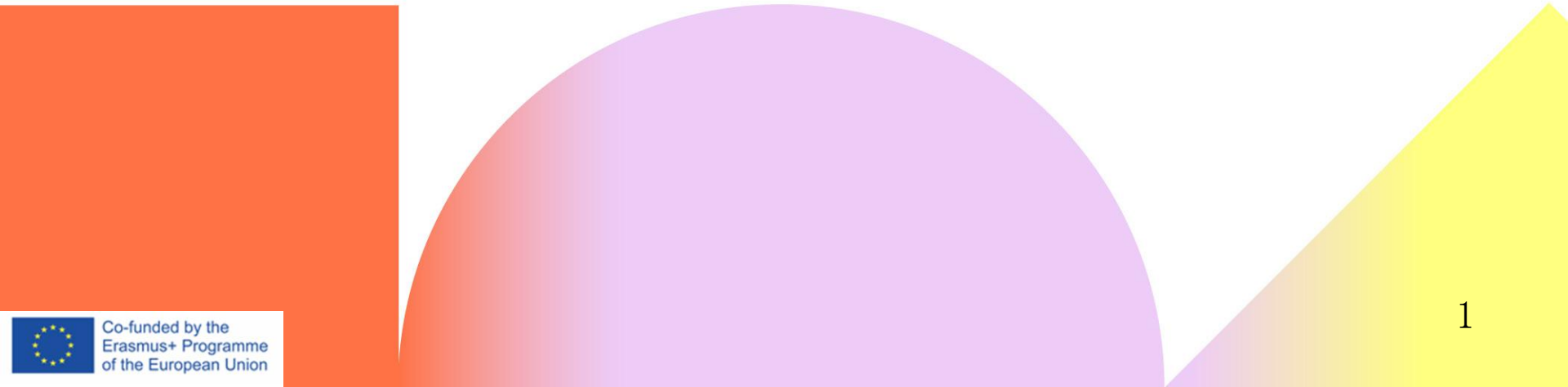


Shaping the umbrella.

Una Europa's internal quality assurance process for joint education



Tuesday, 4 November 2025



Outline



1. Understanding European University Alliances
2. Quality assurance in European joint programmes
3. The context of Una Europa
4. Launching a Joint Bachelor Programme within Una Europa
5. Expansion from flagship to a holistic QA system
6. Challenges in the development of an internal QA system for joint programmes
7. Lessons Learned and Policy Recommendations

Understanding European University alliances



European University Alliances: Strategic Integration Model



- European Universities alliances unite higher education institutions with shared strategic priorities to maximise their impact for the benefit of **students, academic and professional staff, and society**.
- Rooted in the *European Universities Initiative* (EUI), launched in 2019 under Erasmus+, aiming to:
 - Improve the **international competitiveness** of higher education institutions in Europe and beyond
 - Foster **excellence, innovation and inclusion**
 - Promote **European values and identity**
- European Universities alliances connect colleagues from higher education institutions across the continent to **create new ways of learning, researching, and serving society**.
- European Universities alliances are building new bridges between higher education and wider society to tackle the **21st century's biggest challenges**.

The policy trajectory

- **Bologna Process** (1999–): Established the EHEA, harmonizing degree structures and QA standards.
- **Lisbon Strategy & Europe 2020**: Emphasized knowledge-based growth and innovation.
- **Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe**: Provided funding and strategic alignment for transnational cooperation.
- **European Universities Initiative** (2019):
 - Political endorsement by EU Council and Commission.
 - Competitive calls for alliances with long-term transformation agendas.

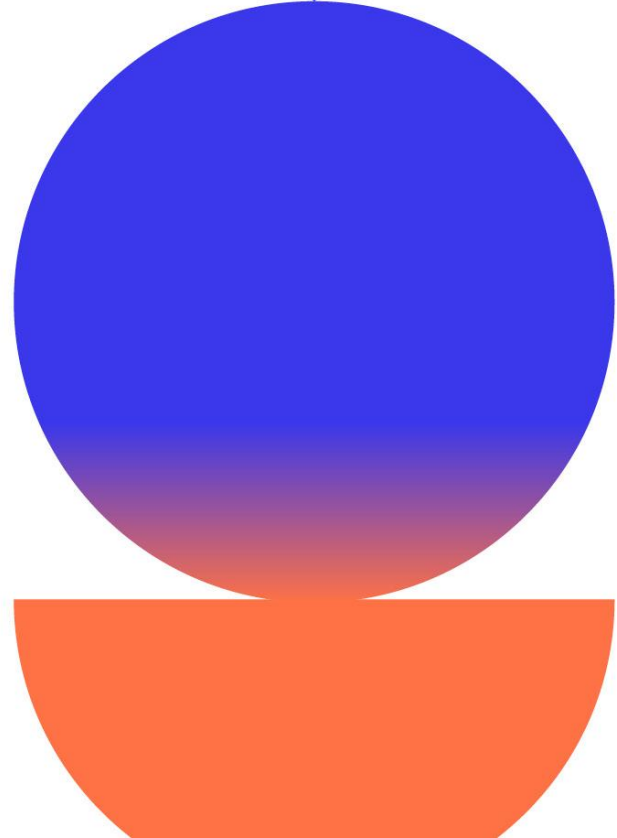


From vision to reality: Building European Universities



- Ambition to create a **network of European Universities by 2024** as flagships of European higher education.
- **High political support and momentum** at European and national levels.
- **Una Europa selected in the first pilot call in 2019** of the European Universities Initiative enabling it to assume a **pioneering role** in shaping **alliance-level policy, governance structures, joint education models**, and **internal quality assurance frameworks**.
- Milestone in 2024: **64 alliances** spanning **35 countries**, representing over **500 higher education institutions** across Europe.

