

The road towards a possible joint European Degree: identifying opportunities and investigating the impact and feasibility of different approaches

Final report

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The road towards a possible joint European Degree: identifying opportunities and investigating the impact and feasibility of different approaches

Final report

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Foreword by the Commissioner



Europe has a long tradition of transnational cooperation in higher education, with joint programmes and educational activities creating high quality opportunities for students and institutions and contributing to raise the international profile of European higher education. The possibility for students to combine studies in several countries is the mainspring of the European Education Area, building on the Bologna instruments. While progress has been achieved, the large increase of the joint educational activities and the multiplication of involved institutions call for solutions that are more adapted to the size and scope of ambitious transnational cooperation models.

It is essential to reflect in students' qualifications and degrees the skills and learning outcomes they acquire by following such joint programmes in several institutions across Europe, in several languages, benefiting from embedded mobility opportunities and learning through interdisciplinary challenge-based approaches. The European Universities Initiative are a key example, having the development of ambitious joint educational programmes as one of its core objectives, as called for by the EU Leaders in the European Council Conclusions of December 2017[1] .

This is why I welcome this study that provides important insights into the needs and expectations of students, institutions, and employers in relation to such joint degree programmes, calling to promote transparency, facilitate recognition, and ensure quality. The study complements and sets a solid basis for the Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects work, with results in 2024, aiming to examine, test and facilitate the delivery of a joint European degree label, based on a common set of European criteria co-created with the higher education sector and the Member States. The study and projects respond to the Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe[2] and the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation[3], adopted on 5 April 2022, which invite Member States and the Commission to explore common criteria that could lead to a possible joint European degree label.

In line with the mandate of the Member States, we are now in an exploratory step-by-step phase, testing the joint European degree label. Based on the results, exchanges with the Member States will continue to determine the need to move forward towards a possible voluntary joint degree based on co-created European criteria, as a complementary instrument responding to the sector's needs, in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity and institutional autonomy.

Mariya Gabriel

Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth

[1] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf

[2] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC_2022_167_R_0003

[3] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022H0413%2801%29

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore how the concept of a possible joint European Degree could be implemented, including an assessment of the impact and feasibility of different approaches. Perceived benefits of a possible joint European Degree include an increased number of joint programmes; increased joint delivery of innovative and transformative education; the easier delivery of transnational higher education; and a number of other advantages, both at EU level and for students. The analysis involved desk research, interviews, surveys, case studies, workshops, and an impact and feasibility assessment. The study elaborates two main options for a possible joint European Degree: a label awarded to joint study programmes and a joint degree based on common European criteria. Based on the evidence collected, the most feasible approach proposed is a step-by-step one, beginning with the implementation of a label, with a view towards the gradual and smooth implementation of the possible widespread availability of joint degrees based on common European criteria. The pilot for a joint European Degree label through Erasmus+ funding in 2022 will explore the most feasible models and test the co-created European criteria in practice, helping to pave the way towards the wider availability of such a label and the possibility of joint degrees based on such common European criteria, which would be delivered in line with National Qualifications Frameworks.

Résumé

Cette étude vise à explorer comment le concept d'un éventuel diplôme européen conjoint pourrait être mis en œuvre, notamment en évaluant l'impact et la faisabilité de différentes approches. Les avantages perçus d'un éventuel diplôme européen conjoint incluent un nombre supérieur de programmes conjoints, une augmentation d'offres communes d'enseignements innovants et transformateurs, une offre transnationale facilitée et un certain nombre d'autres avantages au niveau de l'UE et pour les étudiants. L'analyse inclut une recherche documentaire, des entretiens, des enquêtes, des études de cas, des ateliers et une évaluation d'impact et de faisabilité. Cette étude a élaboré deux options principales pour un éventuel diplôme européen conjoint : un label décerné aux programmes d'études conjoints et un diplôme conjoint basé sur des critères européens communs. Sur la base des évidences recueillies, l'approche la plus réalisable qui est proposée est une approche progressive commençant avec un label dans une perspective de mise en œuvre facilitée d'éventuels diplômes conjoints largement disponibles sur la base d'un scénario de critères européens communs. Le projet pilote d'un label de diplôme européen commun via le financement Erasmus+ en 2022 pour explorer les modèles les plus réalisables et tester les critères européens co-créés dans la pratique, contribuera à ouvrir la voie à un label plus largement disponible et éventuellement à d'éventuels diplômes conjoints basés sur de tels critères européens communs qui seraient délivrés dans le cadre des cadres nationaux des certifications.

Abbreviations

BA – Bachelor of Arts
CeQuInt – Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation
CXC – Caribbean Examinations Council
DEQAR – Database of External Quality Assurance Reports
DG EAC – Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
EA – European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes
ECA – European Consortium of Accreditation
EACEA – European Education and Culture Executive Agency
EC – European Commission
ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EDCI – Europass Digital Credentials Infrastructure
EGTS – European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
EHEA – European Higher Education Area
EIT – European Institute for Technology
EJD – European Joint Doctorate
ENAEE – European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education
ENIC – European Network of National Information Centres
ENQA – European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG – Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
EQANIE – European Quality Assurance Network for Informatics Education
EQAR – European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
EQAS – External Quality Assurance Services
EQF – European Qualifications Framework
EU – European Union
EUA – European University alliance
EUI – European University Institute
EUniQ – European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities
FTE – Full-time equivalent
GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation
HE – Higher education
HEI – Higher education institution
IB – International Baccalaureate
IMI – Innovative Medicines Initiative
IT – Information Technologies
KIC – Knowledge and Innovation Community
LRC – Lisbon Recognition Convention
MA – Master of Arts
MSc – Master of Science
MSCA – Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
NARIC – National Academic Recognition Information Centres
NQF – National qualification framework
PhD – Doctor of Philosophy
QA – Quality assurance
QF-EHEA – Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area
QACHE – Quality Assurance of Cross-border Higher Education
UNU – United Nations University
UNRWA – United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
VET – Vocational education and training
WAEC – West African Examinations Council
WASSCE – West African Senior School Certificate Examination
WMU – World Maritime University

ZEvA – Zentrale Evaluations und Akkreditierungsagentur Hannover (Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency Hanover, Germany)

Executive summary

Introduction

This study aimed to explore how a possible joint European Degree could be implemented, including an assessment of the impact and feasibility of different approaches. The study began in April 2021 and was implemented while discussions about the idea of a possible joint European Degree were evolving at the European level. A Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation and Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe was adopted by the Council on 5 April 2022. The Council Conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe invites *"Member States and the Commission, in line with their respective competences and with due regard for the principle of subsidiarity, to support alliances of higher education institutions, such as the 'European Universities', to explore common criteria that could lead to a potential European label for joint programmes. Later on, the possible design and delivery, on a voluntary basis, at national, regional or institutional level, of joint degrees at all levels, based on these co-created European criteria, could be envisaged, in accordance with the existing instruments of the Bologna Process. This process should occur in close cooperation with national authorities, alliances of higher education institutions and stakeholders."*

The Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation called for the Member States and stakeholders to:

> *Examine the options and necessary steps – in close cooperation with Member States, higher education institutions, student organisations and stakeholders – towards a possible joint degree based on a common set of co-created European criteria. This degree, to be delivered on a voluntary basis at national, regional or institutional level, could attest learning outcomes achieved as part of transnational cooperation 'combining studies in several EU countries' (19), offered for example within 'European Universities'. It should be easy to issue, store, share, verify and authenticate, and recognised across the EU. It will build on and boost the implementation of the Bologna instruments in the Member States.*
>
> *a) Pilot in 2022 the development and implementation under Erasmus+ of European criteria for the award of a joint European degree label. Such a label would be issued as a complementary certificate to the qualifications obtained by students graduating from joint programmes delivered in the context of transnational cooperation between several higher education institutions.*
>
> *b) Based on the results of this preparatory work, report to the Council for further decision at each step towards a possible joint degree based on co-created European criteria, in accordance with the instruments of the Bologna Process.*[4]

The ongoing discussions, both within this study and those organised by the European Commission in the context of preparing a proposal for a Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, informed our work in identifying opportunities and investigating the feasibility and expected impact of different approaches.

[4] Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation.

Methodology

The first part of the study focused on exploring the concept of a possible joint European Degree. Through desk research and interviews, we investigated obstacles to transnational cooperation in higher education, which provides rationales and motivations for the concept of a European Degree. In addition, we analysed existing solutions and instruments that could inform the implementation of such a degree. Furthermore, we carried out five case studies to research the lessons learned from non-country specific qualifications. At the end of this stage, we arrived at preliminary options for a possible joint European Degree. Stakeholder consultations, conducted via interviews, a survey and a workshop, informed the formulation of two options – a joint European Degree label, and a possible joint European Degree qualification.

The second part of the study focused on assessing the feasibility and expected impact of a step-by-step approach towards the implementation of a possible joint European Degree. Desk research, interviews and a survey were used to support the assessment of different approaches. Furthermore, several workshops were held to co-create potential European criteria with the Member States and higher education stakeholders.

The need for a joint European Degree

Research carried out for this study has revealed that obstacles to transnational higher education provision remain a prominent concern for higher education institutions (HEIs) seeking to provide transnational joint programmes. Restrictive national legislation concerning quality assurance and accreditation, recognition, the delivery of joint programmes and the awarding of joint degrees poses significant challenges and barriers to the creation of transnational joint study programmes. Instruments that were set up to facilitate transnational higher education (mostly within the Bologna process) do not fully address these challenges, notably due to a lack of their full implementation and diverging interpretations at national level. In light of the existing landscape for the delivery of transnational education, the stakeholders consulted for this study regarded **a possible joint European Degree as an instrument that could help to resolve the challenges** mentioned above and make the delivery of transnational joint study programmes more feasible and effective. Moreover, those HEIs and students that were consulted for the study expressed a high degree of interest in its introduction.

Options for a possible joint European Degree

Two main options have been elaborated within this study: as a label, and as a joint degree based on common European criteria.

The first option conceives of **a joint European Degree label**, which would be selectively awarded to joint study programmes that lead to the award of a joint degree, and which meet a pre-defined list of criteria agreed at European level. Under this option, European alliances of HEIs could apply for the European Degree label for their joint study programmes. This label would be implemented in the form of a joint European Degree label certificate, which would be added to the diploma awarded by the partner institutions. A generic joint European Degree label certificate template, common across the EU, would be used for this purpose.

The second option conceives of the joint **European Degree as a qualification based on common European criteria** in the sense that a joint study programme would be accredited to award the qualification if it fulfils a pre-defined list of criteria that would have been commonly agreed across the EU. Such European criteria, applicable in any subject area, would be co-created at European level by the Member States, in partnership

with stakeholders and the European Commission. These criteria might be the same as those for the joint European Degree label or could be further developed. Where necessary, the criteria for accrediting these joint degrees based on European criteria would also be embedded into legislation. These criteria would then be applied by national accreditation bodies, to joint programmes planning to award a joint European degree (e.g. a joint European Bachelor of Arts, joint European Master of Science, a Joint European Master in Arts and Science, etc.) in specific or interdisciplinary subject areas.

Feasibility of a joint European Degree label beyond the piloting phase

The joint European Degree label is being piloted and tested using Erasmus+ funding through a call launched in June 2022. This pilot explores the most feasible models for a joint European Degree label, and tests in practice the co-developed European criteria for alliances of HEIs offering transnational joint study programmes. The outcomes of this study propose two possible approaches to setting up a joint European Degree label beyond the piloting phase:

- **Via a coordinating body.** Under such an approach, applicants would submit applications based on a self-assessment report to a coordinating body (via an online platform such as those already used by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency, EACEA). This body would appoint expert evaluators to assess whether the application meets the requirements for the joint European Degree label. In effect, this procedure would be similar to the Erasmus+ calls coordinated by the EACEA, which engages external experts to evaluate proposals for funding; it is also similar to the procedure implemented by the European Institute for Technology (EIT) for its label (European Institute for Technology, 2021). Such an approach is more feasible if the number of applications is limited (a few dozens).

