part of the co-creation of the alliance.**

Since the previous external evaluation conducted in 2023, UNITA has progressed towards the transition to a more inclusive approach of defining governance, however still relying on the project-based coordination of activities due to the European Universities Initiative co-funded by the European Union. At the operational level, one of the most meaningful developments has been the emergence of a distributed governance model. Responsibilities are no longer concentrated solely at the top but are increasingly shared among Vice-Rectors overseeing key domains such as education, research, and international engagement. This shift reflects a deliberate move toward decentralization - one that unfolds progressively, allowing institutions to adjust organically while maintaining strategic alignment. It is less a rupture with the past and more a rebalancing of authority, bringing decision-making closer to where academic work actually happens.

The enhanced governance model of UNITA consists of reinforcing political guidance and decision-making through the formation of dedicated political boards of Vice-Rectors and enhancing Vice-Rectors' involvement while retaining operational efficiency. The Vice-Rectors' Boards were designed to serve several functions, such as providing political guidance to the alliance co-leaders and task co-leaders, ensuring effective deployment of the UNITA mission and vision, delivering strategic feedback on developing the alliance milestones and deliverables, and building a community of practice among Vice-Rectors actively engaged in the alliance, while ensuring continuous support to Rectors in relation to UNITA governance.

This reflects UNITA's evolution to a second phase model for an institutionalized European university, responding to several challenges identified during the first phase of implementation, at the UNITA meeting held at the University of Brescia in October 2024.

The management structures and roles are defined and described in several documents as follow:

- **Governance Board (GB):** it is the final decision maker of the Alliance, in charge of the overall steering of the UNITA and constellation projects, strategic and political decision making and budget decisions, based on the reports from the Management Committee (MC), recommendations from the Quality and Evaluation Board (QEB), and advice from the Students Assembly (AS), and the Associated Partners (AP).
- **Vice-Rectors'/Vice-Presidents' Board (VR/VP Board):** it is established to provide high-level oversight and strategic feedback while maintaining the established operational work packages. It is organized around five groups of strategies and related tasks: Education and Pedagogy Innovation; Research

and Innovation; International Strategies and European values; Communities Building; Quality, Impact, and Sustainability.

- **Management Committee (MC)**: it is the operational decisional body, creating links between decisions and actions and/or instances, in charge of the overall coordination for the UNITA project implementation, operational decision-making and budget compliance. It is also responsible for monitoring the TTs work by means of Task progress continuous reporting.
- **Students Assembly (SA)**: it is a participative consultative body, where students have a core role for the overall steering of the project, strategic decision making, and budget decision. It is self-ruled by the students' community, and nominates 2 representatives per TT, 2 in the GB, and 2 in the QEB. Through the SA, the students' involvement in the creation and management of the Alliance is ensured.
- **UNITA Offices (UO)**: they are the operational structure of UNITA, coordinated by a UNITA Office Coordinator and ensure the smooth roll-out of day-by-day activities in all the action lines of the Alliance. As local actors in each university, they play a central role in the integration of UNITA actions into the partners' academic and administrative life. They embody the presence of the Alliance in the universities and are a landing point for UNITA students and staff involved in mobility programmes and in shared activities, as well as a connection point with other projects of the UNITA Constellation, associated partners, and other possible external actors.
- **Legal Entity / European Economic Interest Grouping (LE / EEIG)**: The EEIG is designed as a tool to serve UNITA and to facilitate the cooperation between its members, while remaining under their control. The EEIG conducts its actions respecting the specificity of each of its members, therefore, its social purpose remains auxiliary to the institutional activities of its members. The EEIG develops a shared governance, based on a permanent structure and a project approach, defined by the mutual agreement of the member universities of the UNITA alliance. The EEIG must enable the UNITA members to offer their students training and courses of excellence (especially multidisciplinary courses) and to build, for the benefit of their researchers, strengthened partnerships capable of promoting innovation in their territories, within a European framework. The main objective of the EEIG is to assist its members in the creation of a strong balance of higher education, research and innovation.
- **Executive Coordinator (EC)**: coordinates the project daily and oversees the good functioning of the governance by linking partners together and by effectively supporting their dialogue and interaction.
- **Agile Project Managers (APM)**: is pivotal in supporting and guiding Work Packages and Task Teams across the alliance. This role focuses on ensuring effective project management, fostering collaboration, managing interdependencies, and driving the successful implementation of agile practices in a multi-institutional environment.
- **Work Package Leaders (WPL)**: The Co-leader of the Work Package (WPL) is required to create and maintain over time the conditions to allow the Task

Teams to focus on achieving the assigned objectives. The WPL supervises the complete finalization of each team's activity plans in accordance with the schedule, in constant liaison with the WPL partner.

- **Task-Team Co-Leaders (TTL):** The Task Team Co-leader (TTL) must be able to create and maintain over time the conditions to allow the Task team to focus on achieving the assigned objectives. The TL is responsible for the complete finalization and on time of the team's activity plans, in constant liaison with the TL partner.
- **Task-Team Members (TT):** The Task Team (TT) member is required to contribute to the execution of the tasks assigned to the team according to schedule. Each TT implements the subtasks described in its Gantt chart, carrying out the activities also by specific working groups (WGs).

The relations between different bodies and levels of governance are very well designed and structured. The rules and responsibilities are presented in the UNITA Agile Management Guide, approved in 2024, a very useful tool available for all UNITA members. The structure of the governance and operational bodies is clear and solid, and the governance model demonstrates the shift from a project-oriented to an institution-oriented approach, which should lead to transforming UNITA into a Confederative University, as a result of the Brescia Declaration, inspired by the confederal approach. This model provides for a common governance regime, while exercising the prerogatives and missions of each member university. Reaching the ideal equilibrium between the needed levels of centralisation and decentralisation on governance seems to be the key challenge.

Although new institutional tools are positive in enhancing the level of students' involvement, like the elections for a representative and their participation in several management boards, the effectiveness of their involvement still depends on local and specific task team's dynamism. Still, UNITA is not known by all regular students, reducing the effectiveness of new governance instruments. Likewise, no specific mechanisms have emerged to ensure staff could contribute in building the alliance.

The model is still in progress, and is based on doing by learning and learning by doing. One of the shortcomings of this model, as perceived during the interviews made in Guarda, is that governance effectiveness is dependent on a multilevel structure. If this is a natural part of a multi-institutional university like UNITA, and of each member's vertical administration structure, the design of transversal guidelines and good practices, that could provide a stronger harmonization of procedures, could result in a more effective and harmonized governance.

This could be aggravated by the enlargement of institutional members. If this is an added value for the alliance's future, it is also a challenge, given the enhanced diversity of institutional cultures, thus requiring deeper and more detailed common governance procedures, to build cohesion on strategic policies and management.