Quality Assurance in European Joint programmes



European coordination to foster collaboration



- Education remains a **national competence** within the EU. Member States define their own QA procedures, accreditation models, and recognition frameworks.
- Joint programmes require **cross-border cooperation** in curriculum design, delivery, and quality assurance. Fragmentation across national systems creates **operational and legal challenges**.
- The **Bologna tools** were developed as part of the Bologna process :
 - European Standards and Guidelines for the quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (**ESG**): Common principles for internal and external QA.
 - Qualifications Framework for the EHEA (**QF-EHEA**): Aligns learning outcomes and degree levels.
 - **ECTS** (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System): Facilitates credit recognition and transparency.
 - **Diploma Supplement**: Enhances international readability of qualifications.
- EQAR

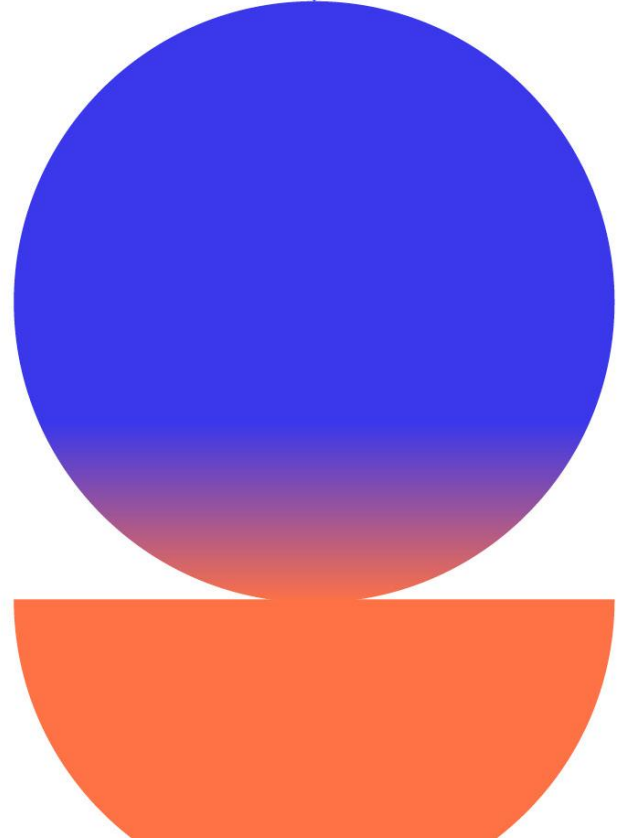
Navigating QA Diversity

Promise and Limits of the European Approach



- No uniform QA pathway for joint programmes caused by **diversity in national QA systems**: programme-level accreditation, institutional accreditation, mixed models and institutions with self-accreditation rights.
- **European Approach** for QA of Joint Programmes (2015):
 - Designed to enable a single QA procedure for joint programmes across borders.
 - Based on ESG and requires use of EQAR-registered agencies.
 - Aims to reduce duplication and foster trust.
- Implementation **Challenges**:
 - Not all Member States have adopted the European Approach.
 - Legal and procedural barriers persist.
 - Institutional awareness and regulatory alignment vary widely.

