

INGENIUM University Alliance

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the INGENIUM University Alliance. The evaluation took place during two meetings, the first online, in February 2026 and the second onsite, from 6 to 10 April 2026 in Oviedo, Spain, where the University of Oviedo as the alliance's coordinating institution is located.

1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The distinctive features of IEP are:

- a strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase;
- a European and international perspective;
- a peer-review approach;
- a support for improvement.

The focus of IEP in an evaluation of a university alliance is the alliance as a whole and not the member organisations, nor individual study programmes or units. The evaluation therefore focuses on:

- decision-making processes and institutional structures and the effectiveness of strategic management;
- the relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic management, as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

All aspects of an alliance evaluation are guided by five key questions, which are based on a “fitness for (and of) purpose” approach:

- What is the alliance trying to achieve/ what is the vision for the alliance?
- How does the alliance plan to achieve its goals/ realise its vision?
- How does the alliance monitor to what extent its vision is actually realised?
- How is the quality of education, research and any other services provided by the alliance assured?
- How will the alliance move from project-based management to long-term and sustainable cooperation?

This review of the INGENIUM Universities Alliance was the inaugural evaluation of an alliance carried out by EUA's IEP and has, in this sense, been a pilot exercise for the programme. The team warmly thanks INGENIUM for its constructive cooperation and the feedback shared on both the process and the outcomes of the evaluation. The mutual learning derived from this pilot will feed into the further development of guidance for alliances as well as into the ongoing adaptation and improvement of the evaluation process for European Universities alliances.

1.2 INGENIUM's profile

INGENIUM is a consortium of 10 European universities committed to advancing high-quality, inclusive and innovative higher education and research. The consortium was founded in 2022 after being selected by the European Commission (EC) as part of the third call for applications in the European University Initiative. The consortium is led by the University of Oviedo (UNIOVI - ES). Its member universities are the Medical University of Sofia (MUS - BG), University of Crete (UoC - EL), Karlsruhe University of Applied Sciences (HKA - DE), South Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (Xamk - FI), University "G. d'Annunzio" of Chieti – Pescara (Ud'A - IT), University of Skövde (SE), Munster Technological University (MTU - IE), University of Rouen-Normandy (URN - FR) and Gheorghe Asachi Technical University of Iasi (TUIASI - RO).

The alliance comprises a very diverse set of member universities that includes both specialised institutions and comprehensive universities. Some are long established, while others are relatively young in their present form. They also range from being research-intense to primarily teaching-oriented. Their internal governances also differ, as do their local regulatory environments. Member institutions are, though, somewhat similar in terms of their size and their regional foci, being mostly located outside main metropolitan areas. The self-evaluation report (SER) states that the alliance currently educates nearly 170,000 students and includes more than 9,200 academic staff and researchers and nearly 5,000 administrative staff across the 10 partner institutions. At the time of the evaluation, however, only a comparatively small proportion of these students and staff were directly involved in alliance-level activities.

The alliance members share a desire for a strong European orientation/vocation with objectives to build the alliance as an open space to provide students with the highest-quality education that prepares them for a global and increasingly complex environment. INGENIUM's mission statement declares the alliance partners' firm commitment to working together to pursue the common vision of what European higher education should be in terms of teaching methodology, interdisciplinarity, research and commitment to social development, and to overcoming barriers and obstacles to create an open, cooperative, inclusive and friendly environment.

Strategically, INGENIUM seeks to build on the diversity of its member institutions to create an integrated (albeit federal) European university, centred on mobility, innovative pedagogies, flexible education, and cooperation with regional, national and international stakeholders. In 2025, the alliance underwent its first mid-term evaluation, and at the time of this evaluation was preparing for another application that should secure an additional round of funding from the EC.

INGENIUM does not have a joint legal entity at this moment. However, the alliance has been preparing to register as a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), with the registration

documentation having already been submitted — a formal legal entity to further institutionalise the alliance’s collaborative operations.

1.3 The evaluation process

The self-evaluation was undertaken by a dedicated self-evaluation group that comprised a representative from each of the universities of the INGENIUM Alliance. Members were selected by the INGENIUM partner coordinators of each institution and approved by the INGENIUM Steering Committee (ISC). The group was coordinated by INGENIUM’s director.

The SER of INGENIUM, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team on 15 January 2026. This very concise report touched upon all the questions from the guidelines. However, it also showed the difficulties in (self-)evaluating performance, when the evaluated entity remains very young, with most plans and objectives yet to be brought to full fruition. Upon request, the IEP evaluation team also received additional information, including, most notably, the original application for the EC as well as an up-to-date document explaining the governance set-up in the past and present, and the one planned for the near future.

An online site visit was conducted on 17–18 February 2026, helping the team to gain a better understanding of what the alliance intended to achieve through the evaluation and what had been achieved so far. The onsite visit took place from 6 to 10 April 2026 at the University of Oviedo in Spain. The alliance had made considerable efforts to bring as many interviewees as possible physically to Oviedo. Still, about half of the interviews were conducted in a hybrid mode.

The evaluation team (hereinafter named the team) consisted of:

- Brian Norton, TU Dublin/UCC, Ireland, Chair
- Luís Castro, University of Aveiro, Portugal
- Simona Lache, Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania
- Katarzyna Gajda, University of Warsaw, Poland, as the student representative
- Oliver Vettori, WU Vienna, Austria, Team Coordinator.

Due to the pilot nature of this review, Cecilia Biaggi from the EUA-IEP Secretariat joined the team as an observer.