- **Via quality assurance agencies.** Under such an approach, applicants would submit applications based on a self-assessment report directly to a selected agency for assessment. Any agency registered with EQAR[5] would be eligible to grant higher education institutions the right to award the label. The process could be linked to the mandatory accreditation procedures for HEIs and would not add any additional layer as it would be fully integrated into existing procedures. An evaluation committee would be appointed by the agency to assess the self-assessment reports submitted. The evaluation committee would then communicate its decision to the quality assurance agency, which would grant the right to award the label. This approach also potentially paves the way for and is better aligned with, the delivery of a joint degree based on common European criteria. It is more feasible if the number of applications is larger than a few dozens.

The joint European Degree label certificates would be issued to students using an electronically signed PDF format, which represents the best balance in terms of verifiability and the level of investment required.

The road from a label to a joint degree based on common European criteria

The joint European Degree label could be designed in a way that facilitates the road from the label to the joint degree based on common European criteria. In particular, the following step-by-step approach could be proposed:

- **Step 1: piloting with Erasmus+:** testing the feasibility of a joint European Degree label in practice would identify the most relevant models and criteria.

[5] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

- **Step 2: agreeing the label criteria with the Member States:** on the basis of the results of the pilot, the Member States could discuss and agree the criteria for a joint European Degree label to be available across Europe. The right to award the joint European Degree label could be assessed by EQAR-registered agencies based on voluntary applications, and be integrated into the general programme and/or institutional-level accreditation/evaluation (including via applications for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes), and offered as a separate service.
- **Step 3: enabling the award of joint degrees based on common European criteria:** lastly, Member States could, where necessary, adapt national legislation to allow for the delivery across Europe of joint degrees based on the same or similar European criteria as those tried and tested for the label, without additional national obstacles.

Feasibility assessment for meeting the provisional joint European Degree label criteria

Based on evidence from other existing initiatives, as well as feedback gathered from stakeholders involved in joint programme delivery, it is feasible to meet most of the criteria for a joint European Degree label that are proposed to be tested. However, two of these criteria are likely to be more challenging to meet than the others. First, the requirement to award a joint degree to graduates of the joint programme may prove challenging for some in the short term, due to existing national legislation that prevents the awarding of joint degrees. Second, it will not always be feasible to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes or the requirement to use any EQAR-registered agency for external quality assurance in cases where legislation does not make the European Approach available, or does not allow the choosing of an EQAR-registered agency from another country. At the same time, such requirements could trigger positive changes for the implementation of the Bologna transparency tools. The consultation with higher education institutions revealed a high degree of willingness to invest time and energy in adapting their joint programmes or developing new joint study programmes to meet such common European criteria. However, legislative adaptations may still be needed in some countries to make this feasible.

Benefits of joint European degrees

A possible joint 'European Degree' is expected to bring a number of benefits to transnational higher education in Europe. The higher education institutions, students and national authorities surveyed were largely positive in their assessment of the potential for a possible joint European Degree to bring about positive changes in the European higher education sphere. The table below presents the list of benefits a joint European degree is expected to bring while taking into account that a joint European degree as a qualification is expected to have a stronger impact in achieving these benefits than a label.

Benefits for HEIs and Member States
• Improved implementation of existing Bologna tools • Automatic recognition of joint degrees • Increased transparency for joint degrees • Easier delivery of joint degrees (as a single document awarded following a joint programme) • Easier implementation of joint innovative educational components

• Reduction of existing barriers relating to quality assurance requirements (e.g. differences in national requirements, differences in the level of external quality assurance) • Reduction of existing barriers relating to the design and implementation of transnational joint programmes (e.g. admission and enrolment criteria, language of instruction, proportion of online elements, credits requirements) • Reduction of barriers relating to the delivery of inter-, multi- and transdisciplinary study programmes
Benefits at EU level
• Increased global reputation of European higher education • Dissemination of European values such as academic freedom, inclusiveness, solidarity, sustainability, entrepreneurship and innovation/creativity, democracy and the rule of law across Europe and beyond • Better cooperation among ministries and other educational authorities across the EU • Facilitating brain circulation across the EU • Encouraging international students to study in the EU
Benefits to students
• Better access to innovative study programmes • Increased opportunities to study in different European countries • Increased opportunities for transnational mobility (physical, virtual, blended) • Increased sense of European citizenship, identity and belonging • Automatic recognition of degrees and study periods • Receiving an education recognised as excellent by employers • Obtaining skills and competences relevant to the labour market

Costs of a joint European Degree label

The development of a joint European Degree label would entail some costs, including the provision of relevant documentation, that must be borne at EU level (e.g. templates, visual identity), as well as those that must be borne at national/institutional levels (guidance documents, approach for submission, depending on the chosen approach). Ensuring that costs are shared between different levels will enable them to be minimised for all parties involved. During the stages of application and assessment for a label, costs are usually incurred by the coordinating body (FTEs for coordination, and paying the salaries of external experts under one of the options), and by the higher education institutions making the applications (the eventual application fee, and the time needed to prepare and submit the application). To ensure that such a label would be implemented at minimal costs, the best cost-benefit ratio could be achieved by integrating the application and evaluation procedures within existing accreditation/evaluation procedures. Lastly, the promotional activities required to increase the visibility and recognition of a joint European Degree label may need to be addressed at European level, in order to complement the promotional activities routinely carried out by higher education institutions to promote their own programmes.

Costs of moving from a label to joint degrees based on common European criteria

The transition from a label to joint degrees based on common European criteria involves mostly non-monetary costs such as, where necessary, making changes to legislation to enable the accreditation and recognition of such degrees. Once a joint degree based on common European criteria has been introduced, the cost of setting up and running such joint degree programmes would be significantly lower than the current costs of running existing joint programmes developed by higher education institutions from different countries. This is due to a reduction in administrative and legislative barriers.

Conclusions

When discussing a possible European Degree began within the framework of this study, stakeholders showed a limited understanding of what such a degree might mean in practice. Nevertheless, when associating a 'European Degree' with either a label or a qualification, stakeholders expressed the view that a European Degree could provide a solution to existing challenges and barriers. This study focused on two options for the implementation of a possible joint European Degree – as a label, and as a qualification. Based on the evidence gathered, the most feasible approach is a step-by-step approach, starting with the implementation of a label, with a view towards a gradual and smooth implementation of joint degrees based on common European criteria.

Introduction

This study aimed to explore how the concept of a possible joint European degree could be implemented, including an assessment of the feasibility and impact of various approaches. The study, which began in April 2021, was implemented while discussions about a possible joint European degree were evolving. Ongoing discussions, both within and outside the context of this study, have informed our work in identifying opportunities and investigating the impact and feasibility of different approaches.

The Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation[6], adopted together with the Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe[7] in April 2022, explicitly states its objective as being to:

> *Encourage, where appropriate, and make it easier for higher education institutions engaged in transnational cooperation to provide joint programmes and award joint degrees, in accordance with the Bologna instruments. In this context and building on the results of the exploratory actions as defined in point 12, examine and facilitate the delivery of a joint European Degree label. Later on, work could be undertaken towards a possible joint degree at all levels, based on co-created European criteria, to be delivered at national, regional or institutional level, in accordance with the National Qualifications Frameworks.*

Such an objective illustrates the call for a step-by-step approach, starting with the implementation of a label, with a view towards a gradual and smooth implementation of a possible wide availability of joint degrees based on common European criteria, calling on the Commission to explore how such a degree could be implemented through cooperation with the Member States, higher education institutions (HEIs), student organisations and stakeholders. The Council recommends that a possible joint European degree should be "delivered on a voluntary basis at national, regional or institutional level, could attest learning outcomes achieved as part of transnational cooperation 'combining studies in several EU countries', offered for example within 'European Universities'. It should be easy to issue, store, share, verify and authenticate, and recognise across the EU. It will build on and boost the implementation of the Bologna instruments in the Member States." The approach adopted by the Council has informed the formulation of the final options assessed as part of this study – namely, the joint European Degree label and a possible joint European Degree qualification (understood as a joint degree based on common European criteria). The following terminology is used throughout the study:

- A **joint European Degree label** to refer to the label
- A **joint degree based on common European criteria** to refer to the qualification
- A **joint European Degree** to refer to both options at the same time

The study began with an exploratory phase (April 2021-October 2021), during which the study team sought to gather initial opinions from key stakeholders regarding how they perceived the possible implementation of a possible joint European Degree. Based on

[6] Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0413(01)&from=EN

[7] Available at: https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities

their favourable response to this initial idea, initial options for the implementation of a possible joint European degree were then developed. These options were based on the feedback collected from stakeholders and the Member States, as well as research on the existing obstacles to joint programme delivery, lessons from other non-country specific qualifications, and the relevance of existing instruments that could be put at the service of a possible joint European Degree. In parallel, the European Commission also consulted with stakeholders and the Member States in the context of preparing its proposal for a Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation. The stakeholder consultation carried out as part of this study, together with the European Commission's consultation with the Member States, also enabled the Commission to develop a preliminary list of criteria for the accreditation of a joint European Degree label.

This study assesses the feasibility and potential impact of the options developed, as well as the accompanying criteria for a possible joint European Degree.

The study is structured as follows:

- First, we present the methodology for the study;
- Second, we review the rationales for, and the expected added value of, a joint European Degree label and of a possible joint degree based on common European criteria. This chapter includes an overview of existing obstacles and solutions to transnational cooperation, lessons learnt from non-country specific qualifications and an exploration of the existing instruments that could be used to facilitate the delivery of a label or qualification. The second chapter concludes with a short overview of possible options, also introducing the preliminary criteria and expected benefits;
- Third, we present the results of the feasibility and impact assessment. This chapter covers the feasibility of implementing a possible joint European Degree through different approaches, as well as the feasibility of meeting the foreseen joint European Degree label criteria. Furthermore, the costs and scope of potential benefits of different approaches are reviewed, and we perform the SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) of the different approaches;
- Lastly, study conclusions and recommendations are presented.

The study is accompanied by the following annexes:

- Annex 1. Interview questionnaire – an exploration of a possible joint European degree concept
- Annex 2. Workshop report – an exploration of a possible joint European degree concept
- Annex 3. Criteria covered through the use of the ESG, the European Approach, and the European Degree Label
- Annex 4. Complementarities and overlaps in the criteria
- Annex 5. Criteria covered by the use of the European Approach and joint European Degree label criteria
- Annex 6. Workshop summary note – joint European Degree label criteria

Methodology

In this chapter, we present the methodology used in the study. We begin by introducing the methods employed to explore the concept of a possible joint European Degree. We

then go on to describe the methods used to conduct the impact and feasibility assessment. In addition to the methods listed below, an expert panel was set up for this project. The members of the expert panel were consulted throughout the project and provided their feedback on the preliminary options of a possible joint European degree, the criteria of a possible joint European degree, as well as relevant research tools and project outputs.

Exploration of a joint European Degree concept

Desk research

Desk research was carried out to explore the existing obstacles to transnational higher education, as well as existing instruments that facilitate transnational higher education. The sources reviewed included publicly available studies, reports and peer-reviewed articles, as well as documents shared internally by the European Commission. The latter included information gathered from the European University alliances on the obstacles they face and the results of a survey of Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) European Joint Doctorate (EJD) projects.

Interviews

The study team carried out 16 scoping interviews with representatives of the European Commission, stakeholders from various European-level associations active in the field of higher education, and representatives of alliances in the European University Initiative (often referred to as European University alliances). Ten interviews were also carried out with representatives of Erasmus Mundus consortia, European Joint Doctorate consortia and additional European Universities alliances (Task 1a interviews). These two types of interviews focused on exploring the initial ideas concerning a possible joint European Degree, as well as reviewing the existing obstacles to transnational higher education provision. The interview questionnaire can be found in Annex 1.

