# HEInnovate Workshop for European Universities alliances

## Summary

21/05/2025

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# Summary of the HEInnovate Workshop for European Universities alliances

**Date:** 21 May 2025

**Time:** 15:00–17:00 CET

**Location:** Online (MS Teams)

**Facilitators**:

- **Ieva Grumbinaitė** – Research Manager at PPMI (Part of Verian Group)

- **Flávia Colus** – Senior Researcher at PPMI (Part of Verian Group)

- **Mona Roman** – Director of Research at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences and coordinator of the U!REKA Alliance, member of the HEInnovate Expert Group;

- **Marina Ranga** – Manager of the Innovation Hub at the University of Seville, under Ulysseus Alliance, member of the HEInnovate Expert Group.

The HEInnovate Workshop for European Universities alliances, held online on 21 May 2025, brought together 50 participants from 23 European Universities alliances to explore how the HEInnovate self-assessment tool can support entrepreneurial and innovative transformation in European Universities alliances. The workshop aimed to introduce the tool, showcase practical examples of its application, and gather feedback on how HEInnovate could be adapted to better serve multi-institutional partnerships.

HEInnovate is a self-reflection tool for higher education institutions that wish to explore their innovative potential. It guides the user through a process of identification, prioritisation and action planning in eight key areas, including leadership and governance, organisational capacity, entrepreneurial teaching and learning, preparing and supporting entrepreneurs, digital transformation and capability, entrepreneurial ecosystem and networks, the internationalised institution, and impact of the entrepreneurial higher education institution.

This online workshop explored how HEInnovate can support alliances in their strategic development and collaborative innovation efforts. It considered the tool's potential to contribute to alliance-level planning, coordination, and action, and examined whether adaptations are needed to better suit the specific needs and ambitions of European Universities alliances.

## Opening and Welcome

Ieva Grumbinaitė (PPMI) opened the event, introducing the workshop's purpose: to reflect on the relevance of HEInnovate for European Universities alliances, share experiences, and explore how to further adapt the tool to this collaborative context. Participants were guided through the agenda, introduced to the facilitation team, and invited to engage with the session through an interactive poll on Mentimeter.

The first Mentimeter question asked: *"Have you ever used HEInnovate?"*

Figure 1. Results from the Mentimeter: Have you ever used HEInnovate?
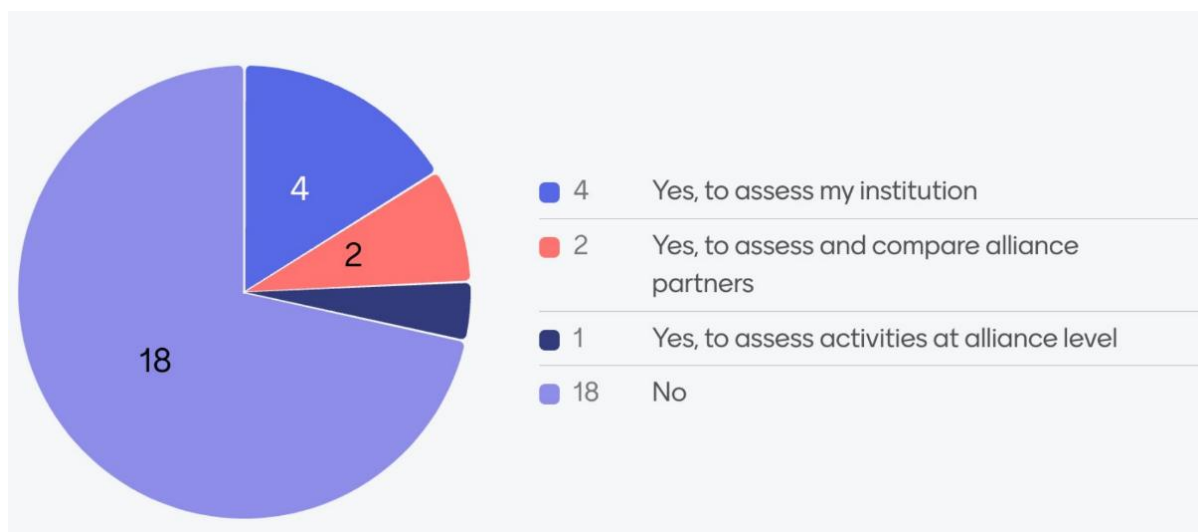


The results showed that most participants present had never used the tool, highlighting the importance of introducing it from both a technical and strategic perspective during the session.

## Introduction to HEInnovate and its Resources

Flávia Colus (PPMI) led the main presentation on HEInnovate, explaining its eight dimensions, user functionalities, and available resources. She emphasised that HEInnovate is most effective when used collaboratively, bringing together diverse stakeholders such as leadership, educators, staff, and students. Tools such as action cards, case studies, and country reviews provide practical guidance and examples for institutions at all stages of their transformation journey.