The team wishes to convey its particular thanks to all the interviewees and INGENIUM actors and stakeholders who were involved in the review. Most notably, though, the team wishes to thank the Rector of the University of Oviedo, Professor Ignacio Villaverde Menéndez, the Director of INGENIUM, Juan Rayón González, and the staff of the INGENIUM Central Office for all their efforts and hospitality.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

Basically, all European University alliances are top-down management projects, with the key question being how alliance operations can be “mainstreamed” and institutionalised, so that the transformative potential gains momentum beyond the project core groups. As requested by the INGENIUM Alliance, this fundamental question also lies at the heart of this evaluation. However, the documents and data provided together with the responses in interviews led the team to conclude that INGENIUM is still very much run as a project, and that project logic and perspectives pervade everything: governance, performance indicators, budgeting and even the thinking about how to move from a project logic to an institutional logic (e.g. by replacing work packages with tasks).

The alliance’s new long-term strategy (see below) is an attempt to move away from the strategic planning of the first three years, which has been very much oriented towards the objectives and indicators from the consortium contract. The alliance is also revising its governance structures and processes. It hopes that becoming an EGTC will be a gamechanger when it comes to operating as a “confederation of institutions”. However, as most of these transitional efforts have commenced only recently, there was insufficient substantial evidence on which to base an assessment of their effectiveness. In formulating its observations and recommendations, the IEP evaluation team was thus careful not to evaluate the plans for the future but rather to focus on the concrete state that it found the alliance to be in at the time of the review.

2.1 *Strategy*

INGENIUM has formulated a publicly available mission statement that explicitly states the alliance partners’ firm commitment to working together to pursue the common vision of what European higher education should be in terms of teaching methodology, interdisciplinarity, research and commitment to social development, and to overcome barriers and obstacles to create an open, cooperative, inclusive and friendly environment. The team found that the mission statement, in particular the focus on “working together”, is also largely the common denominator underlying the alliance leadership’s vision for the mid- to long-term future.

During the interviews, the team found strong commitment to the alliance among rectors, coordinators and many of the staff involved in INGENIUM activities. Interviewees consistently referred to the value of cooperation and mutual learning and to the strategic significance of the alliance for institutions that do not necessarily have a long prior tradition of deep transnational collaboration. At the same time, the team found that the long-term strategic direction is not yet equally mature or equally owned across the partnership. In several meetings, the team heard broad support for deeper integration, but there was less clarity on what specific institutional transformation should look like in practice over the next three to five years.

The different opinions on this might also be linked to the fact that most partners do not yet have an overview of the actual current full cost of the alliance activities, and budgetary projections for the future, not least regarding in-kind contributions, are vague. The remarks in the alliance’s long-term

strategy regarding the important distinction between input-oriented and outcome-oriented commitments are certainly an important starting point for future, more specific, discussions and agreements.

The team therefore considers that INGENIUM has a credible strategic narrative, but that this narrative has not yet been translated into a sufficiently shared and operational medium-term roadmap. The alliance's newer long-term strategy is an important step in this direction, but at present it functions more as a signal of intent than as a fully developed implementation framework.

Overall, the team found a considerable variety of different views of what success will/should look like, which led it to the conclusion that a precise agreed vision for INGENIUM's future is still developing. In this regard, the new long-term strategy also functions better as a signal — explicitly declaring the intention of moving away from mere project status — than as a comprehensive plan towards a clear and shared set of objectives. **The team believes that INGENIUM would certainly benefit from translating the broad long-term vision(s) into a shared, time-bound strategic roadmap with key indicators, clear phases, milestones, ownership and expected institutional changes at partner level.**

2.2 Governance

Operational oversight and day-to-day coordination of alliance activities are carried out by the ISC. The ISC is composed of the INGENIUM partner coordinators appointed by each partner university. These coordinators act as the main institutional contact points for the alliance and ensure coordination between the alliance-level structures and their respective universities. Students across the alliance value the presence of student representatives in the ISC. However, many remain unaware of the INGENIUM Student Board and the ways in which they can influence alliance-level decisions. Three years into the alliance, however, INGENIUM has also identified some areas where structural and procedural changes might be beneficial. For the next phase of INGENIUM, the overall governance model will be redesigned. The alliance will maintain a similar governance structure as before, but with some repurposed committees (e.g. replacing the previous Quality Assurance Committee with a Quality Assurance Board).

Decision-making within the INGENIUM governance bodies follows a cooperative and consensus-based approach. The alliance aims to take decisions primarily by consensus among partners, reflecting the collaborative nature of the consortium. Each partner institution holds one vote in formal decision-making processes. When consensus cannot be reached, decisions may be adopted by qualified majority, according to the rules established in the Consortium Agreement.

The interviews suggested that the relationship between formal structures and actual decision-making practice is not yet fully consolidated. The team heard repeated references to slow decision-making, uneven maturity across committees, and strong dependence on a relatively small number of highly engaged actors. In practice, much of the alliance's operational continuity appears to rely on the technical secretariat, the alliance leadership and a limited group of staff holding multiple formal and informal roles.

The team also found that the existing work package logic still strongly shapes governance and operations. This is understandable in a young alliance funded through a project structure, but it also

creates risks. It can fragment ownership, blur responsibilities across thematic areas and make it harder to present alliance activities as part of a coherent institutional model rather than as a collection of project-based work streams.