The context of Una Europa

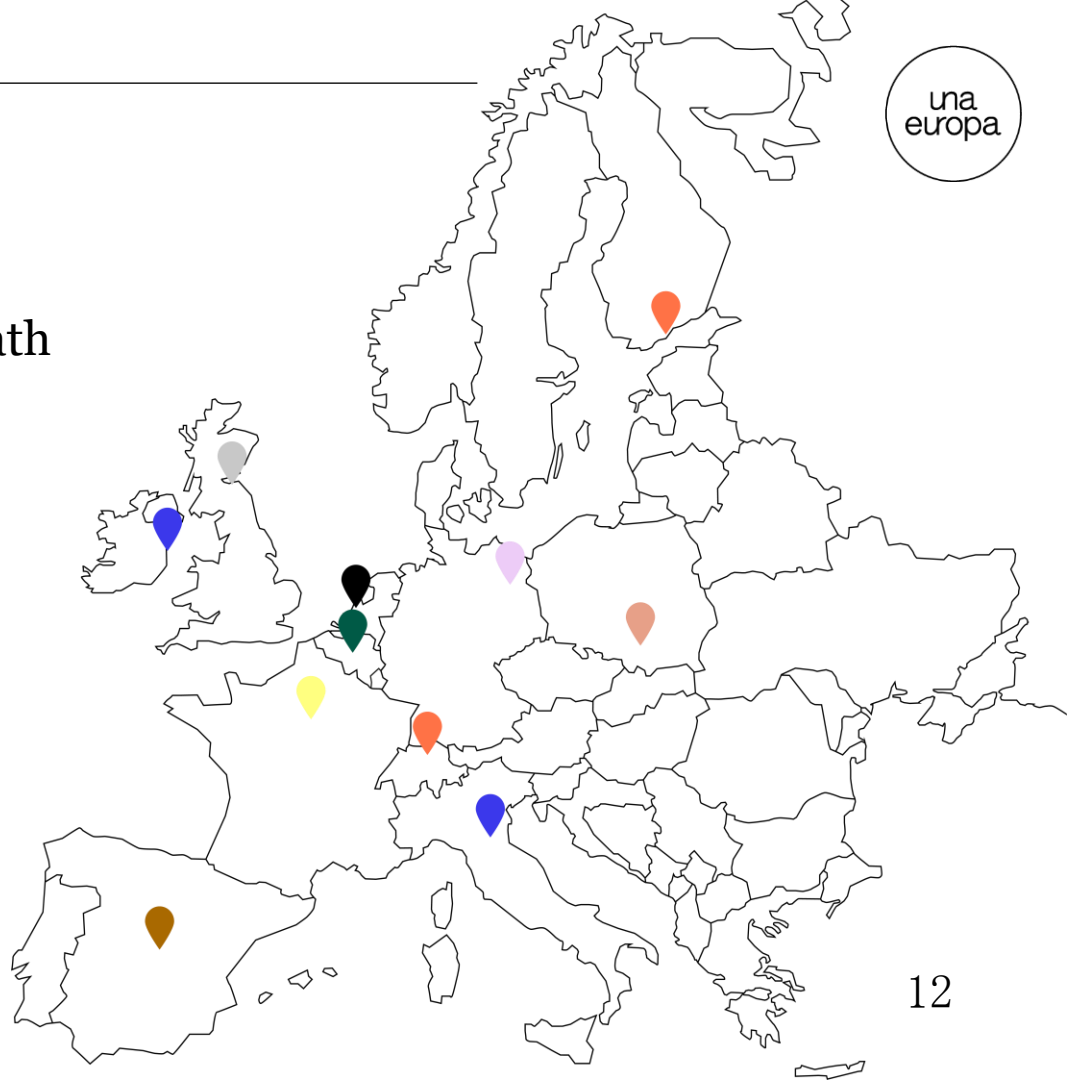


What is Una Europa?

- Una Europa is an alliance of **11 leading universities** from all corners of Europe.
- Together, we are forging a new path for education and research in Europe and beyond to shape our shared future for the better.
- Founded in 2019, Una Europa has secured successive rounds of European Union funding to realise our vision for a European 'University of the Future'.
- Guided by our **2030 Strategy**, Una Europa is working towards a **truly inter-university and pan-European campus**, shaped by universities' central obligations to society:
research and innovation, teaching and learning, and societal outreach.
- We promote common **European values** by including cross-border collaboration. Our joint activities and deliverables should enable **interdisciplinary, intercultural and international** collaboration.



- + Freie Universität Berlin
- + Università di Bologna
- + University College Dublin/
An Coláiste Ollscoile Baile Átha Cliath
- + University of Edinburgh
- + Helsingin Yliopisto/Helsingfors
universitet
- + Universiteit Leiden
- + Uniwersytet Jagielloński
w Krakowie
- + KU Leuven
- + Universidad Complutense
de Madrid
- + Université Paris 1
Panthéon-Sorbonne
- + Universität Zürich



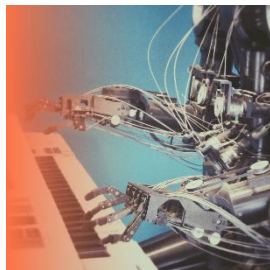
Our Focus Areas



Each focus area fosters multidisciplinary and includes most of the studies offered at our universities. The Focus Areas act as the thematic 'glue' that ties our universities together in our mission to create a virtual campus.



Cultural
Heritage



Data Science
and AI



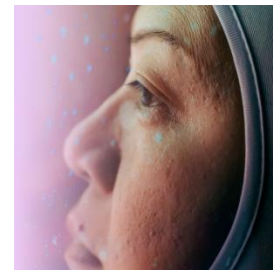
Europe and
the World



One Health



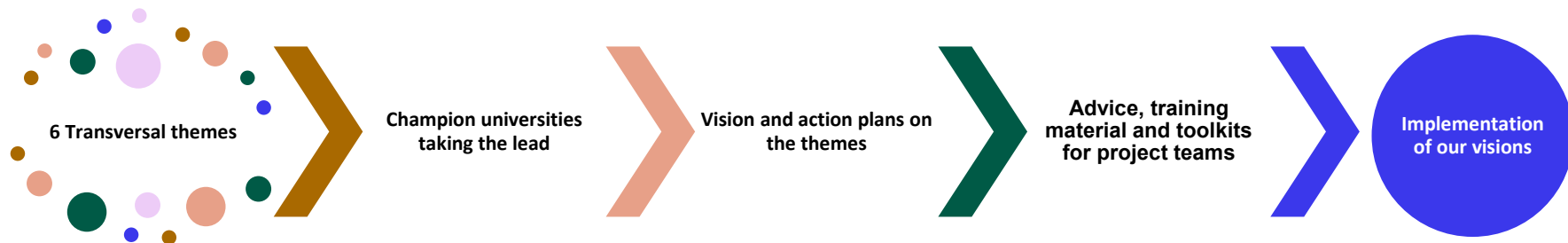
Sustainability



Future Materials
& Technologies

Our Transversal Themes

The guiding principles for our collaboration



Student-centred and research driven teaching & learning, informed by cultural and linguistic awareness

