



European
Commission

Blueprint for a European degree - Frequently asked questions

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European degree

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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The information presented in this document does not pre-empt the discussions to be held in the Council on the blueprint for a European degree and related proposal for a Council recommendation on a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System in higher education.

Note that in this document the term ‘university’ is used as a reference to the broader sector, representing the entire area of tertiary education that are considered to be part of the higher education system in Member States. Thus, it may include all types of higher education institutions, including research universities, university colleges, universities of applied sciences, and others, depending on national legislation.

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 transnational¹ 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, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) Masters, or other types of universities partnerships. **However, they face too many obstacles when trying to develop joint degree programmes².** The more partners they want to involve, the more complex it becomes. European Universities alliances have already embarked on a number of joint degree 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.** This would allow for more joint degree programmes to be set up, so that more students can benefit from it.

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 degree programmes and awarding joint degrees³. They are listed in Chapter 3 and Annex 3 of the [Staff working document accompanying the Blueprint for a European degree](#), for each country, reflecting the lack of compatibility between many national systems.
- **Main barriers** are related to:

¹ Transnational is used as reference for cooperation among higher education institutions within the EU.

² Joint degree programmes are understood as an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions leading to a joint degree.

³ Joint degree: A single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme.

- programme and curriculum structure
- accreditation and quality assurance
- governance structure
- student enrolment and admission.
- Some of the **most telling examples** of incompatibilities include:
 - curriculum structure, with mandatory elements at different times in the education journey
 - differing duration of Bachelor or Master programmes with no flexibility, with Bachelor programmes of 3 or 4 years and Master programmes of 1 or 2 years
 - incompatible rules on mandatory use teaching languages, with prescribed share of teaching in national language applied to transnational programmes
 - limit on the number of semesters that can be spent abroad by students
 - incompatible rules in terms of recognition of blended/online learning
 - contradictory accreditation requirements and timelines
 - strict rules on the diploma templates, and even the thickness of the paper
 - some countries do not allow joint degree programmes at Doctoral level.
 - Uneven use of the European Approach to Quality assurance for joint programmes and incompatible national legislation on accreditation for joint programmes.
- 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 education and qualifications come closer and become more accessible to many students wherever they live, also in more remote areas across Europe.

- Support regions' 'smart specialisation': Universities could work closely with regional actors to develop joint degree programmes, enhancing possibilities for employers to cooperate with universities, for example 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 study⁴ 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.

⁴ 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>

- Boosting a wider brain circulation within Europe, with more balanced mobility flows, for both students and academics. It will bring transnational opportunities closer to home, 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 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 provide⁵:
 - Easier recruitment thanks to the increased transparency and clarity with a single degree that is easy to read, understand and compare, without undermining the reputation of existing national degrees.
 - Enhanced possibilities for employers to cooperate with universities, for example by participating in curricula design.
 - Enhanced attractiveness of Europe for talents across the world.
- Regardless of their field of study it is crucial that we equip future generations with competences and skills that Europe needs to thrive in an ever more interconnected world. Whether they study philosophy or engineering, it is important that the higher education we offer the students is top-notch and aimed at addressing the challenges they are going to be facing in their professional life.
- To ensure this match, 'labour market relevance' is proposed as one of a number of common European criteria⁶ the European degree (and label⁷) will be based on.
- However, labour market does not require the same skills for every job. This is why the criteria does not impose specific requirements but leaves up to the higher education institutions the choice to decide how each programme could address this objective in their own particular context.

⁵ [COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT, COM\(2024\) 144 final, 27 March 2024](#)

⁶ See later at point 8.

⁷ See later at point 10 and 11.

