



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
Youth, Education and Erasmus+
Higher education

European degree

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- version 10-09-2024 -

WHY – THE OVERALL OBJECTIVE.....	2
1. WHY DOES THE COMMISSION PROPOSE A BLUEPRINT FOR A EUROPEAN DEGREE?	2
2. WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES THAT THE EUROPEAN DEGREE WOULD ADDRESS?	2
3. WHAT IS THE ADDED VALUE FOR THE EU AND ITS MEMBER STATES?	3
4. WHAT IS THE ADDED VALUE FOR STUDENTS?	4
5. WHAT IS THE ADDED VALUE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND ACADEMIC STAFF?	4
6. WHAT IS THE ADDED VALUE FOR EMPLOYERS AND THE LABOUR MARKET?	5
WHAT – THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE EUROPEAN DEGREE.....	5
7. WHAT IS THE CONCEPT OF THE EUROPEAN DEGREE?	5
8. WHAT ARE THE COMMON EUROPEAN CRITERIA AND HOW WERE THEY DEVELOPED?	6
9. WHAT IS THE LEGAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A JOINT DEGREE, A EUROPEAN DEGREE AND A EUROPEAN LABEL?	7
10. HOW IS THE EUROPEAN DEGREE COMPATIBLE WITH THE SUBSIDIARITY PRINCIPLE AND THE COMPETENCE OF THE MEMBER STATES?	8
11. WHY NOT SIMPLY MOVING FORWARD WITH THE BOLOGNA PROCESS AND AUTOMATIC RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS?	8
12. WILL THE EUROPEAN DEGREE BE AWARDED IN AN EU OR IN AN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA CONTEXT?	9
HOW – THE ROAD AHEAD	9
13. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES ALLIANCES IN THE BLUEPRINT FOR A EUROPEAN DEGREE?	9
14. WHAT WILL THE IMPACT ON BOLOGNA STRUCTURES BE?	10
15. HOW MUCH WILL IT COST? HOW ARE YOU GOING TO FINANCE THE EUROPEAN DEGREE?	10
16. WILL THE FACT THAT THE PROCESS IS VOLUNTARY LEAD TO THE RISK OF INEQUALITY AND FRAGMENTATION?	11
17. WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS?	12

*Note that in this document the term ‘**university**’ is used as a reference to the broader sector, representing the entire area of tertiary education, thus including all types of higher education institutions, including research universities, university colleges, universities of applied sciences, higher vocational education and training institutions, and higher arts institutions.*

Why – the overall objective

1. Why does the Commission propose a blueprint for a European degree?

- To enhance Europe's open strategic autonomy and high-level knowledge-development, it is key for universities to pool resources and expertise across the EU in the form of in-depth cooperation and transnational degree programmes. This will allow them to better equip future generations with the competences and skills that European societies need to thrive in an ever more interconnected world, including in strategic areas.
- Currently, many universities are already engaged in transnational education, be it through European Universities alliances, Erasmus Mundus, MSCA and EIT Masters, or other types of universities partnerships. **However, they face many obstacles when trying to develop joint educational degree programmes.** The more partners they want to involve, the more complex it becomes. European Universities alliances have already embarked on a number of joint educational programmes, but have often come to realise they will have to exclude some partners (countries) for some programmes due to high barriers.
- Higher education institutions have persistently signalled loss of time and high costs related to trying to overcome obstacles, often realising many of these obstacles are embedded in the respective national legislation. **That is why it is urgent to act, to cut red tape and simplify the development and delivery of joint degree programmes.**

2. What are the obstacles that the European degree would address?

- **Six Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects** have been funded in 2023-2024 to test a possible European degree label. They **involved more than 140 higher education institutions from across Europe, ministries from 17 Member States, and 60 national and regional authorities in charge of accreditation**, quality assurance and regulation of higher education from all Member States, as well as **businesses and students' representatives**.
- These projects identified **more than 50 legal and administrative barriers** that higher education institutions experience when developing and implementing joint educational degree programmes and awarding joint degrees. They are listed in Chapter 3 and Annex 3 of the [Staff working document](#), for each country, reflecting the lack of compatibility between many national systems.
- **Main barriers** are related to:
 - programme and curriculum structure
 - accreditation and quality assurance
 - governance structure
 - student enrolment and admission.
- Some of the **most telling examples** include:
 - incompatible rules on curriculum structure

