

# **4EU+QUALITY**

**The Quality Management  
System of the 4EU+  
European University  
Alliance**

**Additional Information**



## Quality management in the 4EU+ Alliance: shared values of education quality and quality culture

The member universities of the 4EU+ Alliance are united by common values of education quality and a shared quality culture. The common values, also described in the mission statement, set the groundwork on which the collaboration is built.

All universities of the 4EU+ Alliance offer students education of the highest international quality. Students of the member universities obtain in-depth knowledge, experience and competences that will be of lifelong benefit for them and for the European societies.

The 4EU+ Alliance agreed on the following values underpinning the quality of education:

- The Alliance follows the European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).
- The Alliance's understanding of quality is focused on quality assurance as well as continuous quality improvement.
- Mutual trust and recognition is a fundamental principle for the Alliance's practice and view on quality assurance. The Alliance members recognise the quality assurance systems of each other and trust that each member university is capable and competent in assuring quality of educational activities.
- The continuous assurance and development of educational quality on each individual university is the base of the 4EU+ quality assurance, and the procedures of 4EU+ quality assurance are concerned with quality assurance activities on top of the existing systems and practices of the member universities. Therefore, the procedures of the 4EU+ quality assurance only address quality matters beyond the quality assurance of the individual member university.
- All member universities commit to working together to achieve an accreditation of joint programmes. While this commitment relates to national levels as well as to the international and specifically the European level, the member universities' priority on internal quality assurance are taken into account, too.

These values are inherently linked to the Alliance's educational framework that comprises the profile of the 4EU+ students.

The profile defines five fundamental competencies for 4EU+ students, namely:

- multilingualism
- data literacy
- critical thinking
- entrepreneurship and
- social engagement.

Therefore, the educational framework implies the Alliance's commitment to

- world leading, research-based teaching and learning,
- learning that is transfer-oriented and student-centered,
- teaching that offers students the newest insights enabling them to address the challenges of the future,
- an understanding of not only the national but the European perspectives, and
- international outlook and international experience.

These core values also are the basis for the Quality Management System (QMS) 4EU+QUALITY and the respective mutual agreement on quality assurance and quality enhancement signed on 1 July 2022 by the rectors. Thus, the mutual agreement serves as an umbrella agreement for any future offer of 4EU+ joint programmes.

## Quality assurance and enhancement procedures

### Initial Certification

Two types of educational activities undergo initial certification:

1. single educational activities such as courses, summer schools etc., which can either be offered by a single university (so called shared educational activities) or be jointly offered by several member universities (so called joint educational activities), and
2. joint programmes in the broadest sense (reaching from double/multiple degrees up to programmes that are specifically created jointly by the member universities within the Alliance).

For both types, an initial quality assurance procedure is envisaged in 4EU+, that is, the initial certification in order to assure that minimum quality standards are met before these educational activities start.

### Initial certification of 4EU+ single educational activities

Clear standards for educational activities go a long way in the Alliance to ensure their quality. Therefore, the initial certification procedure is a core element of 4EU+QUALITY. All member universities already demonstrate a high level of internal quality assurance. Therefore, the Alliance applies a procedure which gives leeway to member universities by relying on their internal quality assurance systems, while at the same time defining a few minimum standards in order to assure alignment with the 4EU+ Alliance's goals. These standards contribute to

- ensuring the quality of the Alliance's educational activities according to 4EU+ Alliance's goals,

- raising the Alliance's profile, and
- starting a pathway of continuous reflections on improving the quality of the educational activities according to internationally recognized standards for peer review.

The initial certification takes place within the process of the central registration of activities and their publication in the student portal. It is designed for all kinds of different educational activities, comprising existing courses that are opened up for 4EU+ students as well as completely new courses. The aforementioned 4EU+ educational activities can be offered solely by one university (i.e., shared) or by a group of member universities (i.e., joint). However, in the latter case, one member university has the main responsibility for the quality assurance of the corresponding educational activity.