The team therefore concludes that INGENIUM has a functioning governance architecture, but one that is still in transition from project management towards a more institutionalised alliance. **The team therefore recommends that INGENIUM review and clarify decision-making lines between alliance bodies, thematic structures and the institutions, so that responsibility, authority and accountability are clearly visible.**

Overall, much relies on the technical secretariat and the alliance director: they are involved in basically every major process and event, to the point of overextension. The alliance director in particular juggles various roles and chairs several boards and committees — but he is not the only one. The team has met several key, and very committed, actors with multiple distinct roles, some more formal, some more informal. Many of the work package leaders have become the “owners” of the work packages, responsible for carrying out much of the work but also gaining the power to define the purpose and scope of their activities. Though this is inevitable for project-based operations, unless carefully coordinated and managed it leads to inconsistencies, discontinuities and unrealised expectations. Such drawbacks can threaten the ambition to stabilise and grow operations over time. **The team suggests that INGENIUM develop a simple governance map for internal use, showing who proposes, who decides, who implements and who monitors in each major area of alliance activity.**

External engagement is presently uneven. The team heard that many associated partners still relate primarily to the individual institution with which they already had an established connection, rather than to the alliance as a whole. This is not unusual at this stage, but it means that the alliance has not yet fully developed a scalable stakeholder model at alliance level. More observations on this topic can be found in Section 7.

2.3 Resources

The alliance finds itself within what it describes as a “complex funding ecosystem”. It combines EC grants, national and regional funding, mobility schemes, government allocations, internal and external research grants and significant unfunded allocations (that are largely unknown) of staff time. To some degree, those funds are shared beyond the official EC-allocated budget: already in 2023, INGENIUM had established what it calls a “common pot” model to cover joint expenses. Since 2025, this model has also included joint earmarked funds for priority activities, such as student partnerships. From 2026 onwards, the alliance plans to adopt a common budget to support joint education and mobility.

Consortium-internal budget allocation decisions are based on a structured governance framework. Overall financial priorities are set by the INGENIUM Alliance Council (IAC), while operational management of the budget is coordinated through the ISC, the technical secretariat, partner coordinators and work package leaders. Work package leaders propose annual budget plans for their intended work, which are jointly reviewed by the ISC, and financial resources are regularly monitored to ensure adequacy, compliance and effective use. Considerable parts of the budget are allocated to the salaries of project staff hired by alliance partners.

The interviews suggested that the alliance does not yet have a sufficiently complete picture of the full resources contributed across the partnership, especially in relation to in-kind contributions, staff time and medium-term cost implications. This limits the alliance's ability to assess cost sustainability, to compare effort and benefit across institutions, and to plan strategically beyond the current funding cycle.

Human resources are a particularly important issue. The SER itself notes that alliance activities are often carried out on top of existing academic or administrative roles and that this is not sustainable in the long term. The team heard similar concerns in the interviews. INGENIUM clearly benefits from committed and skilled staff, but many key activities depend on a relatively small number of individuals. This creates vulnerability in relation to workload, continuity and knowledge transfer.

The team therefore concludes that INGENIUM has so far used its available resources constructively, but that a more complete and realistic resource model will be essential for the next phase of the alliance's development.

Thus, part of the long-term sustainability of INGENIUM will rely on a favourable cost-benefit ratio and income and expenses being balanced over time. In this regard, it is also important to note that many funding opportunities that the alliance has an eye on are also project funds, coming with strings attached, new deliverables to take care of, and overhead costs. **The alliance should give consideration to gaining a full and proper breakdown of the totality of all income and cost data across the alliance and related information for mid- to long-term planning.**

The key resource for the alliance — as well as for its individual member universities — is the human resources and expertise it can muster to bring its vision to life and to “mainstream” activities. All the interviewees the team met seemed highly enthusiastic and very skilled in their specific fields, but also characterised by (i) a great variety of views on the alliance and ambitions for its future, and (ii) different levels of knowledge and oversight of what is currently going on and what is planned for the coming years. As some interviewees put it, limited access to skilled staff remains a core challenge, and occasionally various parts of the project are competing for the time of a small number of actors. There are plans to further invest in gaining staff for the alliance, including some important steps towards counting work for the alliance towards the general teaching/work obligations. This is a great step forward, for which INGENIUM is commended. However, it does not solve the issue of knowledge management, nor the fact that for some key actors, work for INGENIUM still comes on top of their usual duties, and keeps piling up.

The institutional development plans, which each partner has developed, certainly mark a major step forward on tackling these issues, and the team appreciates the concerted efforts on these plans. **INGENIUM is encouraged to take this process further, as each member institution defines explicitly what “institutional transformation through INGENIUM” means in its own context, and how this will be embedded in its internal strategy, structures and, not least, resource allocation.**

According to the SER, INGENIUM seeks to become one of the most ambitious alliances in terms of the integration of its members, not least by establishing an EGTC. This level of integration is intended to position INGENIUM as a leading model of deep European university cooperation. The draft EGTC Convention and Statutes have already been developed after six months of technical discussions, have

been circulated among the alliance members and have been approved by the IAC. Almost all partners have now obtained the necessary individual institutional and legal authorisations, and the alliance is currently engaged in drafting an implementation roadmap for the next phase. A first draft of the operational plan has been prepared and the potential role of the EGTC in INGENIUM is expected to be involved in several key aspects, though expectations voiced during the interviews varied considerably. The team commends INGENIUM on the progress made to reach agreement across all 10 partners, but also encourages the alliance to approach the expectations projected onto the EGTC from a resource feasibility angle, not a primarily legal one. **It is recommended that INGENIUM define which activities genuinely require EGTC centralisation, then finalise and implement a detailed EGTC roadmap (including legal milestones, staffing implications, financial commitments, service scope, communications and partner responsibilities).**

3. Quality culture

As a relatively young alliance, INGENIUM is still in the early stages of developing a shared quality culture. The SER presents quality assurance (QA) as a central pillar of the alliance's development and identifies stronger traceability between claims, evidence and outcomes, more decision-ready monitoring, and stronger alignment between alliance-level and institutional processes as key next steps. There are various informal, and some formal, ways for peer learning and good practice exchange installed at the alliance, and these are much appreciated by all partners. Learning from each other seems to be a key benefit emphasised by many interviewees.