Table 1. Summary of interviews carried out

Stakeholder type	Type of interview	Number of interviews
European Commission and European Commission agencies	Scoping	6
European-level associations active in the field of higher education	Scoping	8
Erasmus Mundus consortia	Task 1a	3
European Joint Doctorate consortia	Task 1a	4
Alliances of the European Universities Initiative	Task 1a / scoping	5
	Total:	26

Case studies

Five case studies were carried out to explore lessons learned from non-country specific qualifications (Task 1b). The case studies were built around two data collection methods: desk research, complemented by interviews with key actors involved in the design and delivery of selected non-country specific qualifications. In total, **11 interviews** were carried out within the frame of the case studies. In some cases, exchanges with relevant stakeholders via email constituted an additional source of information.

Table 2. Summary of case studies carried out

Case study	Type of interviewees	Number of interviews
Case study 1: European Baccalaureate	Office of the Secretary-General of the European Schools Examining Board; European School Accredited European School	5
Case study 2: International Baccalaureate (IB)	N/a	Communication with representatives of the IB via email
Case study 3: supranational or international bodies	The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) United Nations University (UNU)	5
Case study 4: regional	N/a	Communication via email with a Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) local registrar, a CXC representative responsible for liaison between the Council and her participating country, as well as for the national administration and security of CXC examinations
Case study 5: European University Institute	Director	1

Workshop

An online workshop involving national and European level stakeholders was carried out to examine the concept, rationales for and added value of a possible joint European Degree. The workshop was attended by 40 participants representing various categories of stakeholders. A summary of the workshop discussions is presented in Annex 2.

Stakeholder survey

A survey of stakeholders was carried out to complement the data collected via the workshop and interviews. The purpose of this survey was to canvass perceptions and attitudes among a larger number of stakeholders regarding the concept, rationales for and added value of a possible joint European Degree. Throughout the report, **we refer to this survey as a stakeholder survey**. The survey was implemented via the Alchemer survey tool. The European Commission shared the survey with representatives of the European Universities, Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters consortia, and MSCA Joint Doctorates consortia. The survey was also shared with stakeholders targeted through the scoping interviews, who were asked to also share it with their members. The survey gathered a total of 241 responses (complete and partial).

Table 3. Stakeholder survey responses by type of respondent

Respondent type	Number of responses
National/regional ministries of education	20
National recognition authorities	9
National accreditation authorities	16
Members of ENIC-NARIC	13
National quality assurance authorities	21
Members of ENQA	19
Other national organisations	11

European-level associations of HEIs	8
Employer representatives	1
Other European-level associations	8
Students	14
Doctoral candidates	1
Higher education institutions	86
European Universities alliances	37
Consortia offering Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees	48
Consortia offering European Joint Doctorates	17
European Commission	2
International organisations or associations	17

Note: the respondents may overlap over different categories

The countries from which the respondents came are summarised in the table below.

Table 4. Stakeholder survey responses by country

Country	**Number of responses**
France	30
Germany	24
Other	24
Belgium	23
Spain	23
Italy	17
Portugal	16
Netherlands	15
Austria	9
Romania	7
Czech Republic	6
Poland	5
Denmark	4
Ireland	4
Malta	4
Croatia	3
Sweden	3
Cyprus	2
Hungary	2
Slovenia	2
Bulgaria	1
Estonia	1
Finland	1
Lithuania	1
Slovakia	1

Feasibility and impact assessment

Desk research

Desk research was carried out to explore existing labels in higher education, and to review the legislative basis for the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), as well as other sources relevant to assessing the feasibility and impact of implementing a possible joint European Degree. The labels explored included the European Institute of Technology

(EIT) Label, the European Consortium of Accreditation's (ECA) CeQuInt certificate, and field-specific labels (EUR-ACE, Eurobachelor and Euromaster, Euro-Inf, EQAS Food Award). Further desk research was carried out to map complementarities and overlaps in the criteria proposed for a joint European Degree label with existing initiatives at the European level. The results of this mapping are presented in Annexes 3 and 4. Annex 5 presents the outcomes of mapping the complementarity of the criteria to be tested for a joint European Degree label with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

Workshop

A workshop with stakeholders was organised to explore the criteria for a joint European Degree label. The workshop involved 100 participants representing various stakeholder groups. The workshop summary note is presented in Annex 6.

Interviews

To explore the feasibility of different approaches to the implementation of a joint European Degree label, we interviewed seven stakeholders who were involved with existing quality labels within the European higher education sphere. The interviewees included representatives of the owners of the labels (EIT, EUR-ACE, CeQuInt, EQAS Food Award), as well as national qualifications agencies involved in assessments for the awarding of the labels.

Impact and feasibility survey

The impact and feasibility survey targeted HEIs and national authorities (involved in quality assurance, recognition and qualifications).

Higher education institutions
HEIs from countries in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) were invited to participate in the survey using the email addresses provided on their websites. The search for email addresses was carried out manually. The same approach was used to contact the European University Alliances – all of the 41 alliances were invited to participate via email, using the email addresses provided on their websites. HEIs participating in these alliances were also invited to participate separately from the alliances. Invitations to take part in the survey were sent out to 2,706 individuals. A total of 105 complete and 108 partial responses were received.

National authorities
To participate in the national authorities' survey, quality assurance and recognition institutions and qualification agencies were contacted using email addresses available from the ENQA, EQAR, ENIC-NARIC and their websites. In total, 25 responses were received from 190 invitation emails sent.

Students
The survey of students was disseminated through Cint panels[8]. The survey was sent out to panellists who indicated that they were currently studying. A filter question was developed to ensure that respondents were currently enrolled in higher education (across three cycles). The questionnaire was translated into official EU languages and

[8] Cint provides access to persons who voluntarily sign up to participate in surveys for a small remuneration.

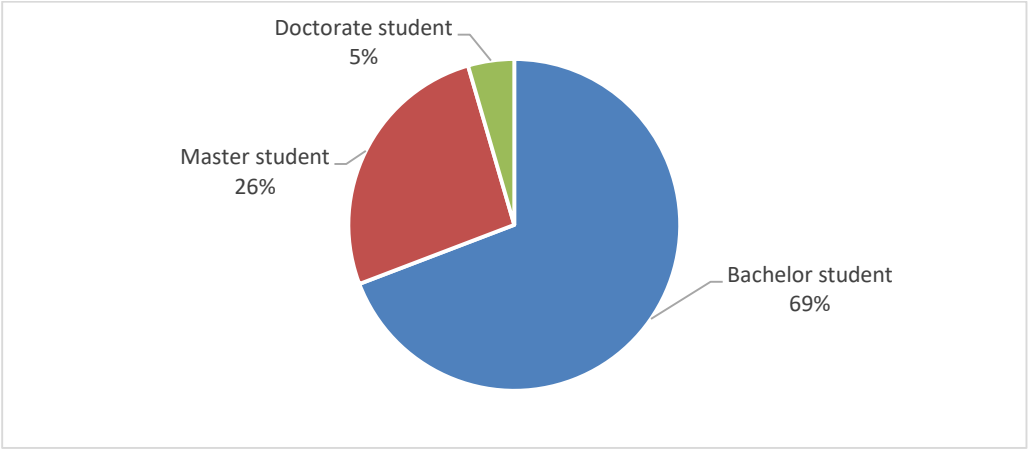
disseminated to students across the EU-27. A total of 2,040 responses were received. The division of responses by country is presented in the table below.

Table 5. Student survey responses per country

Country	No. of responses	Country	No. of responses
Austria	81	Italy	78
Belgium	80	Latvia	68
Bulgaria	80	Lithuania	80
Cyprus	10	Luxembourg	20
Croatia	50	Malta	24
Czechia	102	Netherlands	59
Denmark	70	Poland	103
Estonia	29	Portugal	103
Finland	83	Romania	100
France	104	Slovakia	101
Germany	102	Slovenia	101
Greece	100	Spain	100
Hungary	59	Sweden	50
Ireland	103		

The majority of respondents were Bachelor students, followed by Master and Doctorate students.

Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by study cycle



Source: impact and feasibility survey - students

Feasibility and impact assessment

The data collected were used to assess the feasibility and impact of implementing each option: the joint European Degree label, and the pathway from the label to the joint degree based on common European criteria. Both qualitative and quantitative (descriptive statistics) data analysis methods were employed. The findings of this analysis informed the formulation of the options presented. Furthermore, the feasibility of meeting various sets of criteria for a joint European Degree label was explored. Lastly, we assessed the costs and benefits of setting up and implementing a joint European Degree either as a

label or as a possible qualification, concluding with an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of each option.

The need for and expected added value of a joint European degree

Obstacles and solutions to transnational cooperation

While notable progress has been made in implementing the Bologna process (EACEA & Eurydice, 2020), numerous obstacles to transnational cooperation still exist. This chapter presents the obstacles identified through desk research and feedback provided to the European Commission by the European University alliances[9]. Overall, the obstacles to transnational cooperation arise from restrictive elements of national legislation and a lack of the full implementation of the agreed EHEA and Bologna tools. The obstacles identified have been divided into four topics, each of which is discussed below.

Quality assurance and accreditation

HEIs setting up joint programmes often need to undergo cross-border quality assurance, understood as "external QA activities of a QA agency carried out in a country other than the one in which it is based or primarily operates" (ENQA et al, 2017). Challenges relating to quality assurance, including the accreditation procedures that HEIs need to undergo, represent a key block of existing obstacles to effective cross-border cooperation. The main challenges identified when setting up joint programmes are the need to undergo multiple accreditation procedures (Peres, 2017; European University alliances, 2021); difficulties in re-accreditation (European University alliances, 2021); differing requirements for programmes taught online (European University alliances, 2021); and the durations for which programmes are accredited (European University alliances, 2021; Valeikienė et al, 2017)).

Ideally, a single accreditation for joint programmes should be sufficient; however, based on the experiences of the alliances and other HEIs (Peres, 2017), multiple parallel procedures are often a reality. The governance structure of the consortium delivering the joint programmes may impact its chances of success in pursuing single accreditation. A consortium with a single leader, as opposed to a joint network of equal partners, may be more successful in securing single accreditation (Peres, 2017).

The obstacles relating to quality assurance arise from differing accreditation systems, requiring HEIs to undergo evaluations based on an institutional or programme level, or a combination of the two approaches. For example, self-accreditation at Master's level is comparatively rare (fully available in two countries, and available through a combined approach with programme accreditation in other 12 countries) (EACEA & Eurydice, 2020).