The procedure of initial certification ensures quality of minimum standards as well as transparency of the overall 4EU+ course offers. The procedure is based on the premise that a 4EU+ educational activity is open to 4EU+ students from all member universities, course requirements notwithstanding:

The procedure starts once the lecturer has done the necessary steps that are required at their university in order to enrol their course as a teaching activity for a specific term at their university. Then, the lecturer (even with the local team support) fills in the course template / syllabus, which contains important information regarding the course such as, for example, registration and admission requirements, the number of places available, the responsible lecturer's contact details, the workload of the course and the different forms of teaching, learning and assessment. The complete course template is finally published in the student portal – and with publication, the course is certified as a 4EU+ educational activity. The lecturer is responsible for the later evaluation of the course according to their university's quality assurance procedure, including 4EU+ specific items.

## **Initial certification of 4EU+ joint programmes**

Joint programmes cover a broad range of possible schemes how universities can offer educational experiences to their students. While there is a definition of the term “joint programmes” in the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (see external link: <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/definitions>), in reality and in practice, there is a diversity of definitions for the term joint programmes in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Thus, the 4EU+ Alliance decided to be open to all possibilities available according to the respective national legislations. In consequence, the 4EU+ definition of a joint programme is broad as well.

Since every single university within the Alliance has established its own procedure for quality assurance in line with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) when introducing new study programmes, establishing a joint programme within the Alliance is based on mutual trust in this. The very first condition for creating a joint programme within 4EU+ is to set up a

cooperation agreement between all single member universities. The key aspects of such an agreement are indicated in the Alliance's mutual agreement on quality assurance and quality enhancement. Each cooperation agreement for a specific joint programme contains – among other things – the following arrangements:

- Each member university that participates in a joint programme within 4EU+ assures that the programme undergoes accreditation according to national legislature(s).
- Member universities undertake and maintain a continuous dialogue at strategic and operational levels in order to educate each other about accreditation and re-accreditation processes in their respective higher education systems. All institutions are obliged to create communication channels in order to exchange best practices for successful quality assurance and thereby strengthen the joint programmes.
- There is an annual meeting for each jointly offered programme with the respective member universities. For this purpose, member universities create a joint committee responsible for joint quality assurance and enhancement of the programme. Quality assurance and enhancement of the different parts of the programme lie in the responsibility of the member university who is offering the respective part. Thus, quality assurance of the single parts (i.e., courses, modules) is accounted for by the respective member university, quality assurance of the programme as a whole is accounted for by the joint committee. The committee meets at least once a year. Students' representation in the joint committee is mandatory, and there is one coordinator for each member university whose name is indicated in the respective cooperation agreement.

As soon as the concept of a planned joint programme offered within 4EU+ is ready, the Management Committee (MC) is informed. As soon as the joint programme is installed according to the respective national legislation, the MC certifies the programme as a 4EU+ joint programme.

## Internal Auditing

### Definition and aims of auditing in 4EU+

Auditing in the quality assurance system of 4EU+ means the internal evaluation and monitoring of the Alliance's educational activities on the background of the Alliance's strategic goals. Auditing aims at:

1. assuring that minimum standards for quality of educational activities according to the Alliance's quality criteria are met,
2. improving the quality of the Alliance's educational activities according to the Alliance's quality goals / quality targets by taking adequate, goal-oriented measures,

3. creating transparency for all stakeholders about the results obtained by evaluation of educational activities and about the effects reached by measures taken,
4. informing the public by reporting results, measures, and effects obtained by evaluation of educational activities, and
5. building a basis for
  - a) internal strategic decision-making in terms of refinement and renewal of strategic goals in a long-term perspective of the Alliance as a whole and
  - b) the external reviewing by critical friends.

## Core principles of auditing in 4EU+

Auditing in 4EU+ is based on

1. quality criteria that reflect minimum standards of quality, including the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), and on quality goals / quality targets that reflect quality improvement according to the Alliance's strategy and vision,
2. data – and is driven by empirical evidence,
3. dialogue and a self-critical, positive attitude of all actors involved,
4. the active involvement of all stakeholders of the Alliance, and
5. mutual trust between all member universities.