In 2025, the alliance formally approved its current Joint QA Policy as an official deliverable within the consortium contract with the EC. This policy consists of two parts: the description of the INGENIUM Quality Management System and the QA Policy on Joint Programmes.

The former is, in the view of the team, more about quality management of INGENIUM as a project rather than the structures and processes that would allow INGENIUM to operate as an organisation or even an institution. The reporting formats and processes are bound to project management rather than enabling systematic QA. Some of the key performance indicators (KPIs) pre-defined in the document would also allow INGENIUM to determine its effectiveness and the quality of at least some of its operations, but the KPIs are not yet fully operationalised. As the team found during the interviews, satisfaction data, which is one of the KPI areas defined in the document, is collected by individual partner institutions, but not shared with the Quality Assurance Committee, and nor does it follow an agreed standard. Systematic quality development is not yet safeguarded.

The SER states that the QA system is “closely linked to strategic management and serves as a key instrument for translating strategic objectives into effective implementation and continuous improvement”, but this appears to be limited to the project objectives and their implementation. This is not to belittle past achievements: INGENIUM has established a transparent, and — according to the interviews — well-functioning system for managing the annual project cycles, geared towards passing the EC's various reviews and approval for the next funding period. However, aspects not driven by these priorities are also less represented in the performance indicators through which the alliance is governed. Complementary to the recommendations in Section 2 on governance and institutional decision-making, **the team therefore encourages INGENIUM to regularly review (by existing governance bodies) a limited set of alliance-wide indicators clearly linked to intended outcomes (rather than only to project reporting).**

The interviews have also shown that INGENIUM is not (yet) currently operating a functional QA system. This is partly because many of the activities on which the policy focuses are yet to be launched, and partly because there appears to be some vagueness around the relationship between the overall INGENIUM governance system and processes, the alliance QA system, the work package/activity-level feedback mechanisms, and the QA systems of the individual partners. The INGENIUM director (who also supports the Quality Assurance Committee) has signalled that INGENIUM is planning to move to a more integrated quality monitoring, which is also shown by the replacement of the current Quality Assurance Committee with a new Quality Assurance Board linked to an annual evaluation cycle. This is also stated in the draft note mentioned above. Areas outside of education are barely covered.

In the view of the team, an integrated and aligned system needs to enable informed decision-making (rather than ad-hoc data collection). This requires decisions on:

- methodologies and approaches that best fit the needs of the alliance;
- information required to assess what is going well, or could be improved, and if so, how;
- how to monitor follow-up actions;
- for all these operations, who needs to be involved and informed;
- how to systematically benchmark against selected other alliances or institutions.

The team thus advises INGENIUM to move from a framework-based QA approach to an operational alliance QA system with clear procedures, responsibilities, review cycles and follow-up mechanisms, and to clarify the relationship between alliance QA structures and institutional QA systems, making sure that responsibilities are complementary, rather than ambiguous.

The second part of the Joint QA Policy contains INGENIUM's QA Policy on Joint Programmes. As stated in the document itself, this part is intended as a framework for ensuring consistent quality and effective collaboration among the INGENIUM Alliance's partner universities and for supporting the design, delivery, assessment and monitoring of joint academic programmes within the European Higher Education Area. In its draft note on the current and future governance structure, which was composed on request for the team, INGENIUM states that its Joint QA Policy and system are based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), with a strong focus on facilitating the joint programmes on which the alliance is working. Correspondingly, the alliance is committed to the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes and aims for the ability to "self-accredit" its future undertakings.

In a way, INGENIUM's current approach to QA in education appears to be strongly driven by the different External Quality Assurance systems in the partners' home countries. There are very different requirements across partners' national systems; hence, INGENIUM has made it a priority to find smart ways towards the European Approach.

The alliance's internal QA activities in education can be improved to ensure that (in line with the ESG) they are based on the premise that external QA should build on internal QA. INGENIUM already operates a considerable number of educational activities/learning opportunities (see also Section 4 on teaching and learning) and the partners in charge of these opportunities also collect feedback on many of them. However, whether and how data is collected, with whom it is shared, and what can and will be done based on which quality standards, seems not to be guided or even systematically safeguarded. **The team therefore recommends that INGENIUM prioritise the design and approval of manageable monitoring architectures for joint education, mobility, staff participation, research cooperation, stakeholder engagement and common data-governance arrangements (including GDPR-related procedures).**

4. Teaching and learning

The team found teaching and learning to be the strongest and most advanced area of alliance activity within INGENIUM. The alliance has succeeded in generating momentum, commitment and a wide range of joint educational initiatives within a relatively short period. It has also demonstrated openness to innovation, flexibility and new forms of student-centred provision. There are two main pillars of INGENIUM's educational efforts — the educational pathways and the joint programmes — with a great variety of activities and formats feeding into these pillars or running in parallel. It was quite difficult for the team to grasp all the different learning opportunities for students that operate across the consortium, and there was a tendency among interviewees to approach these learning opportunities in line with work package structures, rather than holistically (e.g. not counting “hackathons” among the learning opportunities, because they are not part of Work Package 4). This results in a quite fragmented picture of what INGENIUM has operationalised regarding teaching and learning, impeding effective oversight. INGENIUM is clearly aiming to build quite an ambitious and comprehensive portfolio of educational offers: joint programmes, the INGENIUM pathway programmes, micro-credentials, summer and winter schools, Blended Intense Learning Programmes (BIPs), but also hackathons, INGENIUM week (which always includes a summer or winter school, but goes beyond it), entrepreneurial classes/modules for basically all students (at least, according to the original application) — and probably other elements the team had missed.