Mobility of Students, Professional Staff and Academic Staff

Research & Innovation

International dimension

Sustainability and Climate Protection

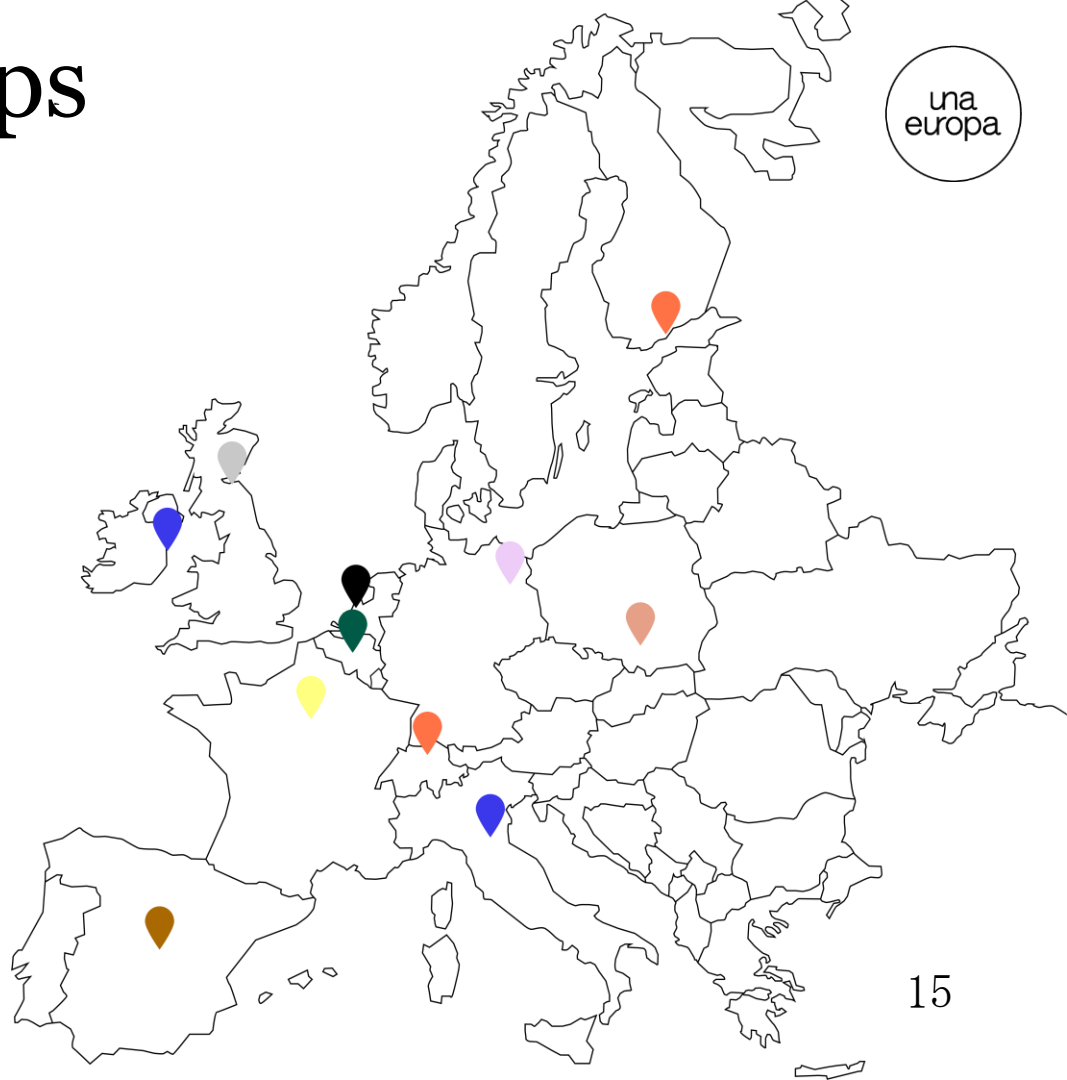
Diversity and inclusion

Una Europa Groups

una
europa

To implement Una Europa's projects peers from the 11 different partner universities collaborate in different Una Europa groups:

- + Self Steering Committees
- + Clusters
- + Groups related to our transversal themes
- + Ad hoc working groups



Self Steering Committees (SSC)



The collaboration within the alliance focuses on **six interdisciplinary areas**: Cultural Heritage, Sustainability, Europe and the World, Future Materials, Data Science and AI, and One Health. The collaborations within each of these interdisciplinary areas is coordinated by a **Self-Steering Committee** consisting of **academics** from different partner universities and different disciplines.

