

# External Reviewing Board Report

**External reviewing in 4EU+ means external evaluation and monitoring of the Alliance’s quality management system on the background of the Alliance’s strategic goals.**

**The External Reviewing Board Report is the final document of this External Reviewing process; it includes both a public and a non-public part. To compose this report, the External Reviewing Board analyses the functioning of the Alliance’s quality management system on the basis of data, reports and results of the Internal Auditing procedure.**



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## Composition of the External Reviewing Board (ERB):

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

Ana Gvritishvili  
Julie Hall  
Maria Kelo  
Terhi Nokkala  
Johannes Schützenhofer

## Meeting Dates:

First meeting of the ERB (transmission of information, data and reports):	12.12.2023
Second meeting of the ERB (clarification of questions):	17.06.2024
Third meeting of the ERB (preparation of on-site visit):	27.09.2024
On-site visit of the ERB:	21. – 25.10.2024
Agreement upon the final External Reviewing Board Report:	05.12.2024



The procedure was coordinated by: **Swantje Schirmer**  
(Alliance Referee for Quality Management)

The coordinator also acted as secretary to the ERB.

All ERB members signed a statement of independence and confidentiality via their contracts and adhere to the 4EU+ No-Conflict-of-Interest Policy.

## Description of the quality management system of 4EU+

4EU+QUALITY is a comprehensive quality management system for all educational activities of the 4EU+ Alliance. It encompasses quality assurance of a minimum standard agreed upon by all members as well as quality enhancement according to the Alliance vision, mission and strategic goals. Its normative basis is the “Mutual Agreement on Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement” that was signed by the Rectors of all member universities in summer 2022. Beyond the commitment to the ESG, this agreement codifies that all cooperation in quality management builds on mutual trust in the existing ESG-compliant quality management systems at each member university. Consequently, 4EU+QUALITY only addresses quality matters beyond the quality assurance of the individual member university where there is jointness in teaching and learning in the educational offer. Nonetheless, as a comprehensive system, it provides common instruments, criteria, and procedures for evaluation and monitoring. All of these components are organised via a PDCA-cycle with the following steps:

As a first step, the 4EU+ Management Committee (MC), **plans (P)** by defining the vision, strategy, and goals of the Alliance. It defines the respective quality management system (QM system), including its nine quality criteria, evaluation instruments, procedures, and responsibilities. The MC communicates all relevant information and decisions widely across the Alliance and the single member universities via the Secretary General who is supported by an Alliance Referee for Quality Management.

In the second step, **the do-phase (D)**, the Alliance as a whole and the single universities take action in line with the Alliance’s vision, strategy, and goals (e.g., creation of new educational activities, creation of joint programmes). These actions go hand in hand with data collection and the assessment of respective data and reports that allow the subsequent evaluation and monitoring of the effects and the success of actions taken. For each of the nine 4EU+ quality criteria, data is gathered via student surveys and/or key performance indicators.

Thirdly, there are four **checking (C)** mechanisms within 4EU+QUALITY to evaluate and to monitor the effects of actions taken.

The (1) initial certification of the offerings as 4EU+ educational activities ensures that an agreed upon minimum standard of quality is guaranteed for the entire 4EU+ educational offer.

The process of (2) Internal Auditing of 4EU+ educational activities by the Academic Council (AC) and the Management Committee (MC) constitutes the Alliance’s internal quality assurance mechanism. The AC, as the internal critical friends of 4EU+, takes up the role of the Internal Auditing Board and as such analyses and interprets the data collected on all educational activities. Based on this analysis, it makes recommendations on how to improve the 4EU+ educational offer. The MC reviews these recommendations and takes decisions on concrete actions and measures.

The process of (3) External Reviewing of the QM system and its effects on educational quality constitutes the Alliance’s external quality assurance mechanism. The five



members of the External Reviewing Board act as external critical friends of 4EU+: they evaluate and monitor the quality management system of the Alliance and give recommendations on how the Alliance can further develop its processes and its quality in line with the Alliance's vision and strategic goals and in line with the European framework. The External Reviewing culminates in an On-Site-Visit. **The present report is the output and result of this process.**

Lastly, a (4) procedure for introducing changes to this QM system exists. Based on the suggestions of, for example, internal QM experts or the critical friends in 4EU+QUALITY, the proposed changes are processed in the Alliance via five steps ensuring comprehensive discussions of the subject matter. The MC takes a final decision on the proposed changes that includes a timeframe for implementing the enhancements.

In the **act-phase (A)**, the Alliance as a whole and the single universities take action and adjust measures in order to further enhance the quality of educational activities within 4EU+ and the QM system itself, based on the recommendations and decisions taken in the check-phase. This again is the basis for refinement and renewal of the vision, the strategy, and the goals of the Alliance.