- incompatible duration of Bachelor or Master programmes
 - incompatible rules on mandatory teaching languages
 - incompatible number of semesters that can be spent abroad by students
 - incompatible rules in terms of recognition of blended/online learning
 - incompatible rules in terms of timelines and accreditation requirements
 - incompatible rules on the diploma templates, and even the thickness of the paper
 - some countries do not allow joint degree programmes at Doctoral level.
- Although the Bologna process has contributed to a significant progress in facilitating transnational cooperation between higher education institutions, many challenges persist, and not all Bologna tools are fully implemented by Member States.
 - In addition, **many of the persisting incompatibilities between national legislations are not addressed by any Bologna tool.**

3. What is the added value for the EU and its Member States?

- By working together and pooling resources among their higher education institutions, the EU and its Member States can have the very best educational offer, innovative pedagogies and cutting-edge skills needed for the green and digital transitions on the doorsteps of their students – in every corner of Europe. Their universities will be able to offer attractive and competitive joint degree programmes, to retain and attract talent on a global scale.
- This would reinforce a strong sense of European identity and belonging and foster the European spirit of cooperation in the European Education Area and give fresh impetus to pursue the remaining gaps in the implementation of the Bologna process.
- The Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects and feedback from European Universities alliances and other higher education institutions give some insights of potential added value for a European Degree, for example:
 - Challenges and opportunities of artificial intelligence: European Universities say that to be able to catch-up and allow Europe to be a stronger actor in the field, the only way forward is by cooperating with their peers across Europe, as no single university has all the necessary knowledge and infrastructure.
 - Help in providing a wider brain circulation within Europe, with more balanced mobility flows, thanks to the embedded mobility in joint degree programmes. With a European Degree, top qualifications come closer and become more accessible to many students.
 - Support regions' 'smart specialisation': Universities could work closely with regional actors to develop joint degree programmes, enhancing possibilities for employers to cooperate with universities e.g., by participating in curricula design, and increased strength for their local eco-systems, encouraging students to also stay and take part in work opportunities in their region after their studies.

4. What is the added value for students?

- 9 out of 10 students surveyed in the context of a recent study¹ identified the following main benefits of a European degree:
 - More opportunities to study in different European countries, with mobilities embedded in the curriculum (fully and automatically recognised).
 - Innovative joint degree programmes with a seamless academic experience across campuses.
 - Gain future-proof skills and competences not available at any single institution and leading to higher employability worldwide.
- The benefits for students include, beyond the acquired knowledge in the field of study, unique intercultural skills, improved language skills, interdisciplinary and labour market relevant components in their programmes and extensive professional networks. Thus, making them obvious candidates for an increasingly global/transnational job market.

5. What is the added value for higher education institutions and academic staff?

- The Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects have shown that joint educational programmes and a European degree boost high quality standards as it would enable higher education institutions to:
 - Pool resources together to offer learning and training opportunities that they could not offer on their own, thereby improving their competitiveness and attractiveness worldwide.
 - Remove unnecessary barriers and cut red tape for setting up joint degree programmes between more than two universities from different Member States.
 - Develop new joint degree programmes with universities from countries that did not present compatible national rules so far, hence multiplying opportunities for new cooperation.
 - Ensure automatic recognition of degrees and learning periods across participating countries.
- Boosting a wider brain circulation within Europe, with more balanced mobility flows, for both students and academics. It will enhance knowledge transfer and skill enhancement among academics, promoting a culture of continuous learning and professional development.
- It will lead to less administrative hurdles and paperwork, enabling academics to focus on the content and quality of the cooperation rather than on its administration. At the

¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Burneikaitė, G., Pocius, D., Potapova, E. et al., *The road towards a possible joint European degree – Identifying opportunities and investigating the impact and feasibility of different approaches – Final report*, p.28. Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/945147>

same time, it allows for more opportunities to test new pedagogies and attractive teaching experience.

6. What is the added value for employers and the labour market?

- Employers, including multinational companies and SMEs, seek individuals with a blend of relevant knowledge, skills and competencies, including cultural intelligence, critical-thinking, problem-solving skills, creativity and adaptability, able to work in multicultural and multidisciplinary teams.
- Employers often highlight skills gaps in Europe, necessary for tackling big societal challenges. The European degree will equip graduates with future-proof competencies and skills that are particularly sought by employers.
- The European degree could in particular provide²:
 - Easier recruitment thanks to the increased transparency and clarity with a single degree that is easy to read, understand and compare, without undermining the 'status' of existing national degrees.
 - Enhanced possibilities for employers to cooperate with universities e.g., by participating in curricula design.
 - Enhanced attractiveness of Europe for talents across the world.