- 3 academics per partner university
- rotating chair
- development of strategies and action plans for collaboration

Clusters

Clusters bring together professional experts from the different partner universities on a certain topic:

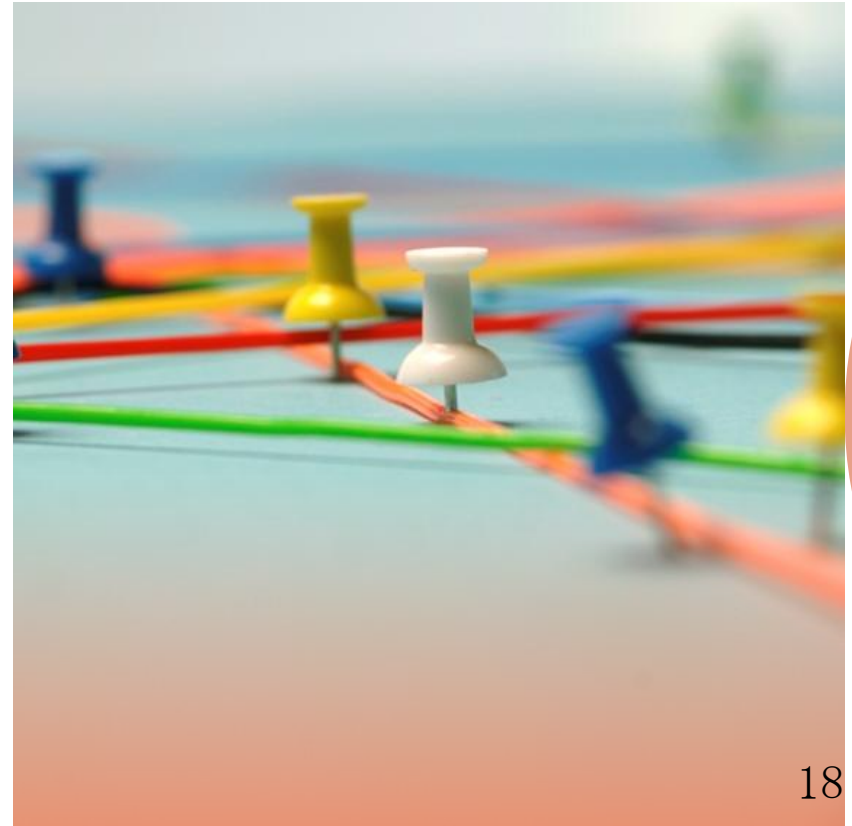
- Student Administration
- Legal Affairs
- Interoperability
- Mobility
- Research Coordination
- **Quality Assurance**
- Teaching & Learning
- Doctoral Training



Groups related to our transversal themes



- Diversity Council
- Task Force for Sustainability and Climate Protection
- Task Force International
 - Africa Working Group
 - Latin America Working Group



Quality Assurance Approach



Principle: Maximum alignment in the development of Quality management of Una Europa at the level of the alliance, quality assurance at the level of project(s) and internal and external quality assurance at the level of our joint educational offer.

QA at the level of the alliance

- Una Europa Board of Directors & External Advisers
- Extended governance structures
- Una Europa 2030 Strategy
- Consultations with internal and external stakeholders

QA at the level of the project(s)

- Project Steering Committee & Executive Committee
- QA of processes, deliverables & overall progress
- Based on QA Plan & PDCA cycle
- Dedicated Work Package

QA of joint educational offer

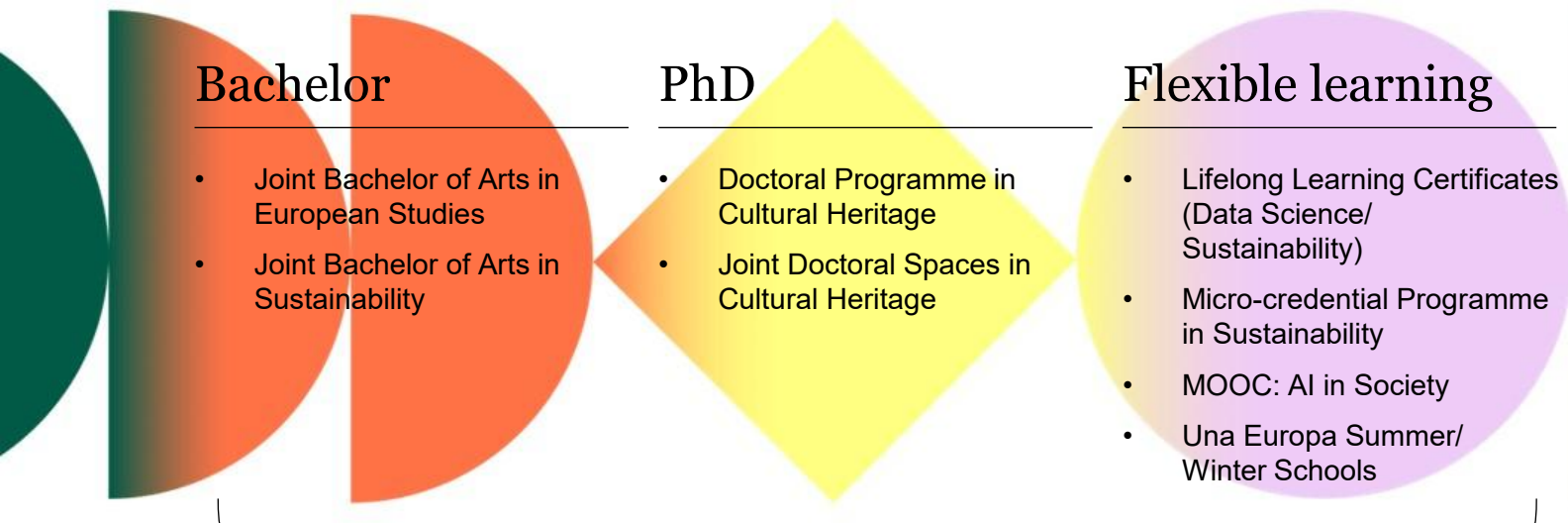
- Internal
 - ❖ At the level of programme management
 - ❖ Based on internal joint QA approach/ blueprint
- External
 - ❖ External accreditation agency
 - ❖ European Approach

Advancing European higher education



The education of future European citizens is vital in facing major societal challenges. Universities are uniquely positioned to play a key role in this endeavour.