The confederative model, having the virtue to respect autonomy and the different institutional cultures and decision-making, may also risk to lead to a slow pace of

decision-making at alliance level. Deepening institutional commonness is desirable to emerge from UNITA's institutional diversity, based on a principle of subsidiarity.

[Documents: Evolution of the UNITA Phase 2 Governance Model; D1.2_UNITA_Management_Guide]

d) The alliance demonstrates effective involvement with key stakeholders and the local community to foster societal engagement, diversity and inclusiveness of students and staff, as well as their entrepreneurial key competences.

According to its mission, UNITA aims to strengthen collaboration between European universities to promote innovation, sustainability, and mobility within rural and cross-border communities. Collaboration with key stakeholders is crucial to achieve this goal. To design the best educational offer and develop tailored communication and involvement strategies for each, in 2024 UNITA realized the Map of Stakeholders, aimed to identify all stakeholders at local, regional, national, European, and international levels. This Map is a useful tool for all UNITA participants, that should lead to developing tailored strategies to engage relevant stakeholders and ensure ongoing attention and involvement.

Another very important step was the election of SA in March 2025, ensuring the real engagement of this category of stakeholders to all UNITA activities. This process was very important, student's involvement gaining more value as their representativeness has been legitimated, thus having a clearly defined role in the alliance. During the meeting with students' representatives, a real and full inclusion at every decisional and operative level emerged. For instance, students from the Students Assembly are also appointed in every UNITA Boards. Their involvement in political and organizational matters is perceived as effective, however with different degrees in some bodies. Some issues were stressed, some students feeling that their opinion is not necessarily considered, including in the matters related to educational initiatives. On the other hand, students involved in the Ethical Committee believe they are treated equally to other members. Another issue would be the rather low awareness of UNITA among students, thus not necessarily acknowledging the importance of participating in the electoral process.

Alongside the students, another important category is External Stakeholders. During the meeting with external stakeholders, a strong collaboration was stressed. Since 2021, UNITA has established a good communication flow with external stakeholders. On the other hand, the connections result to be local or national, and most of the participating external stakeholders limit their activity to the closest UNITA HEI of their region. A consolidated collaboration is recorded in terms of involving students, including PhD students, in the specific activities of the various stakeholders, including those related to research and rural mobilities. It was identified that, some of the activities developed by the students in joint actions with UNITA stakeholders, help them develop key entrepreneurial competences, such as specific skills and behaviours that allow them to identify opportunities, turn ideas into actionable ventures, and adapt to challenges. About the external stakeholders' involvement in the UNITA QA Policies, some of them have formal meetings with local UNITA HEI to

identify the needs of the local communities which can be further addressed. However, collection of their insights appear to be much more active on the Rural Mobilities that they were hosts, than in other components of local interests.

External stakeholders are invited to matching events, but they would be interested in meeting other external partners as well as exchanging good practices with the other UNITA members than the institution with which they have individual partnerships. External stakeholders' feedback is collected, mostly on a need's basis (e.g. in an annual meeting to follow-up agreements with universities), more than according to a systematic process. UNITA lacks an approach of external stakeholders' assessment to UNITA activities beyond the rural mobilities. Mechanisms to ensure the promotion of social engagement, diversity, and inclusion among staff appear to be underdeveloped. In turn, the promotion of entrepreneurial skills appears to be better established, although not equally distributed, as revealed by the meeting with external stakeholders. Overall, they feel supported, heard, and they perceive that they can participate in the improvement mechanisms of the Alliance.

[Documents: MS07_Map of stakeholders]

2.2.1. Aspects that are already developed:

- A clear strategic work-plan and core quality objectives are in place, with ambitious goals such as building an institutionalized university model, developing international study paths and ensuring long-term sustainability.
- A clear, solid structure of operational and decisional bodies has been defined and implemented, with effective distribution of responsibilities across the alliance (Governance Board, Management Committee, UNITA Offices), based on high-level political guidance from Rectors and Vice-Rectors, thus allowing for the establishment of a robust community of practice.
- Ensuring legitimacy of the Student Assembly following the elections of students' representatives across the alliance.
- Development of core frameworks to support educational initiatives and mobility mechanisms.
- Successful establishment of a legal entity in the form of European Economic Interest Grouping (UNITA EEIG), as the alliance's legal support structure to institutionalize cooperation, manage cross-border initiatives and employ core personnel.

2.2.2. Aspects that are partially developed:

- The implementation of the EEIG's objectives is still to be developed.
- While initiatives exist to bust joint education provision, their implementation is heavily influenced and dependent on specific institutional contexts and national regulations.

- Collaboration with external stakeholders is active, but focused mainly to bilateral partnerships with individual UNITA member institutions. A cohesive, alliance-level external partners networks is only partially developed.

2.2.3. Aspects that were started to be developed:

- A unified quality assurance system implementation has started, but experiencing limitations due to various organisational cultures across member institutions.
- Through UNITA GEIE, centralized IT infrastructure has been initiated, but is still to be operating at its full capacity.
- A broad range of cooperation activities and initiatives involving academic staff through diverse interaction mechanisms is already in place. However, the process of consolidating the involvement of teaching staff in the co-creation of the alliance has to be formalized, to ensure their active contribution.

2.2.4. Aspects that still need to be developed:

- Ensuring stable human resources for administrative support is still challenging, in the partial absence of permanent/ unlimited contracts, high turnover and extra workload for staff already engaged in other local activities.
- Students' representatives' involvement at all levels of implementation is still to be addressed, while means to increase awareness of the UNITA development among regular students are still to be identified and implemented.
- Implementation of a systematic external stakeholders' involvement in the works of the alliance is still needed across the alliance, based on the assessment of these stakeholders' needs.

Overall,

UNITA has clearly developed its core mechanisms, legal channels, decision-making, and operational structures to ensure the co-creation of a European university, which are deeply embedded into the institutional members. Given the highly active and mature character of the policy implementation mechanisms, the criterion is already developed.

Recommendations for further improvement:

- Facilitate and ensure the active involvement of students' and staff's representatives at all the levels and structures of UNITA, with increased attention to timely availability of documents for consultation and preparation of dossiers, and active promotion of student engagement in meetings.

