2026 Quality Assurance Thematic Peer Groups

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

Deadline for application: **31 October 2025**

1. Introduction

Systematic and reliable quality assurance is fundamental to European (and international) cooperation in higher education, serving as a tool for greater transparency and, consequently, easier recognition across Europe. In addition to our current activities on quality assurance, the European University Association (EUA) is launching a new series of Quality Assurance Thematic Peer Groups that will provide participating universities with an opportunity for peer learning and exchange of experiences.

Through this call EUA seeks participants for the first round of Thematic Peer Groups (TPGs) on Quality Assurance, whose work will also feed into the 2026 European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF).

2. Objectives

The main objectives of the groups are:

- to discuss and explore practices and lessons learnt in organising and implementing internal quality assurance processes in European universities;
- to contribute to the enhancement of internal quality assurance by identifying key considerations on the selected themes that will be shared with EUA's wider membership.

3. Themes and expected outcomes

In the first round, EUA offers two themes for the Thematic Peer Groups that are aligned with the broader topics of quality culture and internationalisation.

Themes:

1. Cultivating self-reflection and constructive criticism in academic communities

Quality in higher education is not achieved solely through formal systems, structures and processes, but through a mindset of continuous learning and improvement. When individuals and teams engage in honest self-assessment, and openly give and receive feedback, this strengthens trust, transparency, and accountability—core elements of a healthy institutional culture.

This group will explore how higher education institutions can intentionally foster environments where self-reflection, open dialogue, and constructive criticism are embedded in daily practice—ultimately making quality assurance a living culture rather than a mere exercise in compliance. In particular, it will examine institutional practices that support regular self-reflection and open critique as well as existing barriers, the roles and contributions of academic staff and students, incentives, support structures, and recognition mechanisms that sustain reflective culture, as well as approaches to assessing the presence and impact of a feedback-oriented culture.

2. Building robust QA for international cooperation

International cooperation for education brings with it numerous benefits, including the expectation of improved quality and diversity of the educational offer and mobility opportunities. However, international cooperation also brings challenges, not least in relation to quality assurance. Indeed, differences in legal frameworks, institutional procedures, and cultural norms across partner institutions can lead to inconsistencies, duplication of efforts, and difficulties in aligning internal institutional QA processes.

This group will explore how to build consistent internal QA practices across partner universities involved in joint education delivery (including joint programmes) by identifying effective strategies for coordinating multiple internal review cycles and ensuring that key quality processes are mutually recognised and streamlined across institutions. In particular, it will examine practical methods for harmonising assessment criteria, learning outcomes, and grading policies, as well as for consolidating and interpreting QA data from diverse institutional systems to facilitate comparability and integration.

Both groups will reflect on:

- the key challenges related to the theme and how to address them;
- what kind of institutional policies and processes can help address the key challenges.

In addition, each group is encouraged to explore which evidence can be drawn on when identifying good practice, key considerations, and/or recommendations.

4. Activities and timeline

Eight to ten EUA member universities will take part in each TPG. Group members will attend **three meetings** during 2026 (between February and September), each lasting one or two days. As a given, one of the three meetings will take place in person, hosted by a group member, and one online. The group is free to decide whether to organise the third meeting in person or online. Meeting venues and dates will be jointly determined once group members have been selected and the availability of selected group members has been mapped.

Based on the exchange of knowledge, experiences and practices, each group will summarise the conclusions in the form of a short **report** that will be published on the EUA website.

A **final workshop** will facilitate exchange and discussion among all groups. It will be organised prior to the **European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF)**, taking place in November 2026, which all group members are encouraged to attend as workshop facilitators or participants. It will provide an occasion to present each group's outcomes to a wider audience.

5. Group chairs

A coordinator from the EUA secretariat will support the group's work, organise and attend all meetings and draft the group's report.

EUA will also appoint one representative from the group to act as chair. Chairing responsibilities include the planning of the group's work (including meetings and potential asynchronous work), facilitation and steering of the discussions during meetings, and ensuring that the group stays focused and goal-oriented in collaboration with the EUA secretariat. Group chairs will receive a fee-waiver (one per group) for the 2026 European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF).

Those interested in taking up this role are invited to express their interest as part of the application.

6. Eligibility

The call is open to all EUA member universities, represented by senior managers or coordinators with responsibilities for quality assurance at their university. Participating universities are expected to ensure student perspectives are included in the groups' work, preferably by inviting students to join group meetings. Applications submitted jointly with a student representative are encouraged.

Each university is invited to send up to two representatives to the group meetings. Students do not count towards this maximum number.

7. Selection criteria

The selection of group members will be done primarily on the basis of the motivation of the university and the experience in the selected theme, as demonstrated in the application. In addition, the following aspects will be considered:

- geographical diversity;
- balance of institutional profiles (e.g. multi-faculty, specialised);
- engagement of student representatives.

Each university can submit only one application and participate in only one of the groups. Therefore, if you apply for both groups, please indicate which one is your priority.

8. Terms and conditions for participation

There is no participation fee. However, universities will participate on a self-funded basis and are responsible for organising and covering their own travel and accommodation for the physical group meeting(s) and the final workshop. EUA will cover the costs of joint meals (lunches, coffee breaks, and dinner) during the meetings.

Universities interested in participating in the Thematic Peer Groups are invited to fill in the online application form by **31 October 2025**. Applicants will be informed in late November whether their application has been successful. For further questions, please contact Cecilia Biaggi (cecilia.biaggi@eua.eu).

About EUA

The European University Association (EUA) represents more than 900 universities and national rectors' conferences in 48 European countries. EUA plays a crucial role in the Bologna Process and in influencing EU policies on higher education, research and innovation. Through continuous interaction with a range of other European and international organisations, EUA ensures that the independent voice of European universities is heard.