Educational offers and student services are distributed across at least five work packages. The tendency to think and work within those work packages seems to impede the building and managing of a coherent educational portfolio and policy framework and the monitoring of learner benefits. It has also made it very difficult to effectively communicate offers to the intended target groups. Even the website contains only some elements. Students mentioned the difficulties of navigating the alliance's various offers. The team acknowledges that explaining and handling this diversity/complexity is quite challenging, and it is not made any easier by changing targets, delays in delivery and the heterogeneous regulatory frameworks and teaching cultures. INGENIUM is advised to examine ways of informing its students and stakeholders more effectively, and specifically **to communicate more clearly, both internally and externally, which parts of the educational offer are fully operational, which are pilot initiatives and which remain developmental.**

From the perspective of stimulating innovation, the multitude of use cases and “experiments” is certainly desirable. INGENIUM has even launched an “Innovation in Education Strategy” led by an Innovation Committee, though how far the Innovation Strategy influences operations was difficult to establish. The idea is that the joint educational offers allow the developing and testing of new pedagogical models and didactic modes, which can then also transform education within the member organisations. With regard to balancing impact and efficiency, however, **the team is convinced that the alliance would benefit from prioritising a smaller number of high-quality, well-supported joint educational initiatives rather than pursuing rapid expansion across too many formats simultaneously**, even if this could lead to temporary disappointment for some partner institutions and staff groups that feel ownership towards the formats.

Currently, the alliance is working on several academic programmes:

- Master's level programme on Chemical and Biochemical Process Technologies
- Master's level programme on Nursing Care
- Master's level programme on Sustainable Management and Sustainability
- Master's level programme on Mathematical Modelling, Data Science and Machine Learning for Science and Technology
- Bachelor's degree programme on Entrepreneurship and Innovation
- joint PhD programme on Innovative Strategies for Wellbeing
- joint PhD programme on Artificial Intelligence
- joint PhD programme on Planetary Sciences.

Additional programmes might be added if the opportunity arises: there is as yet no discernible portfolio strategy. A joint doctoral programme among three partners is already operating, but its status within the broader educational framework appears to be still vague. **The team finds that INGENIUM might benefit from defining transparent criteria for selecting flagship joint programmes and micro-credentials, based on strategic relevance, institutional readiness, student demand and long-term sustainability.**

A great deal of time and effort has been invested by the alliance's partners in understanding each other and the relevant contextual factors when it comes to education: they have produced analyses, concept notes and models that form an important basis for the coming years. The payoff can partly already be seen in the pathway model that INGENIUM has developed, allowing students to tailor their own individual student journey from a pre-defined set of physical, digital and blended modules and course formats. Students welcome the flexible learning opportunities offered through the pathway programme and the micro-credentials framework. At the same time, they report that communication on available offers is fragmented and difficult to navigate. Many students learn about INGENIUM activities only by chance.

Scaling up will require the alliance to balance pedagogical ambitions in a resource-efficient manner: some of INGENIUM's more ambitious and innovative formats are available for a small number of students only, and the alliance is likely to need to brace itself for navigating the tension between high-impact formats and mainstreaming.

In addition, there is still considerable dissent within the alliance on some core issues that will be relevant for the future. Questions include "Who actually is an INGENIUM student?" and "How is an INGENIUM graduate defined?"; answers range from "every student enrolled at a partner institution" to "only those that have participated in programmes involving mandatory mobility". On the question "How will non-ECTS-bearing and ECTS-bearing activities be aligned for credit recognition?", the alliance has already achieved considerable success with setting up formal agreements and conceptual notes that clarify similar issues, though from what the team has seen, these are mostly for the pathways and joint programmes, and are thus not yet applied holistically. **The team thus advises INGENIUM to ensure that all joint educational offers have documented arrangements that clearly identify partners, roles, responsibilities, student pathways and monitoring schemes.**

Academic programmes are initiated and carried forward by academic teams from different partner institutions and from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. The alliance's Academic Committee supervises their work. External stakeholders are involved in the early design stages, e.g. by asking local industry representatives about their needs regarding student skills and graduate profiles. Students are involved via their own formal representatives in the alliance's governance bodies, but not much beyond. There are various opportunities for students to provide feedback on their learning experiences, and the interviewees appreciated the alliance's interest in their views. However, they also reported that there is no "feedback on their feedback", i.e. there are no systematic information flows about the impact their contributions have had on any further development. The team found that considering INGENIUM's emphasis on student-centeredness, the partnership with students beyond the formal bodies and committees could be strengthened. In particular, **the team recommends that INGENIUM ensure that unfettered student voices drive development of the alliance and its programmes and that the impact of student feedback is evident to everyone involved.**

5. Research

INGENIUM has established structures for governing its research activities and there is an entire work package dedicated to research. A Research School Board coordinates doctoral collaboration across the alliance by fostering joint doctoral programmes (with one already being operated), research-based training activities, and mobility within thematic fields (or “ecosystems”, as the alliance calls them) that connect research groups and partner institutions. The Research School Board brings together representatives from all partner universities and is also responsible for defining common standards for doctoral cooperation and ensuring alignment of doctoral education within the alliance.