- Increase the allocation of human, financial, and IT resources to the UNITA Offices to match the high workload and technical requirements of data collection for UNITApedia.
- Ensure a stronger involvement of external stakeholders in the implementation of UNITA's strategy and policies, beyond the current collaboration, more concentrated on rural mobilities, with UNITA's individual member universities at local and regional level.
- Ensure an active participation of external stakeholders in quality assurance policy.
- Enhance UNITA internal communication strategy, for the promotion of a common transnational academic identity, as well as for ensuring the academic communities' and students' awareness of the alliance and their active involvement in its activities, including their involvement and participation in the electoral process.
- Conducting a study on organisational culture in all UNITA institutions, to help reduce the risk related to this aspect in the development of a unified QA system.
- Develop specific tailored administrative and good governance guidelines and workflow procedures for different management structures and specific tasks across the administrative flow of UNITA.
- Improve the communication bridge between UNITA Offices and the Student Assembly, particularly regarding the harmonization of election procedures and brand recognition.
- Increase the number of joint educational programs (Bachelor and Master), moving beyond "UNITA-labels" for double degrees to fully integrated joint UNITA degrees.
- Continue efforts to attract additional funds beyond those from public funding.
- Clearly define concrete long-term financial commitments from each partner, clarifying exactly how much each university contributes to the GEIE post-project.
- Design and implement policies that ensure all partners, regardless of institutional size or geographic location, have equal access to research funding and UNITA-specific grants.
- Develop institutional strategies to transition UNITA Offices staff from short-term, project-related contracts to permanent positions, ensuring the retention of specialized trained and acquired skills within the Alliance.
- Develop a system where "local" opportunities of collaborations with external stakeholders (rural mobilities, joint PhD, etc.) may be easily expanded (scaled) to other UNITA partners with similar needs (or involve other UNITA partners);
- Increase the allocation of human, financial, and IT resources to the UNITA Offices to match the high workload and technical requirements of data collection for UNITApedia.

2.3 Evaluation and Monitoring

The European University guarantees the effectiveness of its policy implementation for the benefit of the quality of provision (teaching and learning with links to research, innovation and service to society), by organising appropriate evaluation and quality monitoring systems.

Recommendations on further developments and quality enhancement from the previous external evaluation:

- *Implementation of the conclusions drawn from the monitoring process of project development (in terms of progress tracking) into the alliance processes aimed for the development of the inter-connected campus.*
- *Feedback collection has started to be implemented for UNITA's activities (for example, regarding students' participation in BIPs and rural mobilities), but a thorough analysis of the received feedback has to be conducted in order to improve the alliance's activities based on the beneficiaries' experiences. Therefore, the alliance must ensure that the feedback collected from beneficiaries of different activities (including mobility for students, researchers, academics and administrative staff) is analysed and used for the enhancement of future activities, in order to deliver data-driven solutions for improvement.*
- *It is necessary to generate strong interactions within the institutions which are collecting information and feedback during all stages of the project, in order to ensure an active involvement of all stakeholders in the process of connecting the management model to the internal and external QA activities.*
- *Intensify the efforts to fully automate the integration of UNITA specific activities within the corresponding diploma supplements, as a result of inter-university cooperation for the development of common curricula, as well as a monitoring instrument for the collaboration inside the alliance.*
- *A more in-depth analysis regarding the financial sustainability of the alliance should be conducted, in order to ensure the correlation of proposed objectives with the quality of teaching & learning and research processes.*
- *The Quality and Evaluation Board should have a more meaningful role in monitoring the quality assurance of UNITA's proposed objectives in terms of teaching and learning, research and administrative activities. In this regard, a more comprehensive approach to quality assurance of the alliance as an inter-connected campus should be considered, while enhancing cooperation with the UNITA management in order to ensure that QA is part of the strategic planning and implementation.*

Reference points:

- a) The alliance has developed an evaluation and monitoring system that includes specific measures for the evaluation of progress, processes, deliverables and cost efficiency of the alliance, and provides relevant information pertaining to all policy domains, allowing for effective governance and decision-making.**

The UNITA Alliance has successfully transitioned its monitoring framework from a fragmented, project-based approach to an integrated Quality Assurance Plan (QAP) 2023–2027 that mirrors its maturing confederative structure. By establishing the Quality and Evaluation Board (QEB) as a central oversight body, the alliance transforms the monitoring of progress, processes, and deliverables into a strategic tool for institutional governance. The alignment of the QA system with the five thematic strategy groups (coordinated by Vice-Rectors) allows for a governance model that connects high-level rectors' decisions and the operational reality of individual task teams. The registered increase in compliance demonstrates a measurable, documented culture of continuous improvement.

The Quality Review Checklist (QRC) is used as the main tool, without being exclusive, for the monitoring system. The QRC has been extensively revised to reduce administrative burden while increasing strategic relevance. Monitoring ensures that synergistic effects and cost efficiencies are tracked across the entire UNITA ecosystem. The use of structured follow-up tables, with clear responsible persons and deadlines, ensures a clear flow of action-taking, enabling direct QA feedback to UNITA management.

Another important part of the alliance's monitoring system is the Impact Observatory and its technological flagship, UNITApedia. This data warehouse serves as a repository for both quantitative and qualitative indicators, facilitating evidence-based planning across all policy domains. While currently still under development regarding full public accessibility, the system already provides the UNITA Governance Board with critical dashboards that correlate its output with future strategies.

The evaluation system also includes a Satisfaction Barometer, which systematically captures feedback from students, academic staff, and external stakeholders. According to the meetings and discussions held during the on-site visit, it was confirmed that these feedback loops are operational, particularly regarding high-visibility activities within UNITA, such as Blended Intensive Programs (BIPs) and Rural Mobilities.

UNITA demonstrated a proactive approach to monitoring cost efficiency and long-term financial sustainability. Through the implementation of a dedicated financial tracking tool (the "Financial Sustainability Excel") and a mentoring system, the alliance evaluates the realistic costs of its activities. The GEIE (European Grouping of Economic Interest) acts as the financial monitoring hub, scouting for diversified funding opportunities and testing the scalability of joint initiatives. This focus ensures that strategic decisions regarding the joint educational offer or research hubs are grounded in economic reality, protecting the alliance from possible future financial difficulties.

Finally, the alliance's monitoring system is designed to support the "Brescia Declaration" and the transition toward a full European University by 2034. By utilizing the Quality Review Checklist (QRC) every six months, UNITA ensures a continuous cycle of remediation and improvement. This system provides the Management Committee with a fast and effective response required to manage a complex and

extended alliance. While the evaluation and monitoring system is still influenced by its project-based origins, the current shift toward assessing the integrated educational environment demonstrates a true understanding of the European Approach to QA, positioning UNITA as a leader in cross-border institutional integration.

[Documents: Quality Review Reports of UNITA – Phase II Project; Follow-up to third Quality Review Report; Quality Assurance Plan (QAP) 2023–2027; Quality Review Checklist (QRC); Financial Sustainability Excel]

- b) The scope of the evaluation and monitoring system includes the application of innovative pedagogical models; the links between education and research and innovation (e.g. how research results and innovation feeds back into education); and, the measurement of the appropriateness and impact of mobility (for students and researchers as well as for academic and administrative staff), including mobility with other organisations than higher education institutions.**

The Impact Observatory methodology and the revised survey campaign (October 2025) specifically target the appropriateness of Rural Mobility and the innovative pedagogical models proposed. By presenting the 1st Quality Review Report of 2025 in person to different members in Pamplona, the alliance ensured that UNITA researchers and educators directly engaged with the data. However, while the methodology is sound, the challenge remains in fully automating the feedback loop via UNITAmedia to ensure that research-driven innovations are reflected in the UNITA educational catalogue (especially joint educational proposals).