Una Europa is committed to equipping the leaders and problem-solvers of tomorrow by advancing European higher education for all learners.



Una Europa's portfolio of courses and programmes

Launching a joint bachelor programme within Una Europa



Case study: Joint bachelor of Arts in European Studies



The programme & partner universities



- **Joint programme** on fundamental aspects and values of the EU as well as European states / societies.
 - **International:** Stays at 2-3 partner universities
 - **Multidisciplinary:** joint multidisciplinary curriculum followed by selection of major and minor out of seven fields of study
- **Degree-awarding partners:**
 - KU Leuven (Belgium)
 - Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna (Italy)
 - Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Spain)
 - Uniwersytet Jagiellonski w Krakowie (Poland)
- **Mobility partners:**
 - Freie Universität Berlin (Germany)
 - Helsingin Yliopisto/Helsingfors universitet (Finland)
 - The University of Edinburgh (United Kingdom)
 - Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne (France)
 - Universität Zürich (Switzerland)



Approach to External QA



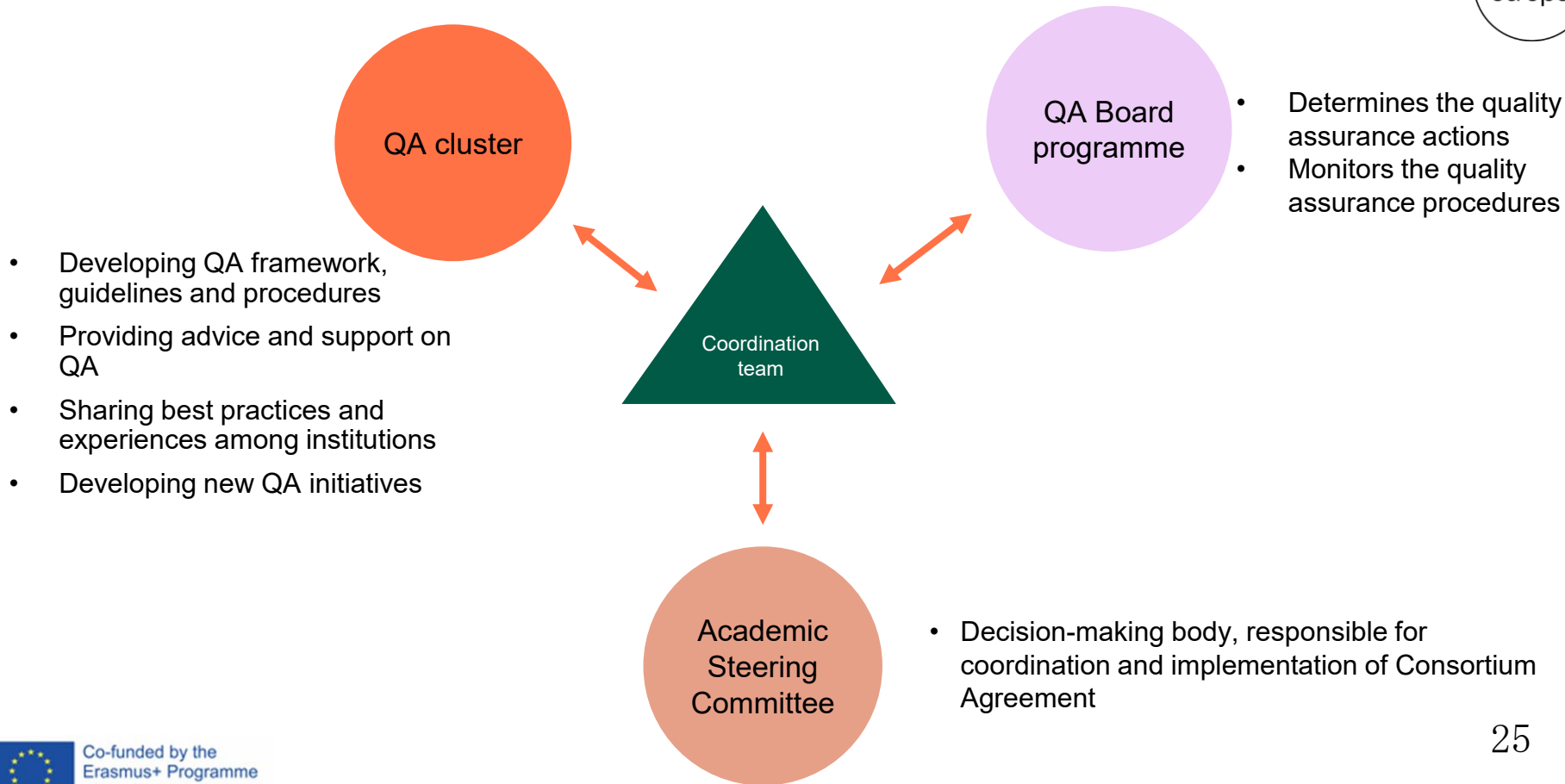
- Accreditation via European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (2021) via Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)
- **Main Challenges working towards a joint programme**
 - Restrictive national legislation as to the **implementation of the European approach and mutual recognition**, resulting in additional procedures at national level;
 - Restrictive national legislation regarding the **possibility to create an interdisciplinary programme/degree**, or degrees in specific fields;
 - Restrictive national legislation regarding the necessary **components of the graduation diploma** and the joint diploma and graduation rules;
 - Restrictive national legislation regarding **curriculum aspects** (minimum or maximum ECTS credits per course; minimum ECTS credits for truncus communis; determining a maximum number of evaluations for a programme, etc.)
 - Restrictive legislation regarding **selection of students**
 - ...
- **Positive conclusion:** As a joint framework, the European Approach is a great tool for going through a joint external quality assessment together with partner universities of countries where the Approach is recognised.