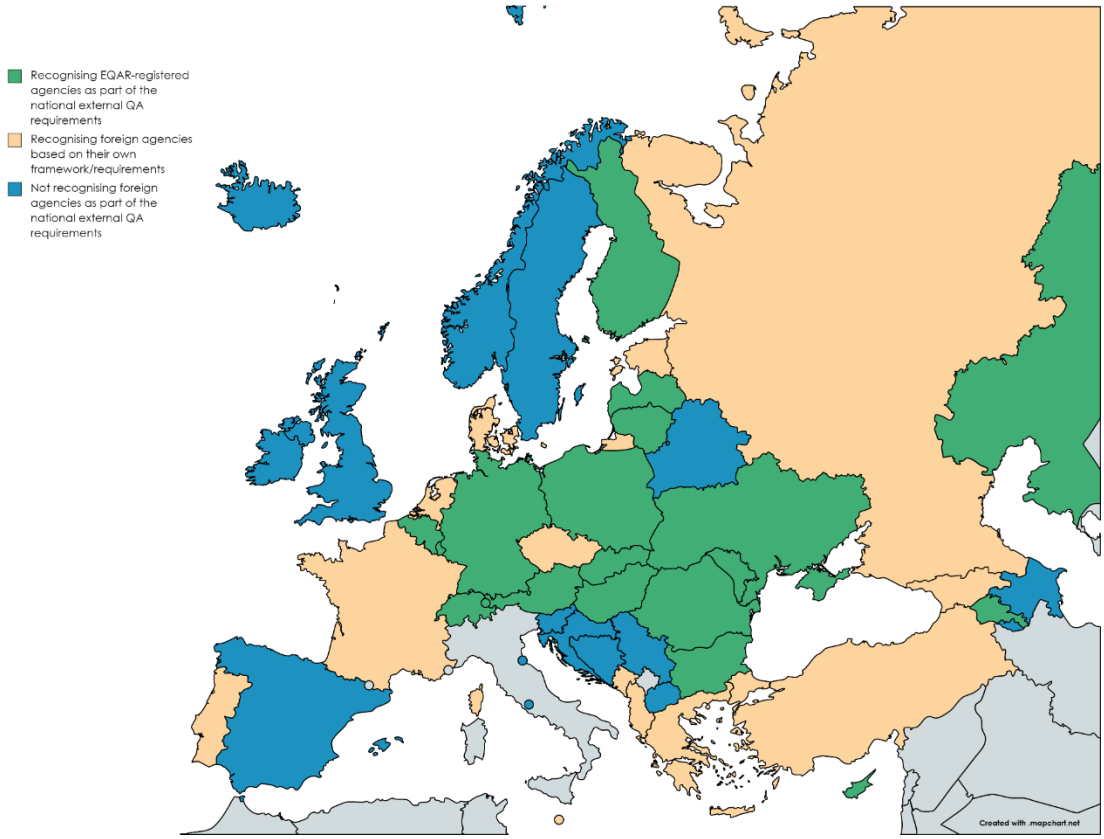
The European Approach (EA) for Quality Assurance, which was conceived to facilitate the quality assurance of joint programmes in which programme-level accreditation is required, is operational only to a limited extent. As of 2022, the EA is currently fully applicable in only 11 EU Member States (EQAR website, 2022). Qualitative feedback from the European University alliances also suggests that in cases where the EA is available, it is not always evenly applied. The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher

[9] The alliances that responded to the survey identified issues face in developing transnational cooperation, commented on them in detail, and provided suggestions for possible solutions that could be applied to some of the issues, as well as providing other recommendations for actions at EU level.

Education (EQAR) has identified that only 10 accreditation procedures were completed using the European Approach between 2014 and 2019 (Kelo et al, 2021). As of 2022, the database of EQAR lists only 11 programmes accredited through the application of the EA (EQAR website, 2022).

Allowing for an institutional quality approach or full implementation of the EA was among the key solutions suggested by European University alliances to remove quality assurance-related obstacles to the delivery of joint programmes. To ensure trust between Member States, accreditation in one country could be carried out by an EQAR-registered agency, which would demonstrate its compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG). However, the lack of possibility for HEIs to freely choose an EQAR-registered quality assurance agency for external quality assurance (see map below) remains a crucial obstacle to implementing such a solution.

Figure 2. Possibility to work with EQAR-registered agencies for external QA



Source: compiled by PPMI, based on https://www.eqar.eu/kb/cross-border-qa/mapping-system-openness-to-cbqa/

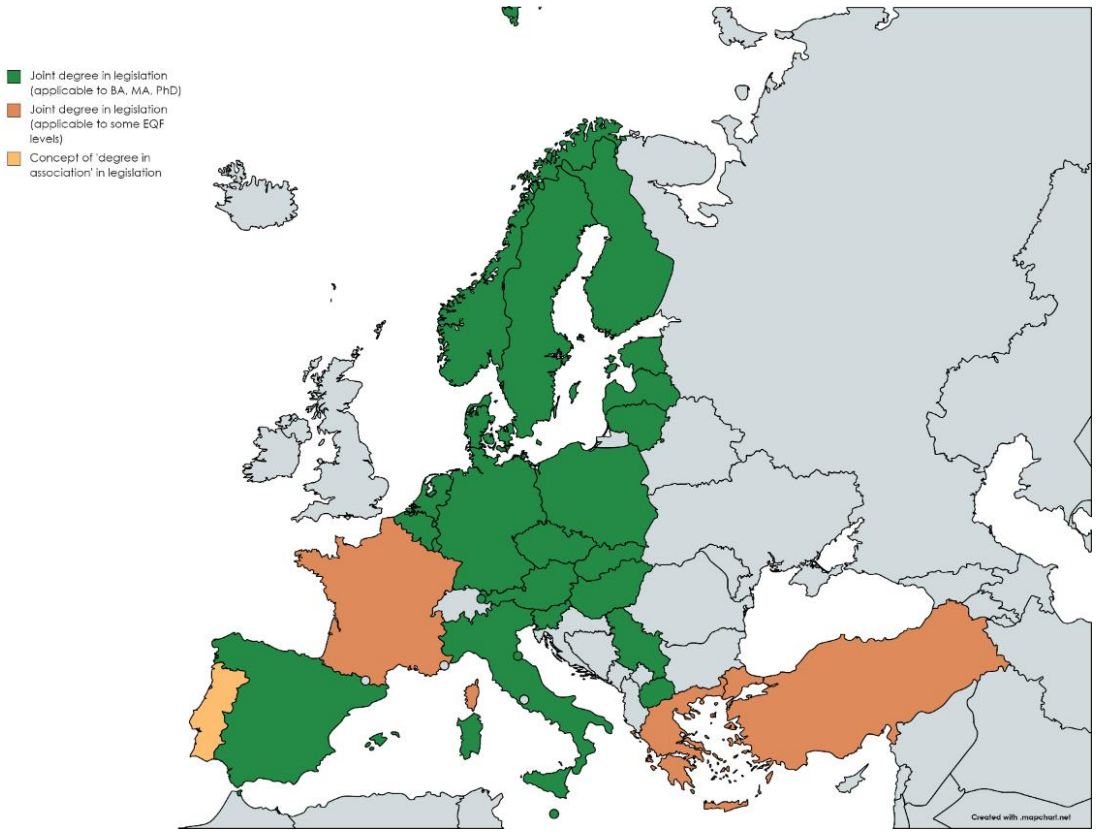
Note: Grey colour indicates that data are not available.

Differences between national systems also create obstacles to the development of internal quality assurance frameworks for those consortia of HEIs delivering joint programmes (such as the European University alliances). While internal quality assurance systems could be used to implement institutional accreditation and contribute to simplifying quality assurance and accreditation procedures, they would need to be built in such a way as to promote trust in their quality.

Awarding joint degrees

Significant fragmentation exists in the types of degrees awarded to graduates completing joint programmes. Students may receive joint, double or multiple degrees upon graduation. A joint degree is a single document officially recognised by the appropriate (national or regional) authorities of at least two countries (European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, 2014). Representing the seamless joint delivery of higher education, this type of degree is viewed as both the most difficult to implement, and the type of degree with the greatest potential to reduce fragmentation. The concept of a joint degree is mostly embedded in the legislation of the EU Member States. A study on 'Implementing Joint Degrees in the Erasmus Mundus action of the Erasmus+ programme'(European Commission & EACEA, 2020) mapped the legal provisions relating to joint degrees to reveal that joint degrees are provided for in the legislation of most EU countries. This applies to Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD levels, as illustrated in the map below.

Figure 3. Inclusion of joint degrees in national legislation



Source: compiled by PPMI, based on the information presented in European Commission & EACEA (2020).
Note: Grey colour indicates that data are not available.
Note: Inclusion of joint degrees is also foreseen in the national legislation of Croatia, currently being revised.

Nevertheless, while legal provisions exist to deliver joint degrees, these are sometimes restrictive, hindering the delivery of joint degrees in practice and nudging HEIs towards awarding double/multiple degrees (European Commission & EACEA, 2020). Across the EHEA, only around 5% of HEIs award joint degrees, based on the data available in 2016-2017. The share was higher among EU Member States, where more than 10% of HEIs award joint degrees (EACEA & Eurydice, 2020). Previous efforts to estimate the scope of the joint degrees delivered through EU-funded Erasmus Mundus Joint Master and MSCA Joint Doctorates indicate that implementing a joint degree programme remains a

significant challenge. Based on internal surveys carried out by the European Commission, approximately 33% of Erasmus Mundus Joint Master consortia succeeded in setting up joint degree programmes (Statistical factsheets on the achievements of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees 2014-2020), while 33% of MSCA Joint Doctorate consortia managed to do the same (European Commission, 2020). The best available data on the number of currently functioning joint degree programmes comes from U-Multirank, which provides information on 12,500 joint study programmes across 24 subject areas, without specifying the number of students enrolled (EACEA & Eurydice, 2020).

Restrictive elements of national legislation concerning joint degree delivery include provisions regarding the components of a degree template (e.g. the requirement to mention partners, national language requirements, visual component requirements) and rules regarding the awarding and signing of degrees (European Commission & EACEA, 2020; European University alliances, 2021). One solution to these issues proposed in the Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation is to allow greater flexibility in defining the template for joint degrees when implementing joint transnational programmes. Moreover, a Diploma Supplement may be used to include various titles of a degree in line with the national requirements (Peres, 2017).

Recognition

The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) (Council of Europe, 1997) is the main framework containing recognition standards and procedures. The LRC provides the basis for automatic recognition of degrees – meaning that students with a Bachelor's or Master's degree should be able to access the next level of higher education in countries that have adopted the LRC unless there are substantial differences among the learning outcomes. Automatic recognition is among the key priorities within the EHEA and the EU, where a 'Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad' (adopted in 2018) called for the implementation of automatic recognition by 2025. The experiences of the European University alliances suggest that a lack of automatic recognition remains a pressing issue in the delivery of joint programmes. Moreover, the alliances noted that poor recognition of online learning and study periods abroad/learning abroad (including virtual mobility) as well as a lack of recognition for prior learning remain a challenge. Challenges relating to recognition may also present obstacles in relation to student admissions (Peres, 2017).

The solutions put forward by some alliances regarding recognition obstacles include:

- putting in place flexible national accreditation systems to allow the recognition of academic content from different universities (including online academic courses);
- enabling HEIs to award ECTS credits for non-formal learning, and integrate these into national and local accreditation systems;
- simplifying internal regulations of universities in relation to syllabi and the development of online course management tools;
- setting and adhering to internal regulations regarding the payroll system and teaching workloads;
- implementing national and European recognition frameworks, tools and mechanisms for virtual learning activities;
- developing and recognising a joint European Degree, accredited at European level and automatically recognised in all EU countries.

Joint programme implementation and delivery

The implementation and delivery of joint programmes are accompanied by a number of challenges, evidenced by practical examples faced by the European University alliances and the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters consortia in the setting up and delivery of joint programmes. Two main types of challenges to programme implementation and delivery can be distinguished. The first concerns challenges relating to the development of programme content (i.e. programme's design) to meet existing national requirements. The challenges identified in relation to **programme design** include:

- **ECTS-related challenges.** Both the European University alliances and the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters consortia (European Commission & EACEA, 2020) faced obstacles concerning differing national requirements for programme length/workload expressed in ECTS credits. The European University alliances also noted restrictive national legislation regarding curriculum development in terms of minimum or maximum credits per course, specific ECTS requirements for theses, and differences in defining the workload for ECTS. Other national requirements may also apply in relation to the minimum share (expressed in ECTS credits) each consortium partner needs to have for a programme to be accredited (Peres, 2017). ECTS-related challenges could be solved at a national level by encouraging Member States to accept different lengths (in ECTS credits, within the agreements made in the Bologna process) and different deliveries of degrees (rather than a strict 30 ECTS credits per semester).
- **Challenges relating to interdisciplinarity.** European University alliances face some difficulties in setting up interdisciplinary degrees, as these are not available in certain countries. Some European University alliances proposed as a possible solution the introduction of flexibility into national legislation, particularly concerning programmes that do not fit predefined lists of study fields in the joint programmes developed.
- **Challenges relating to micro-credentials.** European University alliances that wish to offer micro-credentials as part of their joint study programmes face multiple challenges stemming from a lack of a framework and platforms for awarding, registering and documenting micro-credentials. Challenges relating to micro-credentials appear at various stages from their setup to recognition. To solve the existing challenges, a definition of a European vision for micro-credentials, as well as an academic, pedagogical and implementation framework, would be necessary, given the trend towards including micro-credentials into degree programmes as expressed by the European University alliances (including the possible future joint European degree programmes). A shared European vision for a micro-credentials system, such as the one proposed in the Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, could encourage national authorities to develop a clear framework for granting and recognising courses leading to micro-credentials.