The UNITA evaluation system has successfully integrated the monitoring of non-traditional educational formats, specifically through the phased implementation of micro-credentials and the UNITA Label for double degrees. With 17 micro-credentials already active and a target of 60 by the next cycle, the alliance utilizes a two-phase call system that allows the Quality and Evaluation Board (QEB) to refine pedagogical criteria based on initial results. A key strength of this monitoring is the focus on inter-comprehension and "UNITA a la carte" offerings, which are evaluated not just on completion rates, but on their ability to redesign the academic curriculum toward a more flexible, student-centered European model.

The alliance conforms its educational offer within six thematic Research Hubs. The monitoring system will track the transition of research outputs into educational offerings through the UNITA Graduate School (UGS) - still under development, which will serve as a conceptual bridge between graduate and postgraduate levels. However, although according to discussion with UNITA representatives during the on-site visit it was observed that the explicit feedback loop, where specific research results dictate new course content, is still maturing, the evaluation framework already captures the impact of Starting and Advanced Grants that require participation from at least three partner universities. This ensures that joint educational programs are not merely administrative agreements but are academically driven by the alliance's shared scientific cartography.

UNITA measures the appropriateness of mobilities through targeted surveys and a Satisfaction Barometer. The scope includes students, researchers, and administrative staff, with a particular emphasis on Blended Intensive Programs (BIPs), with more than 100 already implemented across UNITA. The mobility monitoring system allowed to identify critical qualitative barriers (such as the lack of automatic credit recognition in specific regions (e.g., France); exam schedule overlaps; etc.), translating into an effective QA system that is able to provide the UNITA Governance Board with the necessary data to promote further regulatory harmonization across the partner Universities.

A distinctive feature of UNITA's monitoring scope is the evaluation of mobility involving non-HEI organizations, specifically through its pioneering Rural Mobility program. With over 400 applications in 2026, the alliance evaluates the impact of professional internships in border and mountain regions by surveying both the students and the local partners (local businesses and NGOs). This way, it is measured how well the mobility aligns with the needs of rural communities, ensuring that the alliance fulfils its mission of service to society.

The comprehensive nature of UNITA's evaluation system is finalized by its ability to translate mobility and pedagogical data into institutional recommendations. The creation of a dedicated working group for the Quality Management System (QMS) of mobility services highlights a commitment to standardizing procedures across the alliance. By integrating findings from the Impact Observatory into the annual Self-Assessment Reports (SAR), the alliance ensures that the measurement of impact - whether it is the societal benefit of a rural internship or the innovative edge of a research-driven Master's - directly feeds into the next strategic decision. This cyclical approach is essential for achieving the alliance's goal of a fully integrated European University by 2034.

c) The system of regular internal and external evaluations ties in with the management model pursued and is characterized by an active role of students, staff, alumni, the professional field and external independent experts.

In terms of internal quality assurance processes of the alliance, UNITA started developing a Self-Evaluation Report (SER), which is aimed to be published annually, based on the progress of the alliance and the status of implementation of recommendations raised from the identified issues. The SER is developed by the QEB which includes UNITA partners' representatives and one external quality assurance agency representative, task team members responsible for quality assurance, one student and one QEB office representative.

The SER covers four main areas of interest, namely the description of (1) Strategy and Policies, the status of (2) Policy Implementation on different topics such as governance and management, education and pedagogical innovation, research and innovation, internationalisation, community building, quality, impact and sustainability, (3) Evaluation and Monitoring and (4) Improvement Policy, also taking into consideration the alliance's long-term sustainability and quality culture for continuous improvement. Based on the identified issues and formulated recommendations,

follow-up actions are defined. The stage of development of SERs periodically is still incipient, therefore the impact of the alliance's internal assessment and the implementation of recommendations based on this document is still to be evaluated in the future. At the moment, quality policy is still mainly relating to the project, but is in the process of moving forward to the Alliance paradigm. This is being implemented with the redefinition of criteria for satisfaction surveys, of which results have started being used. The next step is to define surveys on governance and external stakeholders. For this assessment, a clearer definition of the confederation models seems to be positive, in order to move from a quality assurance on project deliverables to a mission of a joint European University.

A standout feature of the 2025–2026 monitoring cycle is the significant increase in stakeholder response rates, indicating a deeper involvement from the UNITA community. The system now incorporates a wider view, including the Student Assembly, the Governance Board, and external QA agencies from across the partner countries. Additionally, benchmarking against national QA agencies is an extremely useful practice.

UNITA's system of regular internal evaluations is correlated to its evolving confederative management model. The annual Self-Assessment Reports (SARs) provided by the UNITA Quality and Evaluation Board (QEB) serve as the primary evidence-based steering documents for the Governance Board (Rectors) and the Vice-Rector networks. This ensures that the transition toward a permanent legal entity (GEIE) is monitored in real-time.

The active role of students within UNITA is structuralized through the Student Assembly and their mandated presence in all major UNITA governing bodies. According to the meetings with students and student representatives, it was revealed that students perceive their involvement as having significantly improved post-election, feeling a genuine sense of community and impact. However, for students to act as true co-creators of quality, the alliance must resolve inconsistencies in information equity.

The UNITA alliance manages to involve both academic and administrative staff in the Quality Review Checklist (QRC) development and implementation as well as in the thematic task teams. This distributed responsibility fosters a shared quality culture across all partners of the Alliance. UNITA staff are not only subjects of evaluation but active participants in the Quality Review Reports, providing data and validating indicators. However, the heavy reliance on short-term, project-based contracts for UNITA Office staff across all partners, still remains a major institutional risk. Addressing this through the proposed transition to permanent institutional roles is essential to ensure the long-term consistency and the retention of valuable trained staff within the alliance.

UNITA demonstrates a high level of transparency by systematically integrating external independent experts into its evaluation cycles. Beyond the ARACIS external reviews, the alliance engages stakeholders for independent policy assessment (as it was confirmed during the on-site visit and discussions) and uses the Rural Mobility

framework to capture feedback from socio-economic actors (such as local businesses and NGOs). These external stakeholders provide important feedback on the alliance's societal impact. The system's maturity is shown in its ability to adapt calls and learning agreements based on this external feedback, ensuring that UNITA's activities remain relevant to the labour market and territorial needs.