Approach to Internal QA

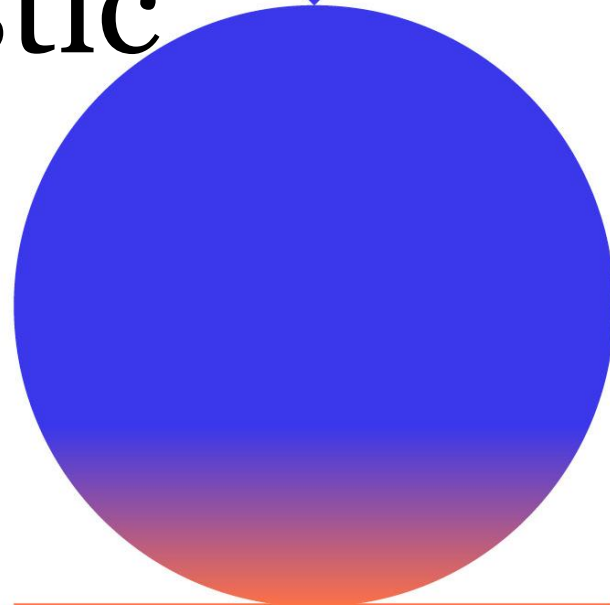


- **“Una Europa’s blueprint for internal quality assurance of joint programmes”** developed by Una Europa Quality Assurance cluster to support the realisation of programme accreditation of joint programmes according to the European Approach (Standard 9)
- **Trust between partners:** Based on the common understanding that each partner institution operates a well-functioning internal quality assurance system, the partners opted to make maximal use of the partners’ existing methods.
- **Need for a joint framework** incorporating existing institutional protocols to a maximum extent to ensure effective decision-making and communication between the partners:
 1. **General principles** for the internal QA of joint programmes (principles of verified trust, subsidiarity and core practices)
 2. **Creation of a knowledge database:** transparent information and communication about the functioning of the internal quality assurance system of each partner
 3. **Definition of responsibilities** regarding quality assurance and enhancement on the level of the management of a joint programme (i.e. Quality Assurance Board)