What – The framework for the European degree

7. What is the concept of the European degree?

- The Blueprint for a European degree presents a vision and objectives for a **common European framework for the design and delivery of joint degree programmes and the award of joint degrees matching a set of common European criteria**. The framework would be integrated by the Member States in their own legislation on a voluntary basis and following their own legislative and regulatory procedures. The European degree is not based on binding EU law.
- This **new type of qualification** – as European Bachelor, European Master and European PhD degree – would be **integrated in the legislation of each Member State, alongside all other national degrees**. It would be automatically recognised in those Member States that include this element in their national legislation and would be **open to any type of higher education institution**.
- The Commission Communication on a Blueprint for a European degree presents the possible next steps on the road towards a European degree, and how it can be co-shaped in the coming years together with Member States, higher education institutions, students, national quality assurance agencies, National Academic Recognition Information Centres, businesses and trade unions.

² [COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT, COM\(2024\) 144 final, 27 March 2024](#)

- The **common set of co-created European criteria** – presented in Annex II of the Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System in Higher Education – embody key transnational features and common European values, a strong European identity, aligning with the objectives of the [European strategy for universities](#).
- The compliance of the joint degree programmes with the commonly agreed European criteria would be checked as an integral part of the coordinator country's regular quality assurance and accreditation procedure. **No additional procedure** would be added.
- The European degree would be **delivered jointly by higher education institutions of any type³, independently from their source of funding, and open to all disciplines**, directly to their students, provided that they graduated from a joint degree programme matching the common criteria.

8. What are the common European criteria and how were they developed?

- The first version of the European criteria was drafted by a European Commission expert group, based on a [study on the joint European degree](#), and was published as part of the call for the Erasmus+ pilot policy experimentation projects.
- The six selected Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects mapped more than **1000 joint programmes across the EU** and analysed their possible compliance with the proposed European criteria. They carried out **surveys with thousands of higher education institutions and students** on the suitability of the criteria and conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups, including Member States and quality assurance agencies.
- The lessons learnt led to:
 - The grouping of the proposed European criteria into **three main categories**:
 1. Transnational programme, organisation, and management
 2. Learning experience
 3. European values, inclusiveness & multilingualism.
 - Removal of some criteria which were perceived as not necessary and clarification of some of the remaining criteria.
- They enabled the optimal formulation of the European degree criteria as presented in the blueprint for a European degree, in Annex II of the Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System in Higher Education, with the objective to strike the right balance between a certain level of ambition to make it attractive and reach the objectives of the European strategy for universities, while at the same time ensuring inclusion for any type of higher education institution and discipline.

³ Higher education institutions (HEIs) — are institutions which offer recognised degrees or other tertiary level qualifications and other comparable institutions at tertiary level, if recognised by the national authorities. The applicant must be recognised as higher education institution by the national authority of its country.

9. What is the legal difference between a joint degree, a European degree and a European label?

- A **joint degree** is a single diploma awarded by the higher education institutions offering the joint educational programme. It is recognised by each participating country as a national degree, and therefore needs to meet all the different national rules of each participating country.

The joint degree typically mentions the name of the student and the names of all universities that have contributed to the joint programme.

Joint degrees are limited in numbers, and in number of universities participating. **Less than one third of EU joint educational programmes manage to deliver a joint degree**, usually between two or three participating higher education institutions. Beyond this, the incompatibilities between the national rules make it impossible or very burdensome to deliver a joint degree.

- A **European degree** would be a **new type of joint degree**, based on a joint educational programme fulfilling common criteria agreed at EU level. It would work for those Member States that integrate the common European framework for the design and delivery of joint degree programmes and the matching set of common European criteria in their own legislation on a voluntary basis and following their own legislative and regulatory procedures. Member States would not add national constraints on top.

A European degree would be a significant simplification for any higher education institution wishing to develop a joint degree programme with as many partners as they wish within the EU.

The European degree could mention the name of the student and the names of all universities that have contributed to the joint programme.

It could lead to more joint degree programmes by making it a lot easier for any type of alliance of higher education institutions, including European Universities, wishing to deliver joint degree programmes.

- A **European label** is a certificate, certifying the compliance of a joint educational programme with the European criteria. This certificate accompanies the national diplomas of students graduating from such a joint programme. However, it would have no legal value on its own, and it would not be a joint degree per se.

The European label could be a first step on the pathway towards a European degree, encouraging and embracing the European criteria.