Ultimately, the alliance's evaluation system serves as the diagnostic engine for the "Brescia Declaration" and the 2034 vision of a unified European University. The system's maturity is evident in its self-critical capacity; the QEB has identified the need to move beyond project-logic and has recommended a more defined confederative-type architecture to further streamline QA. By maintaining this regular, multi-layered evaluation cycle and incorporating students, staff, and external stakeholders, UNITA ensures that its evolution is validated by the entire ecosystem it seeks to transform.

[Documents: Quality Review Reports of UNITA – Phase II Project; Annual Self-Assessment Reports (SAR)]

d) The alliance monitors whether enhanced cooperation is sustained across different levels and areas of activity, building on complementary strengths and synergetic effects of the alliance's network.

The monitoring of the "UNITA Constellation" projects (ReUNITA, ConnectUNITA, etc.) is the primary evidence that cooperation is sustained across different levels within UNITA. By applying the QRC to these satellite projects, the alliance monitors whether the complementary strengths of the network are being leveraged beyond the core of the project currently financing UNITA.

This approach also ensures that financial and human resources are optimized. The findings of the 2nd Quality Review Report 2025 show that the alliance is increasingly capable of managing this complex system through a centralized QA policy that still respects institutional diversity.

UNITA ensures that enhanced cooperation is sustained through a complex, multi-tiered governance structure that has successfully transitioned from a project-based to a confederative-type model.

The monitoring of this cooperation is based on the five Vice-Rector Strategy Networks, a management model that encourages synergies under shared strategies, reduces soloed thinking and moves closer to a governance model for a future European University based on the main dimensions: Research, Education, International, and Quality Assurance. This structure allows the alliance to monitor collaboration not just at the leadership level, but across the critical management layer of all partner institutions. By establishing the GEIE (European Grouping of Economic Interest), UNITA has moved beyond temporary cooperation toward a permanent legal framework, which the Quality and Evaluation Board (QEB) monitors to ensure that joint decision-making is consistent, transparent, and resilient to institutional changes.

The alliance's monitoring system explicitly tracks how the network builds on the complementary strengths of its members through the six Thematic Research Hubs. These hubs were founded based on a scientific cartography exercise that identified

the unique expertise of each partner university. Cooperation is measured and incentivized through the UNITA Starting and Advanced Grants, which requires participation from at least three different UNITA partners. The QEB monitors the output of these hubs - such as joint PhD co-tutelles (56 Co-tutelle so far and 42 new co-tutelle), and shared laboratory access - to ensure that the synergy isn't just theoretical, but results in a competitive, integrated research environment that no single institution could achieve by itself.

At the administrative and operational level, UNITA relies mainly on the network of UNITA Offices. These offices serve as the local engines of cooperation, and the evaluation system assesses their ability to function as a single, harmonized unit. The recent recommendation to move toward a unique model of UNITA offices across all partners reflects a proactive monitoring approach aimed at eliminating institutional isolation. By evaluating the human resource flow and the sharing of best practices among administrative staff, the alliance ensures that cooperation among all partner universities remains agile and that it is embedded in the daily work culture of the UNITA staff.

Finally, the alliance utilizes UNITApedia and the Impact Observatory to provide a data-driven verification of sustained cooperation. This system collects indicators across different aspects of UNITA's functioning, allowing the QEB to visualize the density of collaboration in various policy domains. While currently refining the public transparency of this data, the internal monitoring already allows the Management Committee to identify which areas of the network are achieving high synergy and which require further intervention. This high-level monitoring ensures that the proposed future confederative approach is backed by empirical evidence, allowing UNITA to continuously optimize the complementary strengths of its network.

[Documents: Quality Review Reports of UNITA – Phase II Project; Annual Self-Assessment Reports (SAR)]

2.3.1. Aspects that are already developed:

- The transition from fragmented monitoring to an integrated Quality Assurance Plan (QAP) overseen by the Quality Evaluation Board (QEB) is already established, through the development of periodical Quality Review Reports (QRR).
- Feedback loops for joint activities such as Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) and rural mobilities are fully operational, gathering data from students, academics and external hosts.
- Financial sustainability is monitored through financial tracking mechanisms, alongside internal institutional monitoring systems to assess real costs and sustainability.
- Systems are in place to actively monitor and track educational and research joint initiatives, as well as UNITA Constellation projects aimed at supporting the work of the alliance.

2.3.2. Aspects that are partially developed:

- The UNITAPedia and Impact Observatory provide data to internal structures such as the Governance Board, thus being partially developed regarding its goal to ensure full public accessibility and transparency.
- The monitoring systems collect quantitative and partially qualitative data, however the automation layer is still partially developed to ensure that data is fed into strategy development.
- The UNITA Offices act as a mean of cooperation across the alliance, while transition to a unified office model across all member institutions is still ongoing.

2.3.3. Aspects that were started to be developed:

- The framework of annual Self-Evaluation Report (SER) has started to be developed by the QEB, and is aimed at assessing the status of alliance-level policy implementations and recommendations.
- The redefinition of satisfaction surveys to shift focus from only checking project deliverables towards evaluating the inclusion into a European university has started to be developed.
- Development has begun on the UNITA Graduate School (UGS) to serve as the structural and conceptual bridge tracking the transition of research outputs into educational offerings between graduate and postgraduate levels. This is one of the most highly regarded and strategically important measures at the European level, and it should be supported through to its full implementation.

2.3.4. Aspects that still need to be developed:

- While the elections for the Student Assembly has provided a genuine sense of belonging and representativeness, the alliance has yet to ensure the active involvement of students in the co-creation of the alliance from both a strategic and operational perspective.
- Institutional risks posed by non-permanent or temporary administrative staff still have to be mitigated, through the development of concrete pathways to transition from short-term, project-based staff into permanent institutional roles.
- The confederative university model, once established, still has to be developed through clearly defined architecture to further streamline and unify its cross-institutional QA processes in alignment with the Brescia Declaration. This also represents a unique initiative at the European level that should be brought to full completion in order to become a validated good governance practice for alliances seeking proven models.

Overall,

UNITA has provided a mature, cyclic monitoring architecture through core monitoring mechanisms and internal feedback systems, thus providing quantitative and qualitative data to be fed into strategic development and operational processes.

Therefore, the criterion is already developed.

Recommendations for further improvement:

- Accelerate the shift of the Quality Assurance system from a project-monitoring logic to a comprehensive alliance-approach that focuses on the long-term institutional mission.
- Define a clear, long-term strategy for joint programmes development and scale successful models across the Alliance so all partners benefit from existing accreditation successes.
- Establish formal mechanisms to ensure research results from the thematic hubs are explicitly and systematically fed back into the design of new educational proposals (especially joint educational proposals).
- Harmonize academic regulations to ensure automatic recognition of Blended Intensive Programs (BIPs) within the core curricula of all partners.
- Improve proactive communication with external rural partners to clarify the professional internship scope of mobilities, preventing misunderstandings regarding the purpose of the stay.
- Update the mobility selection and implementation calendars to avoid overlaps with exam periods at different partners, reducing student dropout rates for virtual and rural mobilities.