## The internal auditing procedure

The basis for internal auditing are quality criteria that are assessed via specific evaluation instruments providing reliable data for evaluation and monitoring within the auditing procedure:

|    | Quality criteria                                      | Evaluation instruments                             |
|----|---|--|
| 1. | Extent and appeal of courses                          | Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)                  |
| 2. | Imparting 4EU+ specific competences                   | Student Surveys                                    |
| 3. | Innovative pedagogies                                 | Student Surveys                                    |
| 4. | Internationality by diversity and interdisciplinarity | Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), Student Surveys |
| 5. | Transparent, well accessible and current information  | Student Surveys                                    |
| 6. | Adequacy of requirements                              | Student Surveys                                    |
| 7. | Learning climate                                      | Student Surveys                                    |
| 8. | Management and coordination of studies                | Student Surveys                                    |
| 9. | Study success   | Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)                  |

Based on the data gathered by each university according to the evaluation instruments described above, aggregated reports are generated – for single educational activities as well as for 4EU+ joint programmes.

These reports are the basis for discussion first in the Academic Council in its function as Internal Auditing Board and, second, in the Management Committee. The role of the Internal Auditing Board is:

- Acting as critical friends, supported by an Alliance Referee for Quality Management
- Discussing data and reports and drawing conclusions: Do we approach / reach our goals as an Alliance?
- Giving advice to the Management Committee: What are our strengths and weaknesses? Which actions and improvements would help?
- Further developing the quality management system 4EU+QUALITY itself
- Building the basis for later external reviewing

The recommendations of the Internal Auditing Board serve as a basis for the Management Committee which decides upon actions to take in order to continuously enhance the quality of educational offers.

## External Reviewing

### Definition and aims of external reviewing in 4EU+

External reviewing in 4EU+ means the external evaluation and monitoring of the Alliance's quality management system (QMS) on the background of the Alliance's strategic goals. Reviewing aims at:

1. assuring that minimum standards for QMS according to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) are met,
2. improving the QMS of the Alliance in line with the Alliance's quality goals / quality targets by taking adequate, goal-oriented measures,
3. creating transparency for all stakeholders about the results obtained by evaluation of the QMS and about the effects reached by measures taken,
4. informing the public by reporting results, measures, and effects obtained by the QMS, and
5. building a basis for external strategic decision-making in terms of refinement and renewal of strategic goals in a long-term perspective of the Alliance as a whole.

## Core principles of external reviewing in 4EU+

External reviewing in 4EU+ is based on

1. quality criteria that reflect minimum standards of quality according to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and on quality goals / quality targets that reflect quality improvement according to the Alliance's strategy and vision,
2. data and is driven by empirical evidence,
3. dialogue and a self-critical, positive attitude of all actors involved,
4. the active involvement of all stakeholders of the Alliance, and
5. mutual trust between all member universities.

## The external reviewing procedure

An expert panel of critical friends is in charge of the external reviewing of the Alliance's quality assurance and quality enhancement procedures. The External Reviewing Board (ERB) acts independently and has the following main tasks:

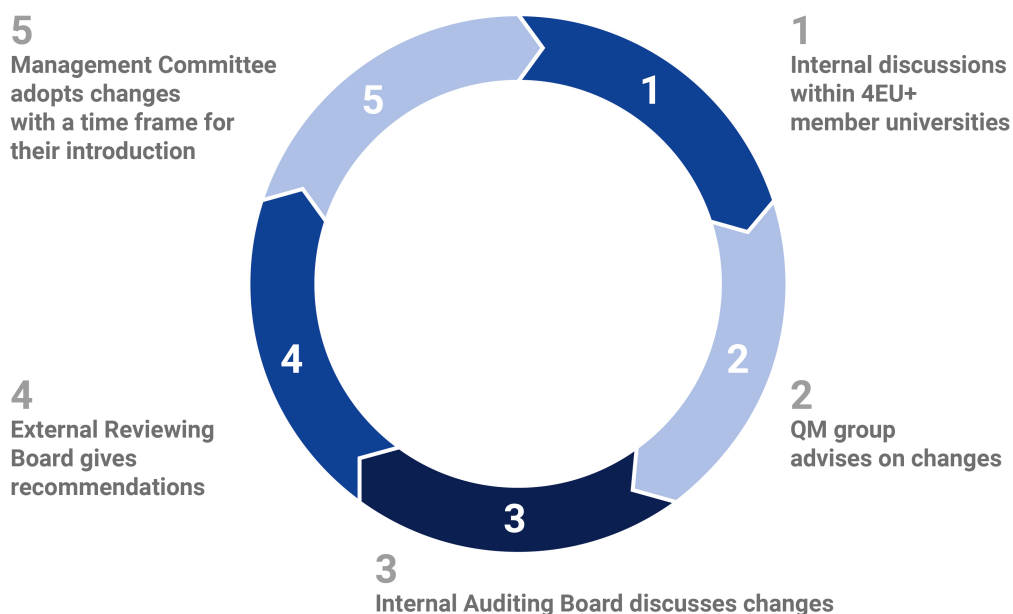
1. evaluating and monitoring the quality management system (QMS) of the Alliance as critical friends: giving recommendations how the Alliance can further develop its processes and its quality in line with the Alliance's strategic goals and vision and in line with the European framework
2. validating the Alliance's decisions, and
3. certification of the QMS of the Alliance

The External Reviewing Board (ERB) analyzes the work of the Alliance's quality management system (QMS) on the basis of data, reports and results of the internal auditing procedure. It may ask for clarification regarding reports. Therefore, it has the possibility to conduct interviews with different stakeholder groups. It is crucial for the ERB members that they can retrace previous recommendations of the Academic Council and decisions of the Management Committee as well as previous measures and their impact on the quality of educational activities.

During the mandate, the ERB members meet to evaluate the QMS of the Alliance. Every two years, the ERB completes one part of its mandate with a report. The Alliance Referee for Quality Management (ARQM) is responsible for furnishing the documents, the preparation and wrap-up of the ERB meetings and the follow-up of the ERB's recommendations, including communication to all stakeholder groups within the Alliance.



### Procedure for the introduction of changes to the QMS 4EU+QUALITY



The quality management system 4EU+QUALITY is a learning system. Therefore, it foresees a process to consistently fine-tune its mechanisms and procedures. The procedure, however, is not designed to lead to an entire overhaul of the system on a regular basis. Fine-tuning shall take place based on the following procedure:

1. Each member university discusses internally if they wish to introduce changes in 4EU+QUALITY.
2. The decision of the desired changes to 4EU+QUALITY should come from the internal quality assurance governance bodies – the Internal Auditing Board, the quality management (QM) group, the member universities – as well as from the External Reviewing Board. If a university wishes to change 4EU+QUALITY, a member of this university presents this in the QM group.
3. The QM group looks at and discusses the system's inner workings and makes suggestions for changes if deemed necessary.
4. The QM group within 4EU+ consists of quality assurance professionals with current knowledge about the trends in quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area and the internal workings of 4EU+QUALITY. The group meets on a regular basis and discusses practical ways of changing 4EU+QUALITY based on universities' wishes, and it presents advantages and disadvantages to the Internal Auditing Board.
5. The Internal Auditing Board meets and discusses the suggested changes.



6. The Internal Auditing Board as an inherent part of the whole QMS of the 4EU+ Alliance plays an important advisory role in shaping the final suggestions for the improvement of the system.
7. If the Internal Auditing Board approves suggestions, it applies for changes to be adopted by the Management Committee.
8. The Management Committee approves the changes.
9. The Management Committee has the final say when it comes to the trend of changes and the desired timeframe for their introduction. It decides based on the advice and recommendations from the Internal Auditing Board, the External Reviewing Board, and the QM group.

This procedure should generally serve as a fine-tuning mechanism of the QMS, and not the way to overhaul the system every two years.



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