What appears to be less clear is what strategic objectives the alliance wants to achieve with its joint research activities in the mid to long term. Some interviewees voiced the opinion that research was not a strong priority — beyond informing educational activities — and that some of the original objectives from the application regarding research had already been revised and reframed (i.e. how far the idea of a joint doctoral school should be taken). Partly, this is linked to the limits of using ERASMUS funds for the alliances for research activities, but from the team’s point of view there is also a disconnect between the alliance-level goals and activities and those of the individual member organisations. The team therefore considers that INGENIUM would benefit from a more explicit alliance-level research strategy focused on a limited number of realistic objectives. At this stage, the alliance does not need to replicate all dimensions of institutional research policy at alliance level. Rather, it should identify where cooperation already has traction and where added value can be demonstrated. **The team therefore recommends that INGENIUM define a realistic alliance research strategy, focused on a limited number of areas where cooperation is credible and added value can be demonstrated.**

Some success has already been achieved in the short period since INGENIUM was founded. The alliance has launched about 20 research groups, following a successful internal call for cross-institutional communities, and is currently preparing a second call focusing on doctoral education. In addition, University of Rouen-Normandy has independently funded additional groups’ activities through French National Research Agency/France 2030 mechanisms. The research groups seem to be intended to promote the mobility of researchers, with a strong focus on early-stage academic staff, and to further their connections not only between themselves, but also, as voiced in the original application, with other research centres and global networks. The interviews showed that expectations for the research groups are still vague and the actual intended qualitative and quantitative targets for inter-alliance collaborations underdeveloped. If research cooperation is to become a stronger and more visible part of the alliance’s profile, INGENIUM will need to show more systematically what kind of cooperation is being fostered and what evidence will be used to assess its progress.

The team does not consider that this requires a complex measurement framework. On the contrary, given the current developmental stage of the alliance, a limited number of meaningful indicators would be preferable. **The team therefore recommends that INGENIUM use a limited set of research indicators that reflect genuine cooperation, such as number of co-supervisions, joint project applications, shared doctoral training and joint projects producing co-authored outputs.** There is

also potential to align preexisting research strengths more strongly with the educational efforts, leveraging them for “brand building” and supporting the alliance’s competitiveness.

Alongside research groups, joint activities on doctoral education are the second key pillar within INGENIUM’s research domain. The new strategic plan has reframed the initial idea of a “joint doctoral school” as “joint doctoral ecosystems” instead. Different models of collaboration will be possible, with at least three partners teaming up for joint PhD programmes or less structured collaborations around the training of PhD students. PhD scholarships already allow students to make use of the infrastructure at partner institutions or to spend some time abroad. The team asked about numbers, but there is as yet no comprehensive overview of collaborative activities and their impact at the PhD level. Enrolment numbers for the inaugural joint PhD programme appear to be comparatively low for now (with 4 places offered), though interest (20+ applications) might be higher. **The team recommends that INGENIUM develop doctoral cooperation progressively, beginning with cotutelle arrangements, joint supervision, doctoral training activities and shared researcher development, before moving to more integrated alliance-level structures.**

6. Service to society

The call to contribute to tackling societal challenges is deeply ingrained in the conceptualisation of all European University alliances, and consequently also plays a strong role for INGENIUM, at both a global and a local level. Examples can be found in the alliance's explicit commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 across all areas of operations; and in its specific focus on inclusiveness, i.e. by initiating specific actions to facilitate the access to higher education and completion of people belonging to under-represented and disadvantaged groups and those from developing countries, e.g. through dedicated scholarships and support services. INGENIUM has even launched two work packages dedicated to sustainability and inclusiveness, which are intended to feed into education and research, as well as into the underlying administrative processes.

However, the team was unable to identify a clear strategic framework for the alliance's ambitions to serve society or to find an overview explaining what INGENIUM is doing in this regard. Nevertheless, it became clear that service to society is recognised as an important dimension, with some early initiatives focusing on challenge-based learning, skills development and engagement with regional stakeholders. This last element is approached mainly via the concept of associate partners, i.e. companies, non-governmental organisations or municipalities that have a strong relationship with one of the INGENIUM partners and have agreed to support their alliance work. In the SER, INGENIUM acknowledges that associates have not yet been involved as systematically as intended and that the partnership model has not yet reached its full potential. Strengthening the role of associate partners is therefore identified by the alliance as a strategic priority for the next phase.

During the interviews, the team could confirm that the associate partners' representatives were communicating mainly with the higher education institution with which they had already formed a prior close relationship. They appreciated the idea of the alliance and the potential to gain access to a larger and more international pool of students and staff to work with and draw talent from. However, there is little involvement in or knowledge about INGENIUM beyond the specific activities that the external partners sponsor. **The alliance is therefore advised to define a clearer stakeholder engagement model distinguishing local institutional partnerships from alliance-wide strategic partnerships.** Linked to this, **the team also recommends that INGENIUM lever the ability and willingness of external associate partners to systematically engage across several member institutions and activities (rather than relying mainly on parallel local relationships).** This is also very much in line with the alliance's self-observation that by pooling complementary strengths, disciplinary expertise and regional perspectives, the alliance could create an added value for its regional ecosystems that would not be achievable by partners on their own.

One further key target group also mentioned in the new long-term strategy is national and regional authorities, with the objective of influencing policy development and regulatory frameworks to facilitate transnational cooperation in higher education. However, how to achieve these objectives is, for the time being, again at the discretion of each partner institution.