2.4 Improvement Policy

The European University takes measures to improve the realisation of its policy objectives and the sustainability of the alliance.

Reference points:

- a) The alliance pursues an active improvement policy based on the outcomes of its evaluations, thereby demonstrating its ability to innovate and adapt in order to improve.**

Based on the PDCA Cycle, UNITA has developed and implemented systematic internal evaluations conducted periodically, based on the recommendations received during the external quality assurance evaluation from 2023 and the internal findings. The Quality Review Reports (QRR) are developed annually, being focused on the review of key alliance activities' compliance, identified issues and proposed recommendations for improvement. These QRRs are developed with the involvement of the Project Manager, Task Team on Quality Assurance, UNITA Offices, Work Package Leaders, Task Team Co-leaders, Governance and External Stakeholders

(Rectors, Rural Mobility Institutions, Quality Assurance Agencies) and Beneficiaries (students, staff, teachers, researchers), and finally approved by the Quality Evaluation Board which is also responsible for the coordination of the process. Each of the groups involved are responsible for gathering information and data related to the activities implementation status, to be fed into the reports. The data monitoring and information collection processes are supervised by the Vice Rectors with attributes depending on the type of activity, including ongoing common projects from the UNITA constellation, which could be related to research, capacity building or education components development. However, it was emphasized that, given the considerable amount of data being collected by the UNITA Offices, a stronger IT support would be needed. The recommendations provided by the QRRs are aimed at improving the leadership, communication and support processes for the development of educational components, joint research and innovation at alliance level, but also to contribute to the construction of the inter-university campus.

[Documents: Quality Review Reports of UNITA – Phase II Project; Follow-up to third Quality Review Report]

b) The alliance demonstrates its capability for long-term sustainability, outlining how each member of the alliance will contribute to its sustainability and reducing existing (administrative) obstacles.

For administrative sustainability purposes, UNITA has established the European Economic Interest Grouping ([UNITA GEIE](#)), which represents the legal support structure of the alliance.

Its role also includes the facilitation of joint recruitment (for alliance activities support positions such as IT or project support), shared services (lifelong learning and micro-credentials), and decision-making at the alliance level. It is structured into a Governance Strategic Board, a Management Board and a Proposal and Steering Committee, and is aimed at supporting the alliance's strategic vision and long-term objectives, through autonomous management of funds, participation to EU or national competitive procedures, establishment of employment and supply contracts, establishment of partnerships with companies, public institutions and non-profit entities. Initially comprised of the six partners from the initial project phase, UNITA GEIE managed to include all 10 full partners in its structure and consult with the 2 associate partners of the alliance.

Moreover, through the adoption of the Brescia Declaration, which represents the commitment to build a confederative university, it was proved that UNITA has started moving its focus from the project-based approach to an integrated alliance of European universities.

As emphasized in the interviews held during the site visit, the universities' management feeling was the change of mind-set through the adoption of the Brescia Declaration, thus working towards the alliance approach.

Related to financial sustainability, UNITA has developed a Financial Sustainability Plan (in mid-2025) to be updated annually, thus allowing for not only relying on the

European Commission's funds for European Universities Initiative (EUI), but also having a more systematic approach on attracting funds through project applications. This approach is still in an early stage, currently focused on scouting project calls addressing European universities alliances or universities as part of these alliances, therefore the impact is still to be evaluated later on.

[Document: D5.2. UNITA Financial Sustainability Plan]

According to UNITA's Management Guide, long-term sustainability has become one of the alliance's core missions, included in the work of several areas (Governance, management and quality, Developing UNITA communities through UNITA sustainable policies for students and staff). Based on the AGILE project management approach, the UNITA offices' role has been expanded to not only remain of administrative support but to also include contribution to quality processes and active participation in funding strategies. In this regard, each project from the UNITA Constellation has a project manager involved in the UNITA Office. Also, for most of the alliance's areas of work, such as education, research and internationalisation, the persons responsible for UNITA Offices are also teaching or research staff with experience in the field.

[Document: D1.2. UNITA Management Guide]

From the site visit, the cooperation between partner universities was remarked, thanks to the creation of different management, decision-making and executive layers, which sets the basis for long-term sustainability even beyond the project currently supporting the construction of the alliance. However, the initiatives for ensuring long-term sustainability have only recently been developed, therefore their impact is still to be measured.

c) The alliance shares its outputs and good practices with relevant stakeholders.

The alliance's outputs and good practices are shared both internally and externally, depending on the degree of sensitivity. Internal dissemination includes the Annual Self-Assessment Reports published by the Quality Evaluation Board, and the Quality Review Reports for UNITA, as well as Re-UNITA and ConnectUNITA, as additional initiatives supporting research and collaboration in learning and teaching. Following the interviews held during the site visit, it was learnt that the UNITA bodies and representatives are aware of the degree of development of the alliance's strategies and initiatives, which is also supported by the frequency of organising UNITA weeks throughout the year.

The Alliance capitalises also its integrated culture and rationalised governance instruments to facilitate the increment of internationalisation with third parties - this is evident with the Geminae groups, working with UNITA members to promote partnerships and research projects with third parties universities. In the interviews it was clear that the concept of UNITA is appealing to third parties universities, as its common design and integration provides a multilateral forum for dialogue, that is an advantage in comparison to bilateral partnerships.

For external dissemination, the alliance has established the UNITApedia Impact Observatory, which is an online platform where information on the alliance, the project supporting it and the work done, as well as the indicators for each category of stakeholders involved, can be retrieved.

However, the development of UNITApedia is still ongoing, with functionalities to still be developed in order to reach the intended impact. The high potential of this tool is highly recognised by the community, however, its functionality for a more user-friendly experience needs to be improved. The alliance is also represented at EU-funded international events, thus allowing for the possibility of sharing their work with other universities and alliances.

Even though involvement of Internal stakeholders' representatives is ensured throughout UNITA's structures, the alliance's members' staff and students have limited awareness of the alliance's activities and their impact to the development of each individual institution and the desired inter-university campus.

External stakeholders are mainly involved in the policy-making and activities of each individual member with links to UNITA's vision, but have limited awareness and involvement of other partners than the regular ones. Feedback from external stakeholders related to the activities conducted jointly is collected rather on an ad-hoc basis, following the implementation of the activities such as rural mobilities. Moreover, the link between external stakeholders and international students other than the ones enrolled in the universities with already existing partnership ties, is limited to rural mobilities only.

d) The improvement policy pursued by the alliance fosters a quality culture, in which all those involved contribute to innovation and to continuous quality improvement of its provision.

