



DRAFT VERSION: December 2023

Bridging Boundaries: A Manifesto for a European Higher Education Interoperability Framework



“Imagine a European Education Area where borders do not limit potential”

At the heart of the [European Digital Education Hub](#), higher education professionals are on a mission. They have embarked on the endeavour to develop a European Higher Education Interoperability Framework to foster a seamless digital teaching and learning experience and bring European campuses to life. This Manifesto offers a set of principles from which they derive further concepts, moving forward. You are invited to join the mission and be part of this exciting endeavour.

The value of a Higher Education Interoperability Framework

At present, multiple interoperability challenges disrupt a seamless higher education (HE) experience. While measures to promote interoperability are taken at both European and national levels, various solutions have been developed in parallel, crucial challenges to achieve a **joint virtual campus** remain, and a clear way forward is still lacking. This systemic disorientation becomes especially clear from the work of [European University alliances](#) (EU-As) which are working to make **seamless mobility, data exchange, and organisational collaboration** a reality. To overcome this, the HE Interoperability Framework is being developed within the [European Digital Education Hub](#) (EDEH), a flagship project of the European Commission’s [Digital Education Action Plan](#).

Addressing HE interoperability requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond alliances and affects the entire education and training, policymaking, and EdTech sectors. While EU-As are its primary addressees, the HE Interoperability Framework aims to provide guidance, break down barriers, and streamline operations and solutions, allowing institutions to plan ahead and focus on their **core mission of educating and empowering students**. Leveraging interoperability can enhance the agility, efficiency, and accessibility of higher education institutions (HEI) at a macro level. Implementing the Framework will optimise education at a micro level. Its operationalisation will ultimately benefit students, educators, management, and administration across Europe.



Vision

Envision a [European Education Area](#) where borders do not limit potential and **where joint virtual campuses have come to life**. The HE Interoperability Framework aligns with HEI strategic objectives to make education more flexible and accessible. Transferring credits, qualifications, and records should be as straightforward as possible, promoting mobility and lifelong learning. Every achievement should be easily acknowledged, reinforcing the idea that **learning belongs to the learner**.

The HE Interoperability Framework is the **backbone for EU-wide standards in HE data exchange**, creating a digital ecosystem to meet future educational needs. In the long term, it will facilitate a seamless approach to **lifelong learning**, extending to primary and secondary education and to vocational training and adult education.


The HE Interoperability Framework is designed to encourage HEI to adopt a core set of standards. It encourages collaboration and the sharing of best practices across HE institutions in the wider [European Higher Education Area](#) (EHEA) and possibly beyond, in non-EU EHEA countries.

By creating a **viable, robust ecosystem based on open standards** to foster innovation and growth in the sector, the HE Interoperability Framework aims to create a diverse landscape that enables smaller EdTech companies to participate alongside larger ones. Yet, at the same time, it places **European public values** and the creation of a trusted environment for data and information exchange in the foreground, prioritising information security and reliability.

Principles

To solve interoperability challenges and coordinate collective efforts we, the developers of the HE Interoperability Framework, advocate for systemic change affecting all levels of interoperability. Our development strategy follows an open, co-creative, and stakeholder-driven approach.

It consists of the following components:

- **Foundational principles**, emphasising key concepts like collaboration, internationalisation, innovation, sustainability, quality assurance, multilingualism, multiculturalism, social inclusion, and lifelong learning. These principles serve as the bedrock, guiding the Framework's design and purpose.
 - To ensure validity, the Framework adheres to **legal requirements**, aligning with established frameworks, standards, and practices. This ensures the initiative complies with regulatory and legal standards.
 - Identifying **functional requirements** is the next step, drawing on concrete **user stories and existing solutions** (from and within EU-As). This involves understanding the practical needs and functionalities required for effective interoperability.
- 

- In addressing potential challenges, **risks** are rigorously assessed to develop robust mitigation strategies. This ensures that the Framework is resilient and capable of overcoming potential obstacles.
- **Privacy and security** are paramount concerns. Stringent requirements are integrated to safeguard data integrity and user trust, ensuring that individuals can interact with the higher education system securely and confidently.
- **Existing technological standards and solutions** are integral to the HE Interoperability Framework. It underscores the importance of public-private partnerships. And it champions the use of **open standards** to share and reuse content and reduce dependencies on proprietary systems. This ensures flexibility and adaptability in the rapidly evolving technological landscape.
- Additionally, our approach considers existing **EU policies, frameworks, strategies, recommendations, and action plans** related to citizens' rights and education. By intensifying the dialogue with policymakers and by building on existing policies, we ensure alignment with broader European initiatives.
- By incorporating **skills as the universal language** within the HE Interoperability Framework, we establish these as a vital bridge connecting education and employment. This fosters the development of individuals throughout their lifelong learning journey.

Expected outcomes

After a test phase by the EDEH Community of Practice, an interactive and incremental process, the HE Interoperability Framework is expected to empower HEI to develop interoperable digital ecosystems across institutions and joint virtual campuses.

A flexible and modular toolkit for HEI will demonstrate how existing standards can be applied to connect systems, solutions, and technical components.

Best practices and a comprehensive roadmap for implementation will be part of the HE Interoperability Framework. The roadmap will facilitate operationalisation, offer guidance and support to HEI in managing change, and provide insight into sustainable solutions for future maintenance.

Ultimately, by enhancing transparency and coordination between the HE community, the private sector, and policymakers, the HE Interoperability Framework offers a way forward on the most promising technical paths towards a more interconnected, efficient, and learner-focused higher education landscape and infrastructures for the future.