Second, several challenges were identified by European University alliances in relation to the **delivery and management** of joint programmes

- **Digital challenges**. The European University alliances noted several digital challenges: a lack of platforms for online learning and teaching; difficulties relating to the management of student data; differing interpretations of the GDPR; and the difficulty of recruiting employees with the necessary digital skills. Some of the possible solutions identified to solve these digital challenges include:
    - Providing adequate and structural financial support for collaboration with innovative bottom-up projects that offer much-needed solutions at content and IT, legal and regulatory levels;

- Building virtual inter-university campuses and a leaner process for virtual mobility are also key conditions for overcoming digital challenges;
- Aligning GDPR interpretations between universities to ensure GDPR compliance (e.g. drafting common personal data protection policies);
- Introducing greater flexibility into the salary system to pay IT specialists, or otherwise supporting universities in the creation of central IT services, tools and digital platforms that can handle international digitalisation processes, would solve the challenge of finding skilled IT specialists.

- **Difficulties in joining a legal entity/lack of legal statute.** The experience of the European University alliances shows that the lack of a legal entity/difficulties in entering into other legal arrangements results in challenges related to joint student recruitment and the joint offering of education. To overcome the lack of a legal entity, the alliances need to develop specific internal boards, rules and regulations, as well as qualifications systems that fit this purpose. A clear path towards the establishment of a legal entity, which draws on existing successful models (e.g. the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation [EGTC]), as well as recognising the deep integration and collaboration within alliances, would be beneficial in facilitating the delivery of joint study programmes.

Other challenges highlighted by the European University alliances include differences in academic calendars; the excessive administrative burden of cooperation (especially for PhD programmes); challenges relating to differing student fees (Eurydice, 2018), admission requirements and different existing definitions of a 'joint programme' and a 'joint degree' in their respective countries. The last of these is a particularly relevant challenge to address to reduce the fragmentation (understood as the type of transnational degrees available)[10] of joint higher education delivery.

Box 1. Summary of obstacles and solutions to transnational cooperation

Desk research and testimonies from European University alliances reveal significant challenges in developing joint degree programmes. Challenges relating to quality assurance and accreditation; the awarding of joint degrees; recognition; and joint programme implementation remain prominent in the European higher education sphere. Stakeholders viewed the development of a 'European Degree' as an instrument that could possibly help to alleviate some of the challenges relating to transnational higher education provision.

Moreover, the Council recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation presents proposed solutions to overcome the challenges listed above. The recommendations propose the encouragement of HEIs to explore and test the feasibility, benefits and risks of setting up institutionalised cooperation instruments, including the 'European universities' initiative, the European grouping of territorial cooperation, and the European Economic Interest Grouping. It is also recommended that the Member States support embedded mobility in joint transnational educational programmes that attract more students, as well as digitalising mobility management, and working on more coherent approaches to organising learning mobility. Strengthening mutual trust between institutions is seen as something that can be achieved using external quality assurance, self-accreditation, and the accreditation of joint educational programmes at all levels. Finally, the Council invites the Member States to involve learners, academics, researchers and staff in the governance of structures for transnational cooperation while taking into account diversity, gender balance, the development of leadership capacity and opportunities for peer learning. If implemented, these solutions could significantly facilitate the implementation of possible joint European Degrees.

[10] Notably including joint degrees, double degrees, multiple degrees.

Lessons learned from non-country specific qualifications

The lessons learned from non-country specific qualifications were explored through five case studies covering different levels of education. This chapter mainly focuses on lessons learned in terms of quality assurance and recognition – key areas in which obstacles exist to the delivery of joint programmes in Europe. The table below summarises the focus of these cases and presents the key parameters of the qualifications offered.

Table 6. Summary of the case studies and qualifications researched

Case study	Short overview	Key parameters of the qualification
European Baccalaureate	The European Baccalaureate refers to the **school-leaving examination** taken by learners enrolled in European Schools or Accredited European Schools[11]. The primary purpose of European Schools is to **provide an education** to **children whose parents work in EU institutions**[12].	Provides an upper secondary-level school-leaving diploma corresponding to EQF level 4 (linked with national qualifications frameworks). The European Baccalaureate cycle covers the last two years of upper secondary education[13]. The school provides both education and examinations, leading to a diploma.
International Baccalaureate	Operating at a global level, the **International Baccalaureate (IB)** provides an example of qualifications delivered in Europe and other continents by schools authorised to offer IB programmes.	Includes four programmes, three of which award a certificate or a diploma: • Middle Years programme students (11-16 years old) receive a certificate; • Diploma programme students (16-19 years old) receive a diploma comparable to EQF level 4; • Career programme students (16-19 years old) receive technical diplomas or certificates comparable to EQF level 4. IB schools provide both education and examinations and issue their own degrees and certificates.
Supranational and international bodies	These bodies operate at a global level and present an example of qualifications recognised worldwide. In particular, the United Nations University (UNU) and World Maritime University (WMU) offer degrees across different countries (including in EU countries), while the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) also provides education in several countries.	The qualifications offered by the WMU and UNU are at Master (EQF level 7) and Doctorate (EQF level 8) levels, while UNRWA offers basic and VET education, and prepares students to take national examinations and receive qualifications. The universities provide both education and degrees. The UNU does not provide learners with a degree singlehandedly; degrees are usually issued by the partner university, but signed by both the partner and UNU.

[11] https://www.eursc.eu/en/European-Schools/European-Baccalaureate

[12] https://www.eursc.eu/en/European-Schools/mission

[13] The European Schools themselves cover seven years of secondary education. The European Baccalaureate is a two-year course in the two last years of upper-secondary education.

Regional bodies	Created in 1972 under an Agreement between the 16 participating governments of the English-speaking Caribbean community, the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) operates as a regional examination body in the Caribbean region from its two offices in Barbados and Jamaica. As an examination Council, the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) is involved in the organisation of several examinations in West Africa, including national examinations, examinations conducted in collaboration with or on behalf of international examination bodies, and (of greatest importance to this case study) a regional examination, the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). This was implemented for the first time in 1998 in the Gambia and subsequently introduced in the other participating countries.	The Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) and West African Examinations Council (WAEC) only provide examinations and award qualifications based on examination results but do not provide education. While CXC carries out examinations for both primary and secondary education, the WAEC mainly focuses on qualifications to enable access to tertiary education.
European University Institute	Operating at European level, the European University Institute presents an example of qualifications awarded by an international body and recognised by European states as being equal to national qualifications.	The degrees (EQF levels 7 and 8) provided by the Institute are not national. However, the Institute was established with the agreement of most EU Member States. Its programmes, which cover the fields of social sciences and humanities, are offered at doctoral, postdoctoral, Master's and executive levels of education.

Quality assurance

Various internal and external quality assurance approaches are applied in the non-country specific qualifications analysed. These include:

- requiring the **accreditation of bodies** that provide the education (European Baccalaureate, International Baccalaureate);
- drawing on **external quality assurance** to accredit programmes in the case of joint programmes (international bodies – WMU);
- setting up comprehensive **external and internal quality assurance systems** (in all of the cases), which rely on:
    - ensuring the **harmonisation of exam evaluations and results** (European Baccalaureate, International Baccalaureate, regional bodies – CXC, WAEC);

- carrying out **programme inspections** (international bodies – UNU);
- carrying out **evaluations/inspections of schools** (European Baccalaureate, International Baccalaureate, international bodies – UNWRA, regional bodies – WAEC);
- supporting and requiring the **continuing professional development of teachers** (European Baccalaureate, International Baccalaureate, regional bodies – CXC, European University Institute)

The combination of measures applied reflects the **importance of external quality assurance** in ensuring the high quality of education provided. The measures are similar to the requirements for HEIs to undergo institutional or programme evaluations in order to deliver joint programmes, thus reinforcing the need to prove the quality of education through external evaluations. In the case of non-country specific qualifications, however, such external quality assurance is facilitated by a delivery mode for the qualifications that does not require multiple quality assurance procedures to meet national requirements. This is enabled by the existing supranational structures or by connecting the international structures with national ones – for example, when delivering a joint programme in cooperation with a national university).

Table 7. Summary of lessons learned regarding quality assurance

Case study	Summary of lessons learned regarding quality assurance
European Baccalaureate	• Schools are accredited following a series of audits and reports for three years (accreditation renewal entails fewer steps than initial accreditation). Examination evaluations are harmonised, exam results are analysed twice, and teachers receive training in delivering high-quality and fair evaluation. The Secretary-General of the European Schools awards European Baccalaureate on behalf of the Board of Governors. • While the harmonisation of curriculum implementation is usually already a challenge at a national level, interviewees noted the fact that European Schools and Accredited European Schools are based in different Member States, that pupils and teachers come from different countries and that great diversity of teaching languages exists in the schools, adds extra layers of complexity to the harmonisation of practices across schools and language sections. The school representative interviewed also noted that significant work was needed to align the requirements of the European Schools system with national-level requirements. • Whole-school inspections are carried out every four years. Notably, these include discussions with key school representatives, the observation of individual lessons, and a report on the school's performance, accompanied by recommendations. After two years, the inspectors organise a follow-up visit to see if the recommendations have been considered. • European Schools have several opportunities for continuing professional development, including subject-specific training that takes place in the wake of revisions to the syllabuses, transversal training (e.g. concerning educational support or the harmonisation of practices) and training requested by individual teachers, which may be offered by those countries in which schools are based.
International Baccalaureate	• Several requirements apply to IB schools and their teachers (such as a constant requirement for teacher professional development, regular evaluations of IB schools, the standardised evaluation of examination results, etc.) to ensure the quality of education and qualifications. • To maintain the standards and practices of its IB programme(s), each IB World School is evaluated regularly. Evaluation takes place at least once every five years. As part of this process, the school engages in self-

	study, which is a key element in the school's continual improvement (see the International Baccalaureate website).
Supra-national and international bodies	• All supranational bodies have quality assurance procedures in place. Both the supranational organisations and partner universities can initiate programme inspections for quality assurance of the universities. UNRWA practises evaluations of its schools and, based on the results of these, visits poorly performing schools more frequently to improve education quality. • At the World Maritime University (WMU), the MSc and PhD in Maritime Affairs are accredited by ZEvA (Zentrale Evaluations- und Akkreditierungsagentur Hannover/ Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency Hanover, Germany) (World Maritime University, 2021), and the degrees are issued in Sweden by the WMU. Accreditation by the Swedish agency was not possible under Swedish law. • Overall, international (supranational) HEIs are accredited in the countries in which they provide education (i.e. the country of origin of the partner universities). The degrees are awarded by one of the partner universities, or collectively by the universities that provide the joint programme. The degree itself is usually tied to at least one university that is not international. A degree from a joint programme still has a nationally accredited university of some country as the programme provider.
Regional bodies	• The development of CXC syllabuses is supported by the involvement in the design stage of subject panels, composed of curriculum development experts, and by the consultation of teachers and other relevant stakeholders, who are invited to comment on the syllabi before they are approved by the Council. The CXC also carries out programme evaluations using a data-driven model, which consists of gathering feedback from multiple stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, and employers) about CXC offerings. Furthermore, the CXC regularly organises training sessions and workshops aimed at teachers and examination staff – for instance, when setting up school-based assessments or implementing e-testing (Caribbean Examinations Council, 2020). In parallel, the CXC conducts surveys targeting teachers, students and principals to gather data on the satisfaction of different stakeholders with the CXC's services. • The WAEC has also developed a quality assurance system to maintain high standards in the implementation of WASSCE. Experienced subject experts develop examination syllabuses and moderate marking schemes to ensure the reliability of the grades, and examination papers are revised, proofread and printed in accordance with strict security arrangements. In addition, to present candidates for the examination, schools are subject to inspections by the Ministries of Education and WAEC officials based on the observation of predetermined criteria (Uwadiae & Adelakun 2011).
European University Institute	• A Quality Assurance Officer is responsible for the operational implementation and management of quality assurance standards for all EUI programmes in compliance with European standards and guidelines, and for the accreditation procedure for all future degree programmes. • The professors at the Institute are encouraged to participate in learning courses such as languages, Microsoft Office and others. In addition, they can undertake additional training on ethics, data protection and other topics of interest. • According to a representative of the EUI, its management system, under which the Institute does not have to gain accreditation in any single country and is free to act independently from any contracting state, is a success factor.