The alliance's structures responsible for the implementation of the quality assurance system, as indicated in the QA Policy, are the Governance Board, Management Committee, Quality and Evaluation Board, Students Assembly, UNITA Offices. The QA system is divided into Project Implementation with quality control and impact assessment measures, QA in UNITA Teaching & Learning, Research and 3rd Mission/ Outreach activities, and Continuous Improvement, Monitoring and Review of the UNITA QA System. The latter is conducted through the Annual Self-Assessment Reports and Quality Review Reports, developed based on QA checklists and measurement of indicators, as well as with the involvement of stakeholders' views through satisfaction surveys (of students and staff, and satisfaction barometer of external stakeholders), and targeted meetings and interviews.

The Quality Assurance activities are conducted based on a multi-annual Quality Assurance Plan (for the period 2023-2027), which clearly defines actions, describes the activities in a precise timeframe and the expected outcomes.

The pursued improvement activities are aimed at fostering a quality culture, although the work of and within the alliance is still to be widely spread among its main beneficiaries and external stakeholders.

[Documents: UNITA Quality Assurance Policy; D1.3 UNITA Quality Assurance Plan Implemented]

2.4.1. Aspects that are already developed:

- UNITA applies a PDCA cycle generating annual Quality Review Reports, which map out compliance, identify core operational issues and allow for the elaboration of improvement recommendations.
- The UNITA GEIE is a fully operational legal entity which managed to integrate all 10 full members and 2 associate partner universities of the alliance, thus providing the means to ensure operational and financial sustainability.
- UNITA has managed to integrate multilevel governance layers to ensure successful day-to-day operations under the guidance of different decision-making layers.
- Mechanisms for internal progress dissemination are established, through annual Self-Evaluation Reports and knowledge sharing during UNITA Weeks,

2.4.2. Aspects that are partially developed:

- UNITAPedia is an online and active platform for centralizing data across the alliance, but requires functional updates to deliver a more user-friendly experience and to ensure public accessibility.
- Involvement of students and staff representatives is established at the level of decision-making structures, but awareness among regular students, teaching and research staff is still partially achieved.
- A comprehensive QA system tackling teaching, research and outreach is establish, but fostering an alliance-level quality culture remains partially developed.

2.4.3. Aspects that were started to be developed:

- The transition to a confederative university has started with the signing and adoption of the Brescia Declaration, which is seen by the external evaluation panel as a significant initiative at the European level that should be brought to completion. The successful implementation of such model has to potential to become a good governance practice for alliances seeking validated models.
- A dynamic sustainability framework has started to be implemented through the annual update of Financial Sustainability Plan.
- The local UNITA Offices have started transitioning from administrative support to proactive hubs that actively co-develop quality assurance workflows and contribute to the participation in funding strategies.
- The collection of feedback from external stakeholders has begun, though it currently operates on an ad-hoc, post-activity basis.

2.4.4. Aspects that still need to be developed:

- A robust IT infrastructure for centralized data needs to continue its development, given the large volume of institutional and quality data gathered from various activities and stakeholders.
- Sustainability initiatives still have to be measured through long-term impact assessment, with academic and curriculum development models that can transcend the mountain and cross-border context and contribute to the core domains of academic content, as well as to broader social and civic priorities.
- Systematic involvement of external stakeholders in feedback loops needs to be ensured at alliance level.

Overall,

UNITA has managed to shift strategically from project-based activities to alliance-driven initiatives, culminating with the ongoing shift towards a confederative model. Given that core structural mechanisms, cyclic review reporting and assessment of strategic frameworks are fully established with a good level of maturity, the criterion is already developed.

Recommendations for further improvement:

- Make use of the information collected through the monitoring activities used for the Quality Review Reports, to ensure proper evidence-based and data-driven solutions are fed into the internal quality assurance processes of the alliance. Given the considerable amount of data collected, robust IT infrastructure is needed.
- Explore the means to survey the opinion of stakeholders, especially students, regarding their perception of recommendations' status of implementation based on the issues identified in the QRR and SER related to the construction and implementation of the alliance as an integral part of the partners' activities.
- Ensure the functionality of UNITApedia as a means to disseminate the alliance's activities and impact to the internal and external stakeholders, taking into account the various levels of sensitivity of information.
- Ensure engagement of external stakeholders in the alliance's activities, and not only in the individual institutions' ones with which they already had previous partnerships.
- Ensure the systematic involvement of stakeholders in the monitoring and periodic review of the alliance's activities to facilitate the provision of feedback, thus tailoring the improvement policy based on the input received.

3. Overall Recommendations

3.1. Strategic recommendations, dealing with the future confederative model, subsidiarity, governance, asymmetries between partners, alliance-level QA, and the long-term development of joint educational provision. These address the future institutional direction of UNITA and the move from a project-based alliance to a more integrated/confederative European University.

- Define a clear implementation roadmap for the confederative model, including stages, responsibilities, decision-making procedures, and expected milestones.
- Clarify the subsidiarity principle between partner universities and the central alliance structures, especially the GEIE/EEIG, so that it is clear which decisions should remain local and which should be taken at alliance level.
- Develop safeguards against asymmetrical development within the alliance, including monitoring mechanisms for differences in institutional capacity, student participation, research involvement, staffing, and access to UNITA opportunities.
- Continue the progressive migration of the QA system from project-monitoring logic to alliance-level, so that QA covers not only deliverables and work packages, but also the long-term mission, governance, education, research, innovation, and societal impact of UNITA.
- Define a long-term strategy for joint educational provision, including joint programmes, UNITA-labelled degrees, micro-credentials, BIPs, lifelong learning offers, and future European Degree-related initiatives.

3.2. Operational recommendations, dealing with UNITA Offices, IT infrastructure, data management, administrative workflows, staffing, mobility calendars, recognition procedures, and feedback loops between monitoring and improvement. These focus on the concrete capacity needed to operationalise UNITA's strategic vision.

- Strengthen the human, financial, administrative, and IT capacity of UNITA Offices, given their central role in coordination, data collection, stakeholder support, communication, and implementation.
- Develop common administrative workflows and operational guidelines for key alliance activities, including mobility, student participation, QA reporting, external stakeholder engagement, and joint educational initiatives.
- Improve IT infrastructure and data management capacity, especially for UNITApedia, the Impact Observatory, QA monitoring, and evidence-based decision-making.
- Ensure stable staffing arrangements for UNITA-related functions, including exploring ways to move from short-term project-based contracts to more sustainable institutional roles where possible.
- Harmonise academic calendars, recognition procedures, and mobility implementation timelines, especially to reduce barriers for BIPs, virtual mobility, rural mobility, and automatic recognition.

- Create clearer feedback loops between monitoring results and improvement actions, so that data collected through Quality Review Reports, satisfaction surveys, and stakeholder consultations directly informs future decisions.