As the alliance itself finds in its SER, societal engagement via research and technology transfer is still a developmental area, at least at the alliance level: individual partners are quite strong in this, but how these strengths can be leveraged for the entire meta-organisation remains to be seen. The

alliance has already engaged in a debate on how to define and measure its societal impact and was encouraged during the last EC-led review to increase its respective efforts. There are various ways of approaching this issue, and there is a tendency among many alliances to “bureaucratise” it and focus on communicating impact via data on outputs and deliverable or anecdotal impact stories, without a coherent, strategy-led underlying framework.

The team found that one of INGENIUM’s most promising, though still underdeveloped, ambitions is its potential to create societal value beyond what the member institutions achieve individually. The alliance’s diversity, geographical spread and combination of institutional strengths provide a strong basis for this. The SER itself notes that the alliance can aggregate complementary strengths and connect regional challenges within a shared European framework. At present, however, this additional alliance-level impact is still more potential than demonstrated practice. The team found that INGENIUM is beginning to work on this question, but that more explicit reflection will be needed on how to define, support and monitor the distinct societal contribution of the alliance itself.

The team encourages INGENIUM to further invest in clearly defining and measuring the additional impact on society created by the alliance as a collective entity, beyond the achievements of the individual partner institutions. This will also help the alliance’s leadership to determine where partnering up adds value to their activities.

7. Internationalisation

Simply becoming/being a part of INGENIUM appears to have given a considerable boost to many partners' internationalisation and mobility efforts. Only a few partners had a strong tradition of comprehensive transnational cooperation before joining INGENIUM, and the alliance has made internationalisation a strategic priority for all of them. Some partners have already reported a considerable increase in the number of students (and staff) going abroad because of the different INGENIUM formats. Students were particularly appreciative of the offers and what they gained through their experiences abroad, whether short or long term. They were also very vocal about their view that any INGENIUM graduate would need to spend at least some time physically abroad to count as such. For 2026, INGENIUM has made its work on flexible mobility stipends a strategic priority, aiming to offer students enrolled in the pathways the opportunity to participate in learning activities offered by INGENIUM universities and their partners in a more individualised manner, as befits the pathways idea.

The IEP evaluation team is also aware, however, that mobility stipends and student scholarships are a significant cost factor and that making sure all students have equal opportunities will be a considerable challenge. This goes well beyond financial considerations and includes all kinds of policy alignment, not least in order to ensure that students' investment in those activities is properly rewarded. For many of those the team met, full recognition of their activities abroad is not yet a reality, and to some extent it is not even envisaged in the design of the study format. Notably, there seems to be a strong take-up of mobility activities by international students (rather than local students).

Overall, the team found that mobility is both one of INGENIUM's most valued achievements and one of its most significant operational challenges. Students and staff interviewed during the site visit spoke positively about mobility opportunities and about the academic, personal and intercultural value they had derived from participating in alliance activities. At the same time, the team also heard repeated reference to practical barriers, including differences in academic calendars, administrative procedures, workload models, language issues, recognition arrangements and the varying capacity of institutions to support expanding mobility. These are typical challenges in transnational cooperation, but in a European University alliance they become strategically important because they directly affect the feasibility of the alliance's educational model.

The team recommends that INGENIUM focus on removing the concrete operational barriers that most directly affect mobility and joint provision, especially calendar alignment, administrative simplification, clearer recognition arrangements and stronger support visibility for students and staff.

Experimentation is a key aspect of INGENIUM's internationalisation efforts. For example, the alliance is proud of its digital wellbeing module, involving students and academics from 8 out of the 10 partner institutions, which has been conceptualised as a BIP and serves a blueprint for the organisation of other joint education initiatives. INGENIUM has also created novel formats (e.g. 10 days of INGENIUM) that introduce/promote international engagement. Overall, there is a clear focus on skills

development, which is even more pronounced in the new long-term strategy. This connects to the EC's Union of Skills framework, and the emphasis is clearly on leveraging industry collaborations and interdisciplinarity to meet labour market needs. What is far less explicit, though, are the skills linked to gaining experience within different national systems and across cultures. For the students, this appears to be one of the key advantages of studying in an alliance-level format, but the official documents and the other groups of actors barely touch upon the international dimension of the graduate mindset.

Thus, the team found that interculturality is not yet always made sufficiently explicit in the formal educational language of the alliance. As INGENIUM develops its joint educational model further, there would be value in identifying more clearly what intercultural learning outcomes it expects students to achieve through participation in the alliance. **The team therefore advises INGENIUM to define intercultural learning outcomes more explicitly in educational and mobility initiatives, so that interculturality becomes a visible academic and institutional objective, rather than treating it as a general and largely implied aspiration.** Linked to this, it also seems prudent to further investigate the intended target groups once more: during the site visit, the team found several indications that the take-up of mobility offers was stronger by international students than local students.

The interviewed staff members also unanimously agreed that international cooperation was inherently beneficial. Despite the extra workload, collaborating on something new and learning from each other clearly has a strong motivating aspect. Considering the need — and desire — to move from “start-up” to “scaling up”, or at least to find a good balance between starting new things and growing/stabilising selected initiatives in a sustainable manner, there is a risk that the novelty will eventually wear off. This might raise awareness of the cost of working together, where the learning is individual rather than institutional and is therefore lost when staff leave alliance roles and activities. The team is conscious of the fact that many alliance members have already found ways to reward and recognise alliance activities (see also Section 2 of this report), yet it was clear that many efforts are additional to regular duties. **The team thus recommends better recognition of staff participation in alliance activities, so that internationalisation does not rely disproportionately on individual goodwill.**

8. Conclusion

All European University alliances are, to a considerable extent, top-down projects. The key consideration and challenge is how to mainstream the alliance so that the transformative potential gains momentum beyond the project's core groups. In INGENIUM, the team found an alliance that — despite or even because of the diversity of its member universities — is built on strong mutual appreciation and carried by a strong belief in the power of partnering up. In a relatively short period of time, INGENIUM has established core governance bodies, developed a range of joint educational initiatives, created common policy frameworks and generated visible momentum around mobility, cooperation and future institutional integration. These are significant achievements.