It could help creating a **strong brand**, promoting the delivery of joint educational programmes meeting the excellent higher education approaches as described in the common criteria. But it **would not make it simpler** for higher education institutions to set up and deliver joint degree programmes. It would not solve the incompatibilities between national rules.

10. How is the European degree compatible with the subsidiarity principle and the competence of the Member States?

- Just like any degree, a European degree would be delivered at national, regional, or institutional level, in full respect of the subsidiarity and competence of Member States. **And it is, of course, voluntary.**
- The European degree does not aim to harmonise degrees across the EU. It is a **voluntary framework** to **simplify** the development, implementation and recognition of joint degree programmes and joint degrees developed and awarded jointly by several institutions from different countries. It is up to each Member State to decide whether it wants to integrate the European degree in its legal and regulatory framework. And it is up to each university to decide if it wants to deliver a European degree (once allowed by their national laws and regulations).
- The Commission recognises the diversity of European higher education systems and understands that reforms will take place at different paces.
- That is why, while encouraging the enshrinement of the European degree in national legislation, the Commission has proposed a **preparatory European label**, as an intermediate step, allowing all higher education institutions in Europe to set up joint degree programmes on an equal footing, which could lead to the European degree at the appropriate time.
- The proposal for a Council Recommendation for a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System contains a proposal for Member States to work with EQAR, in consultation with the E4 group⁴, to identify ways to cover the activities related to the European label within the existing EQAR registration process, for example by complementing the regular review of the work of quality assurance agencies, on an optional basis for those agencies that wish to award the label. This would guarantee the quality of a joint degree programme leading to a European label.

11. Why not simply moving forward with the Bologna process and automatic recognition of qualifications?

- **Automatic recognition of qualifications alone will not facilitate the provision of joint degree programmes**, it will not address the existing incompatibilities between national legislations, as shown by the policy experimentation projects.
- The set-up of the European degree will bring transnational cooperation to the next level and will **boost the implementation of the Bologna instruments** by including them in the European criteria to be matched by joint degree programmes as follows:

⁴ The E4 Group comprises the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and the European Students' Union (ESU). The E4 group were founding members of EQAR.

- Internal and external Quality Assurance is conducted in accordance with the **Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)**.
- The joint degree programme is evaluated using **the standards of the European approach for quality assurance of joint programmes**.
- The joint degree programme describes the learning outcomes and credits in line with the **ECTS Users Guide**
- A **joint Diploma Supplement** is issued to students.
- At the same time, the **European degree goes much beyond the implementation of the Bologna tools**. It ensures **high quality education** with:
 - embedded mobility
 - digital and green skills
 - multilingualism
 - interdisciplinarity approaches
 - labour market relevance
 - democratic values
 - inclusion

12. Will the European degree be awarded in an EU or in an European Higher Education Area context?

- The proposed European degree criteria state that the joint degree programme must be offered by at least two higher education institutions from at least two different EU Member States. There are no restrictions beyond this minimum.
- The criteria allow for the involvement of universities from non-EU countries. However, these non-EU countries would have to allow the award of such a European degree in their legislation and fully respect the EU criteria.

How – The road ahead

13. What is the role of the European Universities alliances in the blueprint for a European degree?

- For all European higher education institutions to maintain a leading role on a worldwide scene, it is essential to be able to work seamlessly across borders. The European Universities alliances are trailblazers in setting in place such strategic, systemic and sustainable transnational cooperation. By pooling their resources and knowledge together, these alliances can offer high-quality education, including in strategic areas.
- For most of them, the European degree is the logical next step, to remove red tape and enable their students and regions to tap the full potential of their European Universities alliances with:

- Students benefitting from true European inter-university campuses with embedded mobility opportunities without borders, getting the skills and cutting-edge knowledge they need for their future.
- Countries and regions benefitting from retaining and attracting the talents they need, including filling skills gaps where needed, and in this way also encouraging balanced mobility.
- We need all EU countries on board for the blueprint for a European Degree to realise the full potential of the European Universities initiative, and to ensure that Europe's higher education institutions can continue to play a leading role on a worldwide scene. Take the example of technical universities within these alliances: they are reshaping engineering and technology education, aiming to create an integrated **European engineering education** space to boost international attractiveness and competitiveness. Together, they are redefining the education of engineering, technology and science-oriented degrees in Europe by developing a general European engineer profile.
- European Universities alliances could pave the way for the entire higher education sector, as the European degree is open to any higher education institution.