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 programmes and the award of joint degrees matching a set of common European criteria**. The framework could be used by the Member States in their own legislation if they wish to offer this possibility, and following their own legislative and regulatory procedures. The European degree is not based on binding EU law and can therefore only be a voluntary instrument.
- This **new type of qualification** – as European Bachelor, European Master and European PhD degree – would be **allowed by the legislation of each Member State, alongside all other national degrees**. It would be automatically recognised in all EU Member States 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.
- 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 – respects institutional autonomy and academic freedom, leaving full responsibility to higher education institutions to build their own curricula, embody key transnational features and shared European values. Compliance with the commonly agreed European criteria would be checked by an EQAR-registered agency as an integral part of the regular quality assurance and accreditation procedure of the joint programme. **No additional procedure** would be added.
- The European degree would be **awarded jointly by higher education institutions of any type⁸, independently from their source of funding**, and **open to all disciplines**, to their students, provided that they graduated from a joint programme matching the common European criteria. The European degree is NOT restricted to higher education institutions participating in a European Universities alliance; it is open to all institutions.

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

- A first version of possible European criteria was drafted by a European Commission expert group, based on a [Study on the road towards a possible joint European degree](#), and was put to testing as part of the call for Erasmus+ pilot policy experimentation projects.

⁸ 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 as part of their higher education system. They could be universities, universities of applied sciences or other, providing degrees on EQF levels 6,7 or 8.

- The six selected Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects mapped more than **1000 joint programmes across the EU** and analysed their possible compliance with the first draft of 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 with representatives of Member States and quality assurance agencies.
- The lessons learnt led to:
 - Removal of some criteria which were perceived as not necessary or too specific and clarification of the wording of some of the remaining criteria to ensure comprehensibility and flexibility in their possible application.
 - 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.
- The six selected Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects enabled the optimal formulation of the European criteria as explained in the blueprint for a European degree and presented in Annex II of the Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System in Higher Education. The resulting criteria aim to strike the right balance between the level of ambition to make it attractive and support transnational cooperation, while at the same time ensuring inclusion of any type of higher education institution and discipline.
- The primary objective of the common European criteria is to establish a common framework for joint degree programmes in higher education, accepted as they are in all Member States.
- Introducing additional, and different, national criteria would likely re-introduce the unnecessary complexity the European degree aims to overcome, potentially again limiting the participation of certain partner countries due to high barriers. It would not lead to streamlining processes and reducing administrative obstacles, which is one of the main goals.

9. Are the criteria compatible with academic freedom?

- Yes. The criteria fully respect academic freedom and were designed and tested to embrace the diversity of educational systems and academic traditions across Europe.
- The criteria do not prescribe what or how to teach; on the contrary, they leave full flexibility to universities to decide what is the most appropriate way to achieve compliance with the elements highlighted by the criteria.
- The flexibility embedded within the criteria means that they can be adapted to various academic disciplines and educational contexts, making the European degree accessible and applicable to a wide range of educational institutions throughout the EU.

10. Will the criteria be final once the Council Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system is adopted?

- The foundation for the initiative of a European degree is the set of common European criteria, proposed as an annex to the proposal for a Council recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education. These criteria have been tested and piloted extensively. Adoption of the criteria is a necessary step to continue working towards a European degree, including the setup of a preparatory European label. It is also a necessary condition for the setting up of supporting measures for Member States (European degree pathway projects) and higher education institutions (European degree exploratory actions) as described in the Erasmus+ Annual Work programme 2025.
- The framework of the European degree, including the methods for the interpretation and assessment of each European criteria, will be further fine-tuned within the European degree policy lab⁹ and the European degree forum, with the participation of Member States, quality assurance and recognition authorities, higher education stakeholders and representatives of social and economic partners. Once finalised, it will be put for adoption to the Council.

11. 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 a 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.

A 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 joint educational programmes offered in the framework of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters manage to deliver a joint degree.** Beyond two or three participating higher education institutions in these joint programmes, 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 use 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 need to restrain adding 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

⁹ See point 20.

wish within the EU. 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 but not only, to deliver joint degree programmes.

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 use 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 have joint degrees labelled as “European degrees”.