Before transitioning to the user case story, participants were invited to answer the second Mentimeter question:

*"In which of the 8 HEInnovate dimensions does your institution need to improve the most?"*

The results revealed that the top three dimensions where improvement is most needed are:

- Organisational Capacity: People, Resources, Incentives and Rewards (14 votes)

- Impact of the Entrepreneurial Higher Education Institution (HEI) (11 votes)

- Entrepreneurial Teaching and Learning (9 votes)

Other areas, such as Leadership and Governance (6), Digital Transformation and Capacity (3), and Internationalisation (3) received fewer votes. These results sparked interest among facilitators and participants, particularly because the trends diverged from those typically observed in past workshops, potentially pointing to distinct challenges faced by alliances.

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Figure 2. Results from the Mentimeter: In which of the 8 HEInnovate dimensions does your institution need to improve the most?



## User Story: U!REKA European Universities Alliance

Mona Roman (Metropolia UAS / U!REKA), member of the HEInnovate Expert Group, presented a detailed user story on how the U!REKA Alliance used HEInnovate. Formed in 2016 and receiving Erasmus+ funding in 2024, U!REKA focuses on the green and digital transition. Each partner completed a self-assessment using HEInnovate, which enabled the alliance to:

- Identify strong points across the alliance—especially in Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and Networks, and Leadership and Governance.
- Highlight weaker dimensions—notably Organisational Capacity, Digital Transformation and Capability, and Impact of the Entrepreneurial HEI—which were then prioritised for competence development.
- Facilitate peer learning by identifying which institutions performed strongly in specific areas and sharing their practices with other partners.

Importantly, Mona emphasised that while the results were instrumental in shaping the alliance's development strategy, they also had to be interpreted with cultural and institutional nuance. For instance, some universities were naturally more self-critical in their scoring, while others were more optimistic. This doesn't invalidate the process, but it means the scores shouldn't be compared directly between partners. Rather, the value lies in understanding each institution's relative strengths and needs, and in using the results to foster dialogue and improvement.

The U!REKA alliance plans to repeat the assessment at the end of its funding cycle in 2027, comparing results over time to monitor progress. Mona noted that a full alliance-level assessment of entrepreneurship capacity will only be truly meaningful after joint activities— such as a common incubator program and shared entrepreneurship curriculum—have been fully developed. Until then, HEInnovate continues to be a valuable tool for identifying priorities and coordinating capacity-building across institutions.

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## Discussion and Practical Considerations

The Q&A session that followed Mona Roman's presentation prompted a rich and practical exchange of ideas, concerns, and suggestions from participants—many of whom were encountering HEInnovate for the first time.

- **Who Should Complete the HEInnovate Self-Assessment?**

The first set of questions centred around who is best positioned to fill in the self-assessment, with one participant asking if the target respondents were institutional leaders, such as rectors, or if a broader range of staff should be involved.

Flávia explained that HEInnovate is designed to be collaborative, with maximum benefit derived when multiple stakeholders participate. The tool allows users to form assessment groups, enabling side-by-side comparison of results from university leadership, teaching staff, administrative staff, students, or external stakeholders. This group feature helps reveal discrepancies in perception, encourages internal discussion, and supports joint decision-making.

Mona added that within U!REKA, implementation varied depending on institutional capacity—some universities engaged multiple stakeholders, while others relied on smaller teams. Nevertheless, she also recommended conducting the assessment collectively, ideally through facilitated workshops.

- **Did the results change your alliance's activities?**

Mona clarified that the tool reinforced rather than redirected their plans. It helped identify which partners could lead the development of which activities based on their strengths. She emphasised that the assessment helped uncover hidden strengths and weaknesses, especially when partners were unaware of how distinctive their practices might be compared to others. The self-assessment thus helped assign roles within the alliance more strategically.

- **Can the HEInnovate Team support individual universities or alliances by facilitating HEInnovate workshops to their staff?**

Flávia explained that there are three pathways for institutions:

- Self-organised workshops using downloadable materials.
- Requesting a workshop facilitated by the HEInnovate team (which can be done online or onsite).
- Joining a "train-the-trainer" session, where institutional staff are trained to facilitate workshops independently.

These engagements are funded under the HEInnovate framework, and come at no cost for the participating institutions, though availability may be limited and prioritised for multi-institutional settings.

- **How does HEInnovate compare to Theory of Change approaches often used to model institutional impact?**

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Flávia responded that while HEInnovate doesn't currently offer a full theory-of-change framework, its action cards, assessment comparison features, and action planning templates can be used as a basis for impact pathway design. Repeating the assessment after a development period provides a feedback loop to track progress—a light version of impact monitoring.

## Breakout Group Discussions: Applying HEInnovate in Alliance Contexts

In the second half of the workshop, participants were divided into four facilitated breakout groups, each examining two dimensions of the HEInnovate self-assessment framework. They collaborated on digital MURAL boards to assess the relevance of statements at the alliance level, contribute examples of alliance activities related to those dimensions, and propose enhancements to improve the tool's suitability for use by European Universities alliances.