Recognition

Meanwhile, the automatic recognition of qualifications explored within the case studies may rely on **agreements signed between countries** (e.g. the European Baccalaureate, European University Institute) or **bilateral agreements** (e.g. the European Baccalaureate, International Baccalaureate, international bodies). Furthermore,

experiences from the case studies reflect the importance of **linking the qualification with the EQF** (e.g. the European Baccalaureate, international bodies – WMU) **and/or the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)** (e.g. regional bodies – CXC). Linking qualifications with qualifications frameworks can prove especially useful when bilateral agreements are needed to ensure recognition (e.g. the European Baccalaureate). Recognition problems may also arise when the body/initiative is small-scale or **not well known** among certain stakeholder types (e.g. international bodies – UNU, European Baccalaureate). In such cases, students or education providers may be burdened with collecting additional information to get their qualifications recognised. In contrast, recognition problems are overcome when the qualification is widely known (e.g. the International Baccalaureate). Lastly, the **involvement of EU Member States in the governance or establishment** of the bodies that deliver education (e.g. the European Baccalaureate, or European University Institute) can also facilitate the recognition of non-country specific qualifications.

Table 8. Summary of lessons learned regarding recognition

Case study	Summary of lessons learned regarding recognition
European Baccalaureate	• The diploma is automatically recognised in the country in which students attend the school. It is equivalent to a national diploma in other EU countries. The 1994 Convention defining the Statute of the European Schools is an EU intergovernmental agreement that forms the legal basis for the automatic recognition of the European Baccalaureate in the EU. Outside the EU, recognition is not automatic. It relies on bilateral agreements between the EU Member State and a third country, facilitated by the equivalence in value between the European Baccalaureate and any EU school-leaving certificate. • Overall, the European Baccalaureate is widely recognised, enabling students to access higher education. However, some difficulties in recognition come from the low level of awareness of the diploma among certain HEIs. Regarding universities outside the EU, a representative of the Office of the Secretary-General reported sometimes being contacted by such institutions and asked to provide documents or information concerning the European Baccalaureate, so that the diploma could be recognised. These kinds of instances are rare, however, and quickly overcome. • The EU Member States are directly involved in the governance of the education process. According to interviewees, given the supremacy of national competence in education, the engagement of national authorities from EU Member States' ministries of education in the Board of Governors has been instrumental in securing the success and recognition of the qualification and supporting sustainable adherence to the system. However, such governance may lead to a slower decision-making process.
International Baccalaureate	• Each programme is subject to different levels and conditions of recognition around the globe, as the IB is recognised on the basis of recognition statements issued by individual countries. Learning outcomes are therefore defined in compliance with each country's education system. The diplomas and certificates are awarded by the IB itself (centrally for all IB schools), while schools are responsible for the examinations. • The IB is recognised worldwide due to its wide geographical scope (it is available in 159 countries). The 'brand' that the IB has created for itself has been used in practice for over 50 years, along with common grading and evaluation systems that ensure the recognition of IB qualifications and ensure the programme covers the same content around the globe.
Supranational and international bodies	• The UNU and WMU award joint degrees with partner universities, while the WMU also awards degrees by itself. UNU degrees are joint, with some programmes providing two degrees instead of one – one of which is issued solely by the partner university while the other is issued jointly. In general, UNRWA only provides students with education and prepares them for examinations – although it also offers VET programmes in line with national requirements which, upon completion, award students with qualifications.

	• Degrees at the WMU are based on ECTS credits and linked to the EQF. • UNU and WMU degrees are recognised worldwide. UNU students receive a joint degree co-signed by the UNU and partner universities, but the programme is accredited by the partner universities, while a German Evaluation and Accreditation Agency accredits WMU programmes. UNU degrees are usually recognised, but instances have occurred in which students have requested a letter from UNU to prove the validity of their degree (UNU is a small university offering niche topics that are not widely known). • All supranational bodies have quality assurance procedures in place. Both the supranational organisations and partner universities can initiate programme inspections for quality assurance. UNRWA practices evaluations of participating schools and, based on the results of these, visits poorly performing schools more frequently to improve education quality.
Regional bodies	• Examinations can be taken in the participating countries (16 for the CXC and five for the WAEC). The CXC and WAEC are responsible for administering the examinations and awarding the qualifications. The qualifications are recognised in participating countries and others worldwide (such as the USA, Canada, UK, etc.). According to the local registrar consulted, all CXC qualifications are linked to the National Qualifications Frameworks of the participating countries. • CXC examinations are recognised at regional and even international levels: students who have been awarded qualifications have, for instance, been admitted to higher education in the US, Canada and the UK, including entry into prestigious institutions such as Oxford University in the UK and Ivy League universities in the US (Caribbean Examinations Council, 2021). • The CXC has also established articulation agreements with a dozen HEIs to define coursework equivalences between educational institutions (Caribbean Examinations Council website). In addition, more than 20 HEIs have published CAPE equivalency charts providing credits to holders of CXC qualifications, thus offering opportunities for advanced standing (Caribbean Examinations Council website).
European University Institute	• The governments of the EU countries have adopted a recommendation stating that "the doctorate conferred by the European University Institute in Florence should be recognised in the Member States in the same way as equivalent national degrees" (European University Institute website). Separate documents/statements exist in Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and Spain, which confirm the recognition of the EUI degrees as being equal to national degrees. • Recognition of European University Institute degrees is also facilitated by the high proportion of its graduates going into academia. • To improve the transparency of EUI degrees, a verification procedure has been set up whereby interested parties such as employers, prospective employers, academic institutions or funding authorities can request information on a current or former researcher's EUI academic record. With the consent of the person holding the degree, their existing degrees or any parts of completed studies are verified online free of charge by representatives of EUI via email.

Box 2. Summary of lessons learned regarding non-country specific qualifications

The lessons learned from non-country specific qualifications were explored through five case studies covering different levels: European Baccalaureate, International Baccalaureate, supranational and international bodies, regional bodies, and European University Institute. Quality assurance and recognition were selected as the key areas in which obstacles exist in relation to the joint delivery of European programmes. External quality assurance or cooperation between national and international quality assurance structures is seen as the most efficient way to provide high-quality joint degrees. Meanwhile, to ensure recognition, the key strategy is to link qualifications with national or European qualifications frameworks. An additional set of problems relating to the recognition of qualifications can be overcome by

increasing publicity regarding qualifications or involving higher-level stakeholders in the governance of the bodies that deliver such programmes.

Existing instruments that could be put at the service of a possible joint European Degree

In this chapter, we offer an overview of the existing instruments that could be put at the service of a possible joint European degree. We focus on identifying the potential benefits of these instruments in implementing a possible joint European Degree, as well as highlighting some possible drawbacks.

Quality assurance, including accreditation

Multiple tools have been put in place to facilitate cross-border quality assurance (QA) for joint programmes, including within the framework of the Bologna process. In this section, we provide an overview of the key QA tools that have the potential to support the implementation of a possible joint European Degree.

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (2015 revision)

The ESG adopted by the ministers responsible for higher education in 2015 apply to all HEIs in the EHEA and aims to:

- "set a common framework for quality assurance systems for learning and teaching at European, national and institutional level;
- enable the assurance and improvement of the quality of higher education in the EHEA;
- support mutual trust, thus facilitating recognition and mobility within and across national borders;
- provide information on quality assurance in the EHEA." (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), 2015)

Thus, the ESG provides a **framework for higher education providers' external and internal quality assurance** (Loukkola et al., 2020) without prescribing standards and rules on how such processes should be implemented (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area [ESG], 2015). The ESG is not a standalone tool and should be considered complementary to **other transparency tools** promoted by the EU, including qualifications frameworks, the ECTS and the Diploma Supplement.

The ESG draws on the **principles of accountability and enhancement** (improvement) as key ways to increase trust in the quality of the higher education offered. The ESG is key to harmonising national QA systems according to the guidelines, without unnecessary enforcement (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), 2015). Having clearly communicated regular internal and external QA procedures in line with the ESG as part of a university's policies can be an important element of QA for the possible joint European Degree.

The design and approval of programmes in accordance with the ESG guidelines sets the **ground for the implementation of a possible joint European Degree**. **Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment** according to the ESG guidelines allows such programmes to keep up with students' needs and level of satisfaction for more effective lobbying on the national level. The **transparency of rules** relating to student admission, progression, recognition and certification in line with ESG creates an opportunity to coordinate the 'life cycles' of partner programmes. The **regular monitoring, review and revision** of study programmes embedded in the ESG guidelines offer a chance to use the documented experience of previous initiatives to avoid repetitive actions during the implementation of any possible joint European Degree, whether as a label or a qualification for joint degrees.

Moreover, according to the ESG, the QA policy of the institutions should cover "any elements of an institution's activities that are subcontracted to or carried out by other parties" (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area [ESG], 2015). This leaves open the possibility to integrate **micro-credentials or extracurricular activities** (voluntary service, internships) into joint degree programmes.

Despite having a common framework, countries struggle to agree on common practices, and not all quality assurance agencies follow the ESG indicators in their work (Loukkola et al., 2020). However, it has to be noted that agencies registered with EQAR or full ENQA members are periodically reviewed externally by EQAR and ENQA, respectively and thus can be expected to comply with the ESG. In certain contexts, national rules exist regarding regulated professions that are not compatible with the standards for QA in the EHEA. Even though students can be extremely helpful on questions of internal QA, it can prove difficult for them to engage (lack of interest, lack of support, lack of an enabling environment). If ESG guidelines are followed consistently, the level of trust in the external QA system and partners within the network will increase, putting in place the key conditions necessary for the successful implementation of a possible joint European Degree. However, trust is needed at the very first stage to implement such a scheme. Currently, there is still a reluctance to recognise and trust the QA of other states.

European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA) (2015), adopted by European ministers responsible for higher education as part of the Bologna Process, has been developed to facilitate external quality assurance of joint programmes (within the EHEA), particularly in cases when programme-level accreditation is required. The EA is expected to remove the need to apply additional national criteria by drawing on EHEA tools (ESG, ECTS, QF-EHEA).

One of the key benefits of the EA is expected to be a reduction in the number of procedures HEIs need to go through to accredit their transnational joint programmes. If the EA is applied, **only one external QA procedure** should suffice, reducing both administrative burden and cost. The applying HEIs can choose an EQAR-registered agency to undertake the EA procedure for external QA. Other benefits of using the EA include its **focus on the programme and its content** and the **true 'jointness' of the programme**. Moreover, the EA is expected to **enhance the internationalisation of HEIs** and help **improve internal QA systems**. Importantly, the EA could also act as an incentive for Member States to implement agreements to facilitate joint programme accreditation and foster peer learning (Kelo et al, 2018).