3.3. Engagement and visibility recommendations, dealing with student participation, student awareness, external stakeholders, external communication, advocacy, and UNITA's visibility in European-level communities such as FOREU4ALL. These concern students, staff, external stakeholders, communication, and the broader public profile of UNITA.

- Strengthen student participation beyond formal representation in different UNITA bodies, by ensuring timely access to documents, access to relevant digital platforms, preparation time before meetings, and visible follow-up on student input
- Increase student awareness of UNITA across all partner institutions, especially regarding elections, mobility opportunities, joint learning offers, and the broader value of belonging to the alliance.
- Systematically involve external stakeholders beyond rural mobilities, including local authorities, NGOs, companies, cultural actors, and regional development bodies in strategic feedback, QA processes, and co-creation of activities.
- Continuously improve the alliance-level external communication, with focus on a clear common narrative, target audiences, communication responsibilities, and visibility indicators.
- Professionalize external communication and advocacy, particularly around UNITA's distinctive identity: rural, mountainous, cross-border, multilingual, and Romance-language-based regions.
- Further engage in the FOREU4ALL and other European-level contexts more strategically, to increase UNITA's visibility and share its experience on confederative governance, rural engagement, multilingualism, and alliance-level QA.

4. Conclusions

Since the previous ARACIS evaluation, it is worth highlighting that, from a strategic standpoint, a structural and functional maturity of the Alliance could be observed, reflected both in the diversification of governance structures and in the intensification of horizontal and vertical inter-institutional interactions and relationships.

Through the Brescia Declaration, UNITA has proposed a new philosophy for its structural reconstruction, namely a federative approach inspired by the philosophy underlying the construction of the European Union. This proposal is not only remarkably bold but also unique within FOREU4ALL and is expected to become an example of good practice for other European alliances. Certainly, this decision, which requires meticulous preparation, may also be translated into a genuine branding action. However, a potential risk identified in this approach could be the uneven development across the future federative components of the alliance, and the potentially late introduction of corrective mechanisms, such as “concentric circles of influence” or a “multi-speed federation” (e.g. founding universities, universities located in larger cities or universities with a higher number of students). Undoubtedly, the new model of academic governance includes control mechanisms that, once broadly approved by the UNITA community, must be rigorously specified in the future Founding Act of the Confederation. We appreciated that this is an important milestone/step forward, and an unique initiative across the European alliance which requires the need to progressively include all UNITA members/partners in the GEIE.

The emergence of a new mechanism of functional coordination, with distributed powers at the level of vice-rectors entrusted with executive responsibilities in the areas of education, research, international relations, quality assurance, represents one of the most robust decisions taken so far. It paves the way for a real, gradual, and relatively controlled implementation of decentralization mechanisms, while respecting their natural progression, beginning with the deconcentrating of decisions from the Rectorates toward the Vice-Rectorates, which are more closely aligned with academic tactics.

Regarding the “sense of belonging”, member universities, through all their representatives (both in education and research structures), demonstrate a strong identity as an alliance, expressed through an authentic organizational culture, reinforced by predictable, stable, and meaningful internal communication pathways.

The process of enlarging the alliance in the second phase of the project was carried out with a convergent yet sufficiently homogeneous participation of universities that displayed similarities in structure, size, and regional scope, deeply implemented in order to avoid the risk of fragmentation and heterogeneity. A very positive aspect is that partners that joined the alliance in the second phase are deeply involved in UNITA governing/organization and are strongly committed to UNITA operational success.

UNITA envisions a strategic opening toward the 2034 horizon through mechanisms of trans-institutional harmonization, targeting integrated governance, core mission, supportive strategies, and the involvement of students in dynamic and transformative processes.

From a communication perspective and in relation to the mechanisms used to facilitate an efficient exchange of messages within and beyond the alliance, the external evaluation panel noted that internal communication strategies are currently more clearly defined and more effectively employed than external communication strategies.

We acknowledge UNITA's highly proactive efforts to increase the independence of its applications submitted to the European level through various calls - efforts that demonstrate a strong state of internal cohesion and a heightened sense of confidence in the Alliance's own capabilities and resources (notably the new application submitted under the European Degree call), where the full diversity of academic fields represented within the alliance.

Finally, we recognize the substantial progress made by the Alliance in moving beyond the formal framework of a "project" (a recommendation included in the previous Report, which noted a tendency to prioritize deliverables and WPs). The Alliance has begun to conceptualise and reshape itself according to the expectations of an organizational structure - one supported by a motivated human resource, with a clearly defined sense of belonging, distinct identity values, and strong ethical regulation mechanisms. In place of WPs, transversal lines of trans-institutional action have begun to emerge, and instead of deliverables, we now identify specific actions. We appreciate this transversal comparative dimension - project versus organization - as likely becoming the cornerstone of any future evaluation.

Evaluation panel:

Prof. PhD Romita Iucu, University of Bucharest, Romania

Prof. PhD Giordano Altarozzi, "George Emil Palade" University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science, and Technology of Targu Mures, Romania

Assoc. Prof. PhD Razvan Ionut Ghinea, University of Granada, Spain

Assist. Prof. PhD Dina Sebastiao, University of Coimbra, Portugal

PhD Student: Irina Duma, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania

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Agenda of the External Quality Assurance evaluation of UNITA by ARACIS

Wednesday, March 11th, 2026			
Time interval	Meeting topic	Participants	Format (in person/online)
10:00 - 10:50	Strategies implementation	Vice Rectors of partner universities	In person
11:00 - 11:50	Administration and finances	UNITA Offices, GEIE, Financial sustainability representatives	In person
12:00 - 12:50	Strategic vision of the alliance	Rectors of partner universities	In person
Break			
14:00 - 14:50	Lifelong learning activities	Representatives for Education	In person
15:00 - 15:50	Student views	Student representatives, Students who participated in Rural mobilities, PhD students	In person
16:00 - 16:50	Quality assurance at alliance level	Quality Evaluation Board (QEB) Representatives from QA tasks	In person
17:00 - 18:00	Visit of the premises aimed at supporting the activity of UNITA	UNITA Offices, IPG representatives	In person
Thursday, March 12th, 2026			

Time interval	Meeting topic	Participants	Format (in person/online)
09:00 - 09:50	Research and Innovation	Representatives of R&I activities Representatives of ReUNITA	In person
10:00 - 10:50	Mobilities	Representatives responsible for implementing Rural Mobilities, BIPs, Virtual Mobilities	In person
Wednesday, April 1st, 2026			
15:00-15:50	IT Infrastructure	Representatives of UNITA IT Department	Online
16:00-16:50	International Collaboration	Geminae consortium partners	Online
Friday, April 14th, 2026			
10:00-11:00	External stakeholders	Public authorities, Business community	Online