### Breakout Group 1:

**Facilitator**: Mona Roman (HEInnovate Expert Group)

**HEInnovate Dimensions:**

**Leadership & Governance**

**Organisational Capacity**

**Key points:**

- All HEInnovate statements in these dimensions were considered relevant, but applying them at the alliance level was not straightforward.
- The heterogeneity of partners in institutional structure, leadership models, and resource availability made consistent assessment difficult.
- One major concern: if different partners fill out the self-assessment at different levels (e.g., senior leadership vs. mid-level practitioners), their responses may not be comparable. For example, rectors might assess governance capacity more positively than operational staff, creating misleading variations.
- The maturity of the alliance was highlighted as a significant factor in whether certain statements were applicable at the alliance level. Early-stage alliances may lack the infrastructure related to these dimensions.

### Breakout Group 2:

**Facilitator**: Marina Ranga (HEInnovate Expert Group)

**HEInnovate Dimensions:**

**Entrepreneurial Teaching & Learning**

**Preparing and Supporting Entrepreneurs**

**Key points:**

- Discussion focused on how to bridge the institutional/alliance divide in teaching strategies and entrepreneurial support services.
- Participants echoed the need for action cards to be adapted to alliance contexts, asking: *"What can an alliance do together that differs from what an individual university might do?"*
- There was strong interest in having more concrete planning templates for cross-institutional initiatives (e.g., alliance-level mentoring networks, joint entrepreneurship modules).

## Breakout Group 3:

**Facilitator**: Ieva Grumbinaitė (PPMI)

**HEInnovate Dimensions:**

**Digital Transformation and Capability**

**Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and Networks**

**Key points:**

- These dimensions were seen as natural areas for alliance collaboration, especially through digital campuses, joint research platforms, and regional engagement models.
- However, there were concerns about measuring digital transformation collectively, when partners are at very different levels of capacity and readiness.
- The maturity of the alliance again emerged as a critical variable: some alliances were just beginning to connect their ecosystems.
- Participants called for creating benchmarking dashboards or customised alliance-level indicators, possibly as part of a future HEInnovate module or add-on.

## Breakout Group 4:

**Facilitator**: Flávia Colus (PPMI)

**HEInnovate Dimensions:**

**The Internationalised Institution**

**Impact of the Entrepreneurial Higher Education Institution**

**Key points:**

- The relevance of these dimensions for alliances was confirmed, especially given that internationalisation is a defining feature of European Universities alliances.
- Several alliances had already implemented short-term entrepreneurial mobility schemes and joint innovation programs.
- On impact, alliances typically rely on grant KPIs, which may be insufficient or too narrow for properly assessing their entrepreneurial activities.

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- Participants again stressed that action planning tools must be tailored to multi-institutional actors, particularly to help identify *shared* actions and track *collective* progress.
- The ability of alliances to measure impact depends significantly on their development stage: mature alliances can look at long-term outcomes, while newer ones should focus on inputs and early outputs.

### Cross-Cutting Reflections Across Breakout Groups

Participants across groups identified several common challenges and recommendations:

- Comparability of results between partners is at risk if partners use different assessment levels or if institutional approaches to entrepreneurship vary significantly.
- The maturity of the alliance greatly affects the relevance and feasibility of HEInnovate statements.
- HEInnovate's action cards and planning resources should be adapted to include:
    - Alliance-specific actions (e.g., joint programs, cross-border hubs, co-investment schemes)
    - Case studies and exemplars from existing alliances
    - A planning framework that reflects shared governance and resource pooling

## Closing Reflections and Next Steps

As European Universities alliances continue to evolve as key players in Europe's higher education policy landscape, adapting HEInnovate to their specific needs is a clear priority. This workshop was as much a consultative dialogue as it was a dissemination event, enabling participants to shape the future direction of the tool.

During the breakout group discussions, participants also contributed several examples of activities at the alliance level that align with HEInnovate's eight dimensions. These ranged from joint incubators and innovation hubs to entrepreneurial mobility programs and shared governance models. We will compile these examples and contact alliances where needed to develop a collection of real-life alliance practices that can serve as illustrative case studies. These examples will also help inform future adaptations of the tool's action cards, planning resources, and guidance materials.

In response to requests raised after the workshop, the HEInnovate team has now added all 65 European Universities alliances to the list of higher education institutions available on the HEInnovate website. This means that alliances can now conduct a self-assessment on behalf of the entire alliance, beyond being able to do so separately for each partner.

The workshop concluded with facilitators inviting participants to explore HEInnovate's full set of tools and materials via www.heinnovate.eu, register for upcoming webinars and facilitator training events. The HEInnovate team also encouraged alliances to reach out for workshops or peer learning opportunities, especially those seeking to integrate the tool into their strategic planning processes.

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