The key obstacle to implementing the EA and its potential use for possible joint European Degree programmes is a lack of availability in some of the Member States (EQAR

website). It is not easy for the institutions to see the added value of the European Approach and what benefits it could bring to the faculties. The lack of good practice examples makes it harder for institutions to see what the Approach means in practice, and why they should engage with it. In particular, the level of awareness concerning the European Approach may be particularly low in institutions that are not usually subject to programme accreditation, which may thus fail to see its relevance to the joint programmes in which they are involved. Awareness of the EA may also be low because it has only been applied in a comparatively small number of cases (Kelo et al, 2018).

Moreover, the existing confusion regarding national and European definitions of a joint programme/joint degree/double degree/multiple degrees has also contributed to difficulties in implementing the EA (Kelo et al, 2018). Given that the EA should take precedence over national processes, it is expected that the national programs will adjust their definitions to those provided by the EA. Thus, if the EA approach is to be applied effectively in the context of a possible joint European Degree, these definitions would have to be aligned. Currently, there is sometimes a lack of distinction between a) definition of a joint programme and a joint degree; b) definition of a joint degree and a double/multiple degree (European Commission & EACEA, 2020) in the national legislation. Most of the definitions of a 'joint degree' refer to a single document (joint diploma) issued upon completion of joint study programmes offered by at least two HEIs. (European Commission & EACEA, 2020). However, not in all cases, relevant distinctions between joint degrees and double/multiple degrees exist in the national legislation, creating obstacles in quality assurance, including the application of the EA (Kelo et al, 2018). Moreover, existing differences in the definition and interpretation of what constitutes a joint degree (as opposed to a joint programme or double/multiple degree), may prevent the successful implementation of future initiatives that rely on a common understanding of what a joint degree is.

There is also evidence of an overall lack of clarity concerning the EA among HEIs and, to a lesser extent, among national agencies. The elements of the EA identified as the most unclear included the legal validity of the EA in the national system, including in terms of assurance that it can replace national procedures. HEIs also noted the need for further clarifications regarding transparency and documentation, and quality assurance requirements. Furthermore, the existing legislative frameworks prevent the full implementation of the key promise of the EA, which is a single accreditation procedure for joint study programmes (Kelo et al, 2018). The European Approach implementation toolkit developed as part of the ImpEA project is one of the practical tools that could help facilitate its implementation if sufficient awareness is raised about the toolkit (ImpEA, 2018).

In addition, the EA is not as relevant in countries where programme-level accreditation is not required. However, it is also likely that among the partners implementing joint programmes (including a possible future joint degree based on common European criteria), at least some will require programme-level accreditation, making the EA still relevant.

Moreover, the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation also calls for a "Move further towards the use of institutional-based external quality assurance".[14] Nevertheless, currently, the programme-level external quality assurance remains more prominent, as evidenced by the types of procedures carried out by EQAR-registered QA agencies. By the end of 2021, EQAR registered agencies submitted 69,161 programme-level reports (covering both national and

[14] Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (Text with EEA relevance) 2022/C 160/01

international degree programmes), and only 2,128 institutional-level reports.[15] As also presented in the table below, most commonly, the Member States use external quality assurance systems that combine institutional and programme-level accreditation requirements.

Table 9. Types of existing external quality assurance requirements

Country	Types of existing External Quality assurance requirements
Austria	Institutional and initial programme accreditation (private HEIs, universities of applied sciences) Institutional audit (public universities; universities of applied sciences after 12 years of uninterrupted accreditation) Own methodology (colleges of teacher education)
Belgium	French community: Programme evaluations Flemish community: Institutional review and programme accreditation
Bulgaria	Institutional and programme evaluation
Croatia	Institutional and programme accreditation Initial institutional and programme accreditation (new HEIs, and new programmes of private HEIs)
Cyprus	Institutional, and programme evaluation and accreditation Department evaluation
Czechia	Institutional and programme accreditation
Denmark	Institutional accreditation Programme accreditation (until institutional accreditation is achieved)
Estonia	Quality assessment of study programme groups Institutional accreditation Initial assessment of study programme groups
Finland	Institutional audits
France	Institutional evaluations Review of disciplinary fields
Germany	System accreditation (optional, enables self-accreditation of study programmes) Programme accreditation
Greece	Programme accreditation Institutional accreditation
Hungary	Institutional accreditation Initial programme accreditation (part of initial institutional accreditation) Programme accreditation in disciplinary clusters
Ireland	Institutional reviews Programme validation (eight Irish universities, Dublin Institute of Technology and Royal College of Surgeons are exempt)
Italy	Institutional accreditation Programme accreditation
Latvia	Accreditation of study directions Institutional accreditation Licencing of a study programme
Lithuania	Evaluation of study fields Institutional accreditation
Luxembourg	Institutional accreditation Programme accreditation
Malta	Institutional audit Programme accreditation (self-accrediting public institutions are exempt unless they want to exceed their current Malta Qualification Framework level)
Netherlands	Programme accreditation Institutional audits (optional)
Poland	Programme evaluations
Portugal	Institutional assessment

[15] EQAR (2021). Annual Report 2021. Available at: https://www.eqar.eu/about/annual-reports/2021-2/database-of-external-qa-results-deqar/

	Accreditation of study programmes in operation
Romania	Institutional evaluation and accreditation Programme evaluation and accreditation
Slovakia	Institutional accreditation Programme accreditation
Slovenia	Programme accreditation Initial accreditation and re-accreditation of programmes
Spain	Ex-ante and ex-post programme evaluation Institutional evaluations
Sweden	Institutional review Programme evaluations

Source: compiled by PPMI based on EQAR knowledge base. Available at: https://www.eqar.eu/kb/country-information/country/?id=46

The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and DEQAR database of external quality assurance results

The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) is a register of quality assurance agencies compliant with the ESG. The EQAR also implements the Database of External Quality Assurance Reports (DEQAR), which compiles the results of external quality assurance in the EHEA, including through the application of the EA. The database includes QA results covering evaluation, accreditation (including positive and negative results), audit and review. As EQAR-registered agencies are acknowledged to be compliant with the ESG, the external review results published in the DEQAR are expected to enhance the transparency and commitment to the quality of higher education. Participation in EQAR is voluntary, with a minimal administrative burden for participating agencies.

Other

Other tools that can help to support cross-border quality assurance are summarised in the table below. These tools include practical resources for QA agencies implementing cross-border QA, as well as the **European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities** (EUniQ) (EUniQ, 2021). The latter is available for the voluntary evaluation of European Universities by EQAR-registered QA agencies and has the potential to make the external QA more effective within the scope of the European Universities alliances. Lessons learned and good practices could then be scaled up to other consortia of HEIs.

Table 10. Summary of other tools supporting cross-border quality assurance

Tools	Description	Benefits	Drawbacks
Practical resources for QA agencies: • A Toolkit for Quality Assurance Agencies (developed as part of the QACHE project) • European Approach implementation toolkit (developed as part of ImpEA project) • Roadmap for Cross-Border QA in the EHEA	These resources provide practical advice for QA agencies dealing with cross-border quality assurance.	Similar practical resources may need to be developed once the joint European Degree is operational. It will be essential to provide necessary resources to practitioners responsible for accrediting degree programmes based on common European criteria. The existing resources may be tailored to reflect the agreed common European criteria for a joint European Degree.	The multitude of practical resources available could cause confusion over what should be applied. Thus, consistency should be ensured in guidance materials.
European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities (EUniQ)	The EuniQ-project has developed a methodology for the comprehensive quality assurance of (European) University Networks. The ultimate aim of EUniQ is that university alliances can be evaluated externally using one European Framework and one corresponding suitable QA procedure, rather than being subject to multiple national and European frameworks and procedures.	There are principles, good practices and experiences within the projects that can and should be promoted and used as examples by European University alliances when looking for accreditation solutions in the development of their own internal quality assurance schemes. Developing their own internal QA systems that consider the needs of external QA may help to make QA of joint European Degree programmes more effective.	This approach is relevant from a medium/long-term perspective but was introduced at a very early stage in the implementation of the European University alliances. At the time of the EUniQ assessments, these alliances were still focusing on setting up their internal, inter-institutional structures and working towards the project-specific goals of their alliances. They were still in the process of developing an internal quality culture and processes available for evaluation. The EUniQ framework is very recent (created in the autumn of 2021) and is therefore not yet very well known nor widely used, and alliances have mainly worked using the quality parameters stated in the project proposal.

Recognition

Council Recommendation on Automatic Recognition of qualifications and the underlying Lisbon Recognition Convention

The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) (**Council of Europe, 1997)**, adopted in 1997, established the grounds for making automatic recognition a reality. It embedded the principle that qualifications obtained in foreign countries should be recognised unless substantial differences can be shown. Despite efforts to make automatic recognition a reality in higher education, obstacles remain. Full implementation of automatic recognition would significantly facilitate the delivery of a joint degree based on common European criteria, including raising its attractiveness for prospective students (guaranteeing access to further education and the labour market).

Acknowledging the importance of automatic recognition to cross-border cooperation, a Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper-secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad was adopted in 2018. With the Council Recommendation, EU Member States committed to introducing automatic recognition by 2025. In the field of higher education, the Recommendation builds on previous developments within the Bologna Process and the LRC, as well as via multilateral agreements (e.g. the agreement on automatic academic recognition in the Baltic states [2018], the declaration of intent by the Baltic states and the Benelux member states on the automatic mutual recognition of higher education degrees [2019], the Baltic-Benelux agreement on automatic recognition of HE degrees [2021]).

The Recommendation also promotes the further use of existing tools that can support the recognition of qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad. This includes Europass, the European Qualifications Framework, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the Diploma Supplement and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training, among others. The proposed Recommendation aims to improve recognition processes for the qualifications required to access higher education at the upper-secondary level, including vocational education and training qualifications.

If the Recommendation is fully implemented across the Member States by 2025 as agreed, many existing issues relating to automatic recognition would be solved – also paving the way for a possible joint degree based on common European criteria.

Europass Digital Credentials Infrastructure (EDCI) and the Europass Digital Credential

Europass Digital Credentials Infrastructure (EDCI) is developed to support the recognition of qualifications (as well as other credentials and learning achievements) efficiently and securely. The EDCI will provide a platform to securely authenticate digital documents, providing relevant information about the qualifications obtained. The Europass Digital Credential (EDC) will be based on credentials issued by educational institutions, and may contain descriptions of:

- activities (e.g. classes attended)
- assessments (e.g. projects)
- achievements (e.g. skills developed)

- professional entitlements (e.g. registration as a medical doctor)
- qualifications (Europass website).

Thus, while the EDCI will provide a platform to support the recognition of qualifications, the EDC will provide secure paperless documentation for information relevant to recognition. Importantly, the credentials (including qualifications) will be automatically verifiable (by being able to check information about the awarding body and quality assurance).

The EDC may prove especially useful in implementing a joint European Degree label (for issuing certificates) and for a joint degree based on common European criteria as a qualification (for issuing diplomas). Because credentials are signed using an e-Seal, their legal authenticity is presumed and equivalence to paper-based alternatives verified.

ENIC-NARIC network

The ENIC[16] and NARIC[17] networks (ENIC-NARIC networks) are key stakeholders in the recognition of qualifications. At a minimum, the members of ENIC-NARIC are responsible for providing relevant information to qualification holders, and in many cases, they are also the bodies directly responsible for issuing recognition decisions. ENIC-NARIC members also offer many joint initiatives to facilitate qualification recognition in participating countries. The European Area of Recognition manual is one of the outputs of cooperation between ENIC-NARIC members. This manual targets members of the ENIC-NARIC networks (especially those responsible for issuing recognition decisions). Creating a common understanding among recognition practitioners will be crucial for the recognition of a joint degree based on common European criteria.