14. What will the impact on Bologna structures be?

- The European degree has no direct impact on the Bologna structures. It will not modify the 3-cycle system of Bachelor, Master, and PhD, but builds on the foundation of the Bologna structures.
- It will be a specific type of qualification – European Bachelor, European Master, European PhD – included, whenever necessary, in the National Qualifications Frameworks.
- The European degree is fully compatible with the European Qualifications Framework, and thus with the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area.

15. How much will it cost? How are you going to finance the European degree?

- The blueprint for a European degree is a policy instrument that is addressing Member States and higher education institutions to make it simpler and less costly to create joint degree programmes and award European degrees with several universities across Europe.
- It will reduce the costs for universities to set-up transnational joint degree programmes.
- It will also decrease costs for:
 - quality assurance agencies, by eliminating parallel quality assurance procedures for the same joint programme by different countries.
 - both recognition authorities and employers, by introducing automatic recognition and by increasing transparency of this type of joint degree in terms of learning outcomes.

- **The European Commission provides support through Erasmus+** to make the European degree a reality:
 - European Universities alliances currently receive up to EUR 14.4 million per alliance for a 4-year period from Erasmus+, equalling more than EUR 1.1 billion for the funding period 2021-2027. Part of the funds is money that can be used to set up joint educational programmes, in the future leading to a European degree.
 - Erasmus Mundus provides a yearly support to finance:
 - high-level transnational or international Master programmes resulting in the award of either a joint or multiple Master degree;
 - scholarships to excellent students worldwide for their participation in these joint Master programmes;
 - actions to encourage the design and development of innovative, highly integrated Master programmes in Europe and beyond.
 - The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions provide a yearly support to joint doctoral programmes. This represents around 10% of the funding of all MSCA doctorates. Note that there is no pre-allocated budget to joint doctorates, the budget division is based on the number of successful selected projects.
 - New actions proposed in the **2025 Erasmus+ Work Programme** are:
 - A **European degree Policy Lab** to develop detailed guidelines and action plans to guide the implementation of a European degree with experts from Member States, higher education institutions, quality assurance/accreditation agencies, students, and economic and social partners.
 - Erasmus+ support for **European degree Pathway Projects** enabling Member States, together with their accreditation and quality assurance agencies, universities, students, economic and social partners, to engage in the pathway towards a European degree.
 - Erasmus+ support for a **European degree exploratory action** enabling higher education institutions to design or adapt joint degree programmes compliant with the European criteria for a European degree.
 - An **annual European degree Forum** to take stock of progress, gathering high level representatives from Member States, key organisations in quality assurance and recognition, education social partners and representatives from economic and social partners.

16. Will the fact that the process is voluntary lead to the risk of inequality and fragmentation?

- The limited internationalisation of local higher education institutions already encourages young people to seek opportunities elsewhere, which can lead to brain drain.
- In fact, maintaining the status quo would perpetuate existing inequalities of opportunity and would not offer a solution to encourage graduates to stay in their home region:

- The recent publication of the European Commission 'Youth for reviving stagnating EU territories' shows that, based on a survey among 15 – 29 year-olds, the top three reasons that young people had for leaving their 'home regions' were: a lack of adequate employment opportunities (49 %), personal reasons (47 %) and a lack of adequate study opportunities (40 %).
- At the same time, the top two reasons why young people decided to stay in their 'home regions' were: personal reasons (49 %), followed by the overall study opportunities (39 %). It shows that better study opportunities, including opportunities for mobility, encourage them to stay in their home region.
- Furthermore, in regions either at risk or already in the 'talent development trap' (i.e. the difficulty to retain talent), young people identified more higher education institutions and more cooperation between industry and academia among the most effective policy options to counter this trend. Both are among the European degree criteria.
- The European degree could address this challenge. It will open opportunities for all higher education institutions to offer a highly-sought-after degree, regardless of which country they are operating in. Students looking for international experience will have embedded mobility opportunities. It will also increase internationalisation of the national higher education institutions at home.
- It will not lead to devaluation of national degrees – on the contrary. Higher education institutions including the European degree in their offerings signal students at home and abroad the high quality of their educational activities, therefore increasing the value of their national degrees as well.

17. What are the possible next steps?

- Autumn 2024: Publication of the final report on the detailed results of Erasmus+ pilot projects on the European degree (label) and institutionalised cooperation.
Member States to do their own internal analysis at national level.
- Q1-2 2025: Set up of the European degree policy lab to work on implementing guidelines and co-create the next steps.
- End 2025: 1st European degree policy forum to take stock of progress.
- End 2026: 2nd European degree policy forum to take stock of progress.
- 2027: Possible proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European degree presented at the 3rd European degree policy forum.