A **European label** would certify the compliance of a joint educational programme with the European criteria. This could materialise in a certificate that would accompany the joint degrees awarded to students graduating from such a joint programme. It would have no legal value on its own and would not ease the delivery of more joint programmes. It would reward those joint programmes, matching the European criteria, that managed to overcome all the difficulties to set up such an ambitious form of cooperation.

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.

12. 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 awarded 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 programmes and joint degrees developed and awarded by several institutions from different countries together. It is up to each Member State to decide whether it wants to use the European degree in its legal and regulatory framework, and it is up to each university to decide if it wants to award a European degree (once allowed by their national laws and regulations).
- The Commission proposes that the external quality assurance of the European degree programmes should be integrated in the existing external quality assurance procedures of the different Member States, according to their own legislation. **No European quality assurance body is proposed to be set up for this purpose.**

13. Would the European degree devalue national degrees?

- The European degree would not diminish the value of the national degrees, but rather complement and enrich the academic offer. Just like joint degrees already coexist alongside national ones, the European degree would offer an additional option, tailored to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. Higher education institutions including the European degree in their offerings could signal students at home and abroad the high quality of their transnational educational activities, therefore increasing the value of their national degrees as well. As the design and delivery of programmes leading to European degrees will be bottom-up, decided by higher education institutions voluntarily, it is expected that it would bring innovation and higher quality in specific domains of education, where there is an existing need for such joint programmes.
- It will not cancel out programmes rooted nationally and focused on their own strengths. Most students will continue to opt for a specific national curriculum. Rather than lessening national degrees, the European option broadens universities' opportunities for recognition and reputation, gives students access to diverse educational pathways based on their career goals and helps to attract global talent.

14. Is the European degree compatible with the autonomy of universities?

- Offering a European degree or European label is fully voluntary and does not aim to harmonise degrees across the EU. The proposed European criteria do not refer to the content of the curricula, which is the sole responsibility of universities. They rather set standards for an enabling framework for all levels and fields of education. Criteria are flexible enough to let universities determine how they wish to build their own curricula and adapt it to their own needs and those of their students.
- These criteria strike the right balance between a certain level of ambition to make it attractive, while at the same time ensuring inclusion for any type of higher education institution and discipline.
- By not dictating the content of the curricula, it fully respects academic freedom and institutional autonomy of universities.

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

- **Automatic recognition of qualifications alone does not facilitate the provision of joint programmes and joint degrees**, it will not address the existing incompatibilities between national legislations, as shown by the policy experimentation projects.
- In a similar manner, the **full implementation of Bologna tools** would be welcome and allow some progress but would **not be sufficient to address all the challenges faced by universities** and that have been systematically reported by the Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects, Erasmus Mundus consortia, MSCA consortia and European Universities alliances.
- A European degree would actually **boost the implementation of the Bologna instruments** by including them in the European criteria to be matched by joint degree programmes as follows:
 - 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.
- The concept of a **European degree**, with its proposed criteria aims also to boost **high quality education** with:
 - embedded mobility
 - digital and green skills
 - multilingualism
 - interdisciplinarity approaches
 - labour market relevance
 - democratic values
 - inclusion

By this, it **goes beyond** what the **Bologna tools** are aiming at.

16. Will the European degree be awarded in an EU or in a 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 in terms of number or geographical scope.
- 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 degrees in their legislation and fully respect the European criteria, including the implementation of the Bologna tools.