# INTERNAL PART (FOR THE 4EU+ ALLIANCE ONLY):



### Conclusion and Recommendations for the quality management system of 4EU+

The ERB concludes that **4EU+QUALITY, the quality management system of 4EU+ is fit for purpose.** In light of the maturity of the Alliance, the QM systems is successful in fulfilling its purpose. It is well known and widely appreciated in the Alliance. Thus, with 4EU+QUALITY, the Alliance succeeds in delivering a system that **is as lean as possible and as comprehensive as necessary** and thus manages to **fill the gaps in quality assurance and enhancement** that arise from providing a **novel educational offer on alliance-level.**

The strengths of the system clearly lie in the level of commitment of the 4EU+ community to implementing the system as well as in its approach to pooling resources instead of doubling the work. In addition, the ERB would like to highlight the following good practice: First, creating the Internal Auditing Board as a congruent body to an existing advisory body (the Academic Council) seems to be highly useful and constitutes a lean and efficient way of pooling resources. Second, a university-level reflection on the quality of the educational offer via the so-called University Reflection Reports features as an integral part of the check-component on alliance-level. This constitutes a particularly advanced good practice of quality assurance since it serves as a great source for identifying potential areas for improvements and as a way to share good practice. Third, effective implementation of this lean system on alliance-level is facilitated by a the newly created role of an Alliance Referee for Quality Management.

Nonetheless, the ERB observes potential for improvement in four areas and would like to make the following related recommendations:

The ERB observes high levels of commitment to the QM system in all parts of the Alliance but also acknowledges that there is potential to further work on an even greater alignment of 4EU+QUALITY with the university level. Thus, the **ERB recommends to swiftly ensure the comprehensive integration of the system in all member universities** to enable the Alliance to make full use of its strategic potential.

The ERB observes good communication practices on various dimensions but also sees potential to further enhance communication practices in particular on and within the QM system as well as its integration in the overarching alliance governance. Thus, the **ERB recommends to invest time and resources to create even more meaningful dialogue and communication on the roles and responsibilities** within the QM system and across existing bodies and structures to enhance smooth cooperation. The **ERB also recommends to consider increasing the number of in-person meetings, especially for transversal tasks across bodies and institutions.** The Alliance already makes great strides in informing and engaging diverse students in its work, yet the **ERB recommends to consider how a greater demand for the educational offer can be encouraged via meaningful communication** that raises the awareness about the offer. In a similar vein, there is very good communication



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towards academics in many areas, yet **the ERB recommends to focus on a more targeted communication** towards this group to **increase the awareness of and to further strengthen pedagogical support for academics** teaching in an international classroom (for example via the 4EU+ Centre for Innovative and Digital Teaching and Learning). Lastly, various useful formats to exchange good practice already exist in the Alliance, yet 4EU+ could also benefit from more communication and increasing exchanges with other alliances on good practices.

The ERB is pleased to see the lean and efficient approach to data collection and data analysis but also observes potential to make even better use of this data. **The ERB thus recommends to further strengthen the role of the Alliance Referee for Quality Management as the central node for data collection and data analysis in 4EU+QUALITY.** This also includes to further institutionalise the steps undertaken to follow up on the results of data analysis as well as the steps undertaken to close the feedback loop. The Alliance may, for example, create a ‘you said/we did’-mechanism to close the loop on student surveys once the system has matured. ERB also suggests to explore other means of data collection such as focus groups and face-to-face exchanges in combination with the existing surveys to obtain additional valuable feedback. This could include student bodies on university-level to also inquire the needs of students who did not yet enrol in 4EU+ courses. Relatedly, the ERB suggests to review the contents of the surveys and also include for instance more student outcome data to measure the success of the educational offer once the system has matured.

Beyond 4EU+QUALITY, the ERB would also like to share that it is very pleased to see that the 4EU+ educational offer is highly valued by the students. To further enhance the quality of this educational offer, the **ERB suggest to focus on fewer but more targeted offerings and to define well for each one what strategic objectives they are to meet**, which specific groups they target, and how they benefit the Alliance and its learners. **The ERB suggests that in further tailoring the offer, the Alliance may benefit from an even more strategic usage of the QM system.**



**ANNEX:**

Guiding questions from the European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities (EUniQ; see section „2. Evaluation criteria“; available via

<https://www.nvao.net/nl/attachments/view/european%20framework%20for%20the%20comprehensive%20quality%20assurance%20of%20european%20universities>)

1. What is the European University's vision [here: alliance] on the quality of its education and, where possible, research, innovation and service to society?
2. How will the European University [here: alliance] realise its vision on the quality?
3. How does the European University [here: alliance] monitor to what extent its vision on quality is actually realised?
4. How is the European University [here: alliance] working on improvement?
5. How is the quality of the European University's [here: alliance's] provision assured in an internationally accepted manner, respecting the EHEA principles and objectives?