Level of qualifications

Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)

The Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) provides a systematic framework for qualifications in the EHEA, consisting of three cycles. One of the purposes of the framework is to provide an overarching framework that will simplify mobility, transparency and recognition between national systems. A possible joint European degree, both as a label and a qualification, would benefit from each of these goals. The framework will help to support the development and recognition of joint degrees from more than one country. QF-EHEA aims to harmonise the qualifications offered, seeking to ensure that qualifications offered during different cycles are comparable.

European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) relates different countries' national qualifications frameworks to the EQF's eight reference levels. The EQF encompasses different levels of education (from school leaving certificates to Doctorate degrees). Qualifications obtained through general, vocational and academic education can be linked to the EQF. As the EQF's levels are described in learning outcomes, it enables the comparison of different national systems linked to the EQF.

[16] European Network of National Information Centres (ENIC Network).
[17] National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC Network).

The implementation of the EQF is based on the Council Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. In implementing the recommendation, Member States have set up national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) linked to the EQF. Currently, these NQFs are linked with the EQF in most Member States, except in Spain and the German-speaking region of Belgium (Cedefop website). If a joint degree based on common European criteria is awarded at national level, it should be a part of these NQFs. Linking it to the EQF by embedding it in a country's NQF would facilitate the delivery of joint degrees by enabling smoother comparison and cooperation between countries and institutions.

In line with the EQF Recommendation, the QF-EHEA can be linked to the EQF, specifically EQF levels 5-8.

Table 11. Connection between the EQF, QF-EHEA and qualifications obtained

EQF level	QF-EHEA cycle	Examples of Qualifications obtained
Level 5	Short cycle (that can be linked to or within the first cycle)	Professional/vocational
Level 6	First cycle	Bachelor
Level 7	Second cycle	Master
Level 8	Third cycle	Doctorate

Source: compiled by PPMI, based on EQF and QF-EHEA frameworks.

Overall, linking the joint degree based on common European criteria with the QF-EHEA and the EQF should facilitate recognition of such degrees and contribute to the less burdensome quality assurance of joint programmes.

Transparency of learning outcomes

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

The **European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)** is "a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer, based on the principle of transparency of the learning, teaching and assessment processes". (European Commission & DG EAC, 2017). The use of the ECTS should facilitate both the recognition of qualifications and the quality assurance of joint programmes. Moreover, the ECTS is a tool that supports mobility, enabling the recognition of learning abroad. The cycles of higher education are linked with different ECTS ranges, as illustrated in the table below. For the first cycle (Bachelor), the ECTS credit range should be between 180 and 240, while the second cycle (Master) should offer 60, 90 or 120 ECTS (60 ECTS is equivalent to one study year) (European Commission & DG EAC, 2017).

Table 12. ECTS credit accumulation for QF-EHEA cycles

Cycle	ECTS credits
Short cycle	90-120 ECTS
First cycle (Bachelor)	180-240 ECTS
Second cycle (Master)	60-90-120 ECTS
Third cycle (Doctorate)	The use of ECTS varies

Source: QF-EHEA and ECTS users' guide 2015.

For the possible joint European degree, the ECTS could prove a useful tool if existing obstacles relating to its use are solved. Moreover, the ECTS enables the integration of different modes of learning into the joint study programme, including internships and micro-credentials.

Diploma Supplement

The Diploma Supplement is a tool used to provide data to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, providing information on the nature, level, context, content and status of an individual's studies. The Diploma Supplement accompanies the original qualification (e.g. a diploma), providing details about the studies the individual has completed.

The Diploma Supplement could be used as a first step towards the implementation of a possible joint European degree. The Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees developed by the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (Aerden & Reczulska, 2013) provide a list of suggestions on how joint degree supplements should be developed, highlighting the importance of including all necessary information to facilitate recognition. As also highlighted by an interviewed stakeholder working in ENIC-NARIC, if properly prepared, could facilitate the recognition of the degree. In particular, the guidelines recommend adding components without removing what is already there. The elements relevant in the context of a possible joint European degree include the following:

- information about all the institutions taking part in awarding the joint degree
- the languages used during studies and the explanation of how exactly they were used (e.g. the balance of credits, master's thesis in national language)
- the details of whether all members of the joint programme award the degree or not (in case someone does not, their role needs to be explained separately)
- further contacts of joint programmes where a student can receive more information
- information about the relevant ENIC-NARIC
- information on whether the joint programme is quality assured and/or accredited as such (and by whom) (Aerden & Reczulska, 2010).

Failure to follow the structure for Diploma Supplements proposed in the guidelines mentioned above would prevent recognition in cases where the necessary information is not accessible. This could be the case for joint degrees that do not provide sufficient clarity regarding their joint nature. This deficiency is reflected in a lack of information about them on institutions' websites, accompanied by supplements that are either issued separately by each institution or do not provide a sufficient level of clarity about the role of each institution in the final degree.

No common description exists in the supplements regarding extracurricular activities. This means that decisions regarding internships and micro-credentials, for example, will need to be made from scratch in the context of a possible joint European degree.

Lastly, the Diploma Supplement could be used to indicate that a graduate has completed a "quality-certified" programme in the case of the implementation of a joint European Degree as a label.

Subject Area Qualifications and Assessment Reference Frameworks developed as part of the TUNING Academy and CALOHEE projects

The Reference Frameworks are based on the merger of the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF). The descriptors in the Reference Frameworks are organised based on 'dimensions'. The Subject Area Qualifications Reference Frameworks may prove a useful tool for those developing joint degree programmes, specifically their learning outcomes, to ensure that they align with the EQF/QF-EHEA. Furthermore, the subject-specific descriptions provided by the TUNING projects could form a solid basis for international groups of academics during the development phase of joint study programmes, potentially leading to a joint European degree. Lastly, the frameworks could help harmonise understandings as to what competences, skills and knowledge are required within specific of fields study, as well as accounting for added value due to the transnational provision of the programme. However, descriptions are not yet available for all fields of study.

Box 3. Summary of the existing instruments

This chapter focuses on the implications of the existing instruments for the development and implementation of a possible joint European degree.

Quality assurance
The design and approval of the programmes in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) creates an opportunity to harmonise the 'life cycles' of partner programmes, as well as conducting a regular review and revision in line with common standards, and eventually increasing trust in the external QA system and partners within the network. Application of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA) is expected to ensure the true 'jointness' of the programmes, while also simplifying accreditation to a single external QA procedure. The key issues with this approach are confusion regarding national and European definitions of a joint degree, and a low level of awareness among institutions.

Recognition
Following the Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad in 2018, the EU Member States committed to introducing automatic recognition by 2025. Europass Digital Credentials Infrastructure (EDCI) can be used for the recognition of qualifications on a platform that allows digital documents to be securely authenticated, providing relevant information about qualifications obtained. This system may be particularly useful in implementing a joint European Degree as a label (for issuing certificates), and for a possible joint European Degree as a qualification (for issuing joint diplomas). The European Area Recognition manual for the ENIC-NARIC networks will help in creating a common understanding among recognition practitioners that will be crucial to the recognition of the joint European Degree.

Level of qualifications
The Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) provides a systematic framework for qualifications in the EHEA that simplifies mobility, transparency and recognition between national systems. The Framework can help to support the development and recognition of joint degrees from more than one country, which would be largely beneficial for a possible joint European degree. The QF-EHEA can be linked to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The EQF encompasses different levels of education (from school leaving certificates to Doctorate degrees) as well as the learning outcomes for each level, thus enabling the comparison of different national systems linked with the EQF.

Transparency of learning outcomes
The use of the **European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) can support** the facilitation of both the recognition of qualifications and quality assurance of joint programmes,

as well as mobility, enabling the recognition of learning abroad. A Diploma Supplement with a unified template could also contribute to recognition and be used as a first step towards the implementation of a possible joint European Degree. The compliance of learning outcomes with the EQF/QF-EHEA, plus a clearer understanding of the competences required in specific fields of study, can be achieved using the Subject Area Qualifications Reference Frameworks.

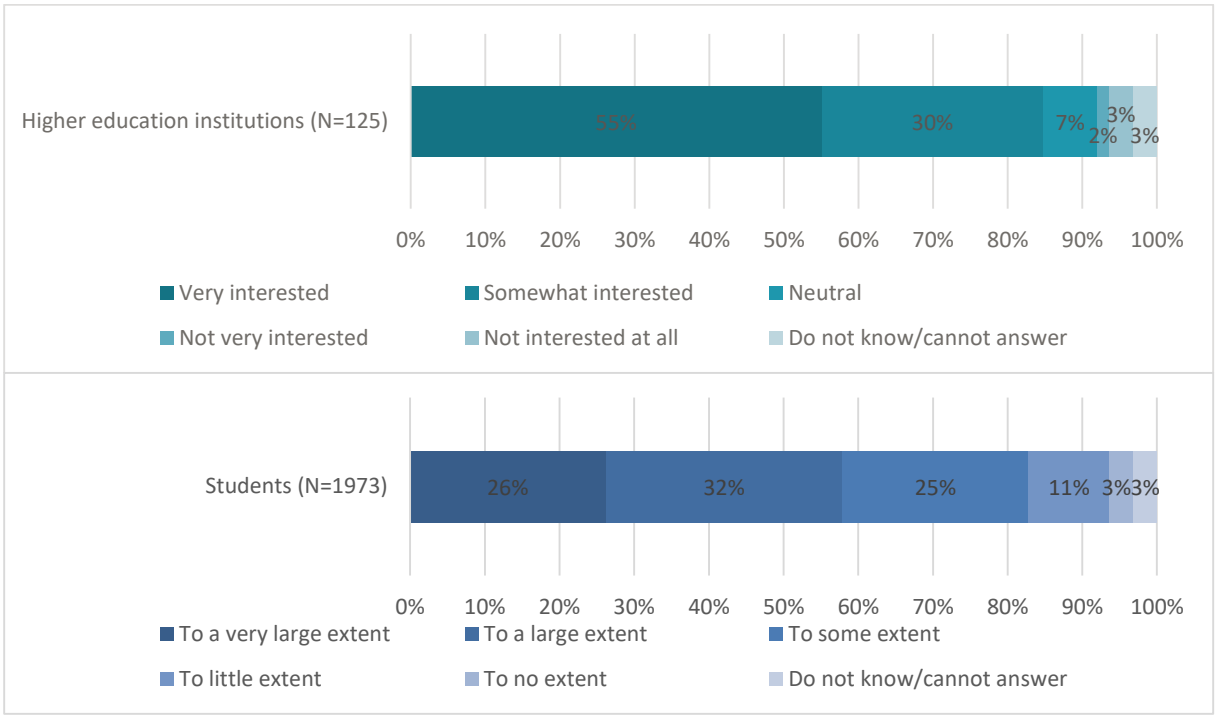
Overview of the options for a possible joint European degree

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the options, preliminary criteria and expected benefits of a possible joint European degree, preparing the ground for the feasibility and impact assessment.

Options for implementing a possible joint European degree

Based on consultations carried out for this study, and in line with the Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe and the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, a joint European Degree label and a possible joint European Degree qualification (understood as a widely available joint degree based on common European criteria) emerged as the two key options. Overall, the higher education stakeholders initially consulted for this study through interviews, a survey and a workshop mostly regarded favourably the idea of a joint European degree as an initiative that was accessible to all HEIs in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), encompassing three cycles of higher education (Bachelor, Master and Doctorate), and not creating an additional burden to existing initiatives. Stakeholders also positively assessed the joint European degree as both a label and a qualification (understood as a joint degree based on common European criteria). Moreover, the students and HEIs surveyed demonstrated an interest in the joint European Degree label (see below), a necessary condition for its feasible implementation.

Figure 4. Interest in joint European Degree label study programmes