In particular, the evaluation demonstrated:

- a strong capacity for change within INGENIUM;
- the actors actively involved in INGENIUM confirming collective learning over the first three years;
- considerable investment in the transformation process, evidenced not least by the institutional transformation plans that have been developed at each partner institution.

At the same time, INGENIUM remains in a transitional phase. Many of its key strengths are still carried by project structures, a relatively small number of highly engaged actors and a portfolio of activities that is richer in ambition and experimentation than in fully consolidated operating models. The central challenge for the alliance is therefore no longer to justify the value of cooperation, but to convert that cooperation into a more mature, more evidence-based, more evenly owned and more sustainable model for the next phase of development. Relatedly, efforts need to be made to ensure that those changes are satisfying stable, agreed and widely understood expectations, processes and intended outcomes.

Communication will be key to the alliance's success, but it also represents a major challenge. The interviews showed that for now, communication is often understood as promoting and disseminating information, rather than as a two-way street that also involves audiences outside the circle of actors inherently interested in INGENIUM/the European University alliances. From the team's point of view, institutionalising INGENIUM will require the involvement of the member universities' communities more broadly, but also thinking outside the box of the blueprint for alliances created by EC calls and funding schemes, and realising that not everything has to be (entirely) new: sometimes (re)purposing existing structures and processes within the alliance could even be more effective.

In this report, the IEP evaluation team has formulated recommendations regarding these improvement areas intended to support the alliance in its ambitions. The most important recommendations are as follows:

Governance and institutional decision-making

- *Translate the broad long-term vision into a shared, time-bound strategic roadmap with key indicators, clear phases, milestones, ownership and expected institutional changes at partner level.*
- *Review and clarify decision-making lines between alliance bodies, thematic structures and the institutions, so that responsibility, authority and accountability are clearly visible.*
- *Develop a simple governance map for internal use, showing who proposes, who decides, who implements and who monitors in each major area of alliance activity.*
- *Each member institution to define explicitly what “institutional transformation through INGENIUM” means in its own context, and how this will be embedded in its internal strategy, structures and, not least, resource allocation.*
- *Define which activities genuinely require EGTC centralisation, then finalise and implement a detailed EGTC roadmap (including legal milestones, staffing implications, financial commitments, service scope, communications and partner responsibilities).*
- *Give consideration to gaining a full and proper breakdown of the totality of all income and cost data across the alliance and related information for mid- to long-term planning.*

Quality culture

- *Regularly review (by existing governance bodies) a limited set of alliance-wide indicators clearly linked to intended outcomes (rather than only to project reporting).*
- *Move from a framework-based QA approach to an operational alliance QA system with clear procedures, responsibilities, review cycles and follow-up mechanisms, and clarify the relationship between alliance QA structures and institutional QA systems, making sure that responsibilities are complementary, rather than ambiguous.*
- *Prioritise the design and approval of manageable monitoring architectures for joint education, mobility, staff participation, research cooperation, stakeholder engagement and common data-governance arrangements (including GDPR-related procedures).*

Teaching and learning

- *Communicate more clearly, both internally and externally, which parts of the educational offer are fully operational, which are pilot initiatives and which remain developmental.*
- *Prioritise a smaller number of high-quality, well-supported joint educational initiatives rather than pursuing rapid expansion across too many formats simultaneously.*
- *Define transparent criteria for selecting flagship joint programmes and micro-credentials, based on strategic relevance, institutional readiness, student demand and long-term sustainability.*
- *Ensure that all joint educational offers have documented arrangements that clearly identify partners, roles, responsibilities, student pathways and monitoring schemes.*

- *Ensure that unfettered student voices drive development of the alliance and its programmes and that the impacts of student feedback are evident to everyone involved.*

Research

- *Define a realistic alliance research strategy, focused on a limited number of areas where cooperation is credible and added value can be demonstrated.*
- *Use a limited set of research indicators that reflect genuine cooperation, such as number of co-supervisions, joint project applications, shared doctoral training and joint projects producing co-authored outputs.*
- *Develop doctoral cooperation progressively, beginning with cotutelle arrangements, joint supervision, doctoral training activities and shared researcher development, before moving to more integrated alliance-level structures.*

Service to society

- *Define a clearer stakeholder engagement model distinguishing local institutional partnerships from alliance-wide strategic partnerships.*
- *Lever the ability and willingness of external associate partners to systematically engage across several member institutions and activities (rather than relying mainly on parallel local relationships).*
- *Further invest in clearly defining and measuring the additional impact on society created by the alliance as a collective entity, beyond the achievements of the individual partner institutions.*

Internationalisation

- *Focus on removing the concrete operational barriers that most directly affect mobility and joint provision, especially calendar alignment, administrative simplification, clearer recognition arrangements and stronger support visibility for students and staff.*
- *Define intercultural learning outcomes more explicitly in educational and mobility initiatives, so that interculturality becomes a visible academic and institutional objective (rather than treating it as a general and largely implied aspiration).*
- *Better recognise staff participation in alliance activities so that internationalisation does not rely disproportionately on individual goodwill.*