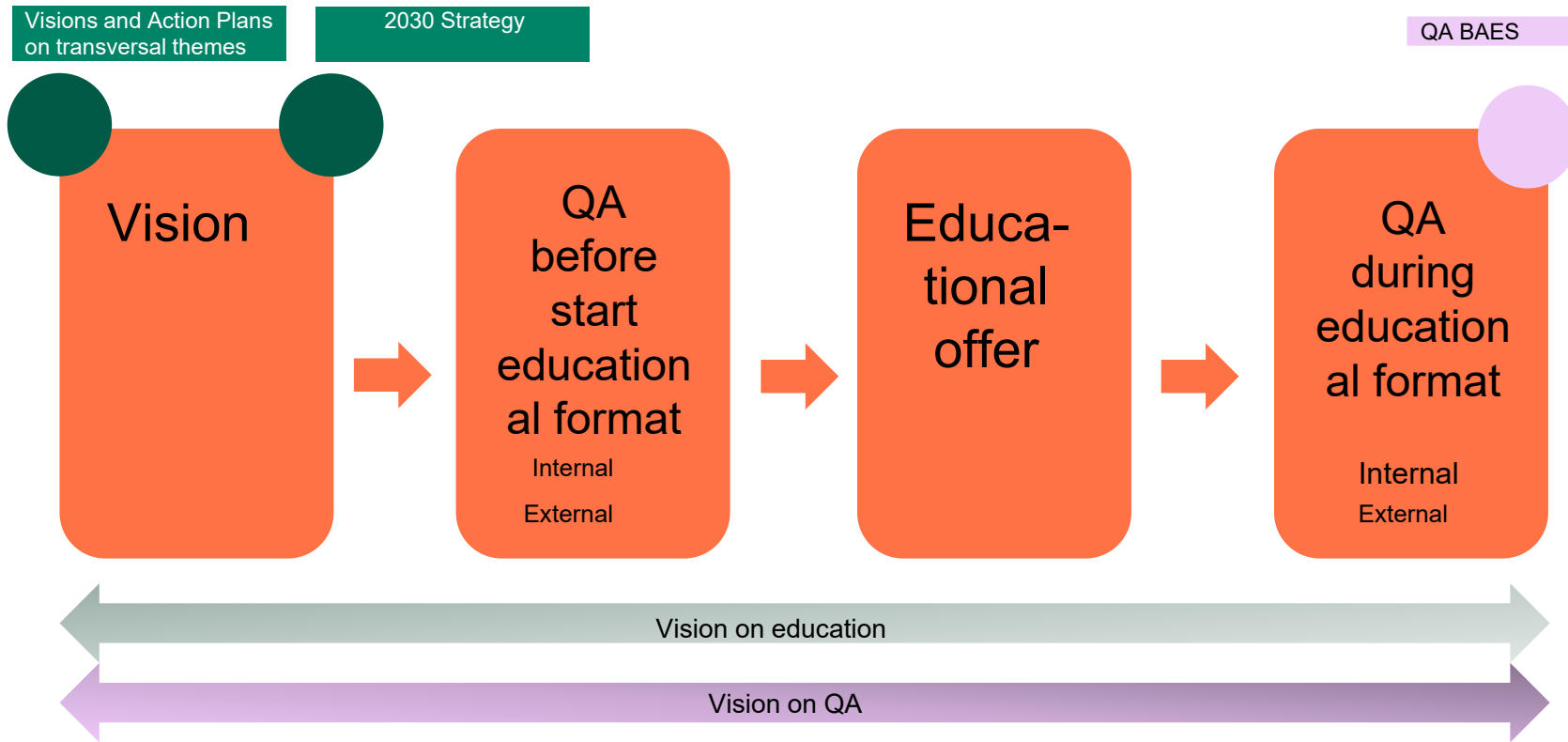
Implementation of joint internal QA



Expansion from flagship to a holistic QA system



Holistic approach

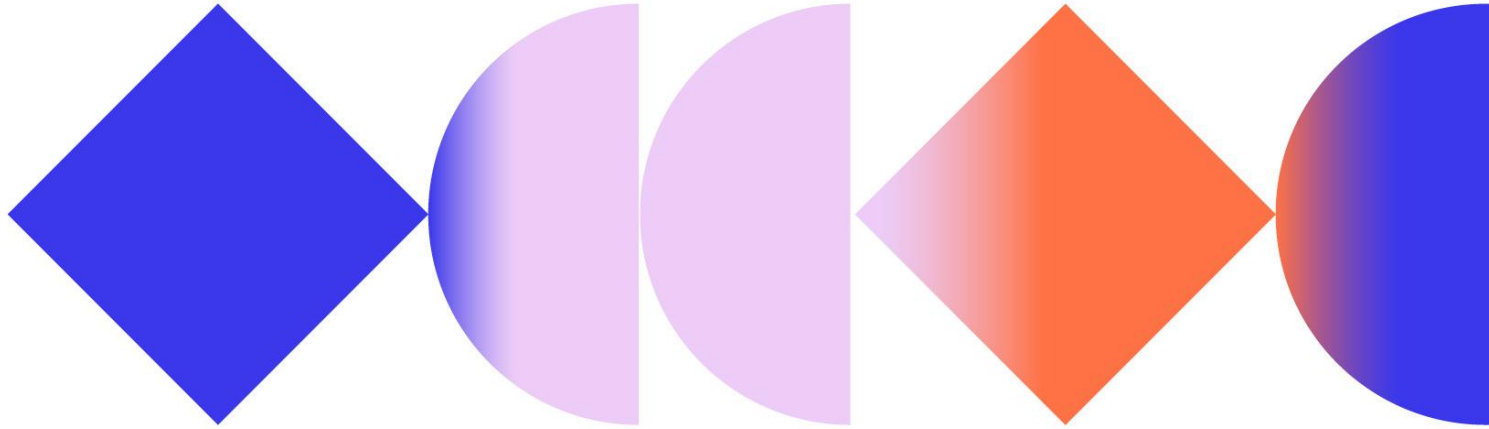


Impact of the joint internal QA system



- More **holistic incorporation of all elements of visions** into the different stages of the life cycle of an educational format
- Establishment of **workflows** to implement a **well-functioning reflective cycle**
- Guaranty for **value-driven high-quality education**, offered in a European campus with smooth cooperation and communication
- Enhanced **competitiveness** of Una Europa's educational offer
- Increased **satisfaction** of learners, teaching staff and professional staff

Lessons learned and policy recommendations



Key insights from developing a joint internal QA system



- Start with shared principles, then translate them into concrete practices.
- Delegate operational agreements to those closest to those responsible for their implementation.
- Enable open dialogue and continuous exchange.
- Be flexible—adapt and refine the system when needed.
- Always keep the primary goal in focus: delivering high-quality education for students



Translating Experience in Policy Impact



- University alliances help address:
 - Regulatory obstacles (in national law, regulatory frameworks of universities)
 - Operationalisation obstacles (e.g. lack of interoperability)

Some projects:

- ED-AFFICHE: project by 6 European University alliances, mapped existing obstacles, potential solutions and proposed legislations to tackle obstacles in joint programmes
- EBSI (European Blockchain Services Infrastructure) Early Adopter Programme: solutions for registration, admission, student information systems, student accommodation application...



Closing insights

- **Sustainable collaboration** is built through **open dialogue at all levels**—policy, political, operational, and among educators and support staff.
- **Lasting impact** requires **broad engagement and ownership** across institutions and organizations.
- **Successful implementation** depends on **embedding change** throughout every layer of the partnership