17. Who will check the compliance with the European criteria?

- The [proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education](#) recommends the quality assurance of the joint programmes leading to a European degree or a European label should be integrated in **national quality assurance procedures**, to avoid duplication of efforts. This is in line with the principles of cross-border quality assurance as recommended by the [2006 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education](#), as well as with the European Approach for quality assurance of joint programmes in the European Higher Education Area.
- The proposal specifies that Member States should allow any quality assurance agency registered in EQAR to:
 - award the European label to joint degree programmes matching the European criteria as set out in Annex II, where programme or combined approach to external quality assurance are required;
 - grant higher education institutions subject to external quality assurance at institutional level the ability to award the European label to their joint degree programmes based on internal quality assurance and compliance with the European criteria;
 - grant alliances of higher education institutions subject to external quality assurance at cross-institutional level the ability to award the European label to their joint degree programmes based on a cross-institutional evaluation carried out in accordance with the principles laid down in Annex I and compliance with the European criteria.
- It also proposes for Member States to work with the E4 group¹⁰, 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

¹⁰ 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.

label. This would guarantee that the quality assurance measures of a joint degree programme leading to a European label are correctly applied in the agencies throughout Europe.

- It also proposes to set up a repository of European degree and European label programmes at EQAR for increased transparency to help automatic recognition.

18. How would the European degree and the European label coexist?

- The policy experimentation projects agreed that introducing the European label could help national education systems progress towards a European degree fully integrated into national law. The label could serve as a driving force by showcasing the potential of European degrees.
- This gradual approach does not entail delaying the European degree until all Member States have implemented the necessary legislative modifications. Instead, the two options could exist simultaneously: the label could be introduced whilst countries begin to use the European degree into their national legislation. Moreover, the label could remain an alternative in situations where a European degree would be more complex, such as in regulated professions. This twofold strategy could facilitate the transition towards a fully recognised European degree without compromising national systems.
- As it is proposed for the European criteria to be the same for the European label and the European degree, transition from one to the other should not pose specific difficulties.
- As the European criteria already specifies that the joint programmes eligible to issue a European label should award a joint degree, the coexistence of the European label and the European degree even in one joint programme would not be problematic. Only the legal basis for the award of the joint degree would be different for the universities, depending on their national context (European degree in one case, national degree labelled as “European degree” in the other). The situation would not differ as compared to what is done today for the award of any joint degree, with various systems in place in the different Member States. The main difference of a European degree would be that the joint programme would have been built using a common framework and would be identified as a “European degree” across borders, bringing considerable simplification to universities and higher visibility of students’ achievements.

How – The road ahead

19. 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 several 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.

20. 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.

21. 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 around EUR 1.2 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.
 - While not pre-empting any discussions in the Council on the blueprint for a European degree, 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.

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

- The fact that the application of the European degree is voluntary and fully respects subsidiarity of Member States does not lead to deepening of inequalities or increased fragmentation. Instead, it offers a viable solution to overcome existing challenges and create a level playing field for all higher education institutions.
- The limited internationalisation of some 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.

- The two entry points with a European degree and a European label offers Member States to test the benefits of deeper transnational cooperation. Universities of any European country can already build partnerships of higher education institutions and offer joint degrees. The European label will allow them to signal that the joint degree they provide adhered to the same high-quality standards.

23. What are the possible next steps?

Q3-Q4 2024:	Allowing time for Member States to do their own internal analysis at national level and support a dialogue at ministerial level
Q4 2024:	Adoption of the Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable academic careers in higher education
Q4 2024:	Publication of the Commission report on the final outcomes of the Erasmus+ pilot projects on the European degree (label) and institutionalised cooperation instruments.
Q1-Q2 2025:	Working towards the adoption of a Council Resolution on the blueprint for a European degree and related Council Recommendation on a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System in higher education, during the Polish Presidency of the Council
Q2 2025:	Set up of the European degree policy lab to work on implementing guidelines and co-create the next steps (while not pre-empting the discussions in the Council on the blueprint for a European degree and related proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System in higher education).
Summer 2025:	Possible launch of Erasmus+ calls for European degree pathways projects and European degree exploratory action (while not pre-empting the discussions in the Council on the blueprint for a European degree and related proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System in higher education).
End 2025:	1 st European degree policy forum to take stock of progress.
End 2026:	2 nd European degree policy forum to take stock of progress.
As of 2027:	Possible proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European degree presented at the 3 rd European degree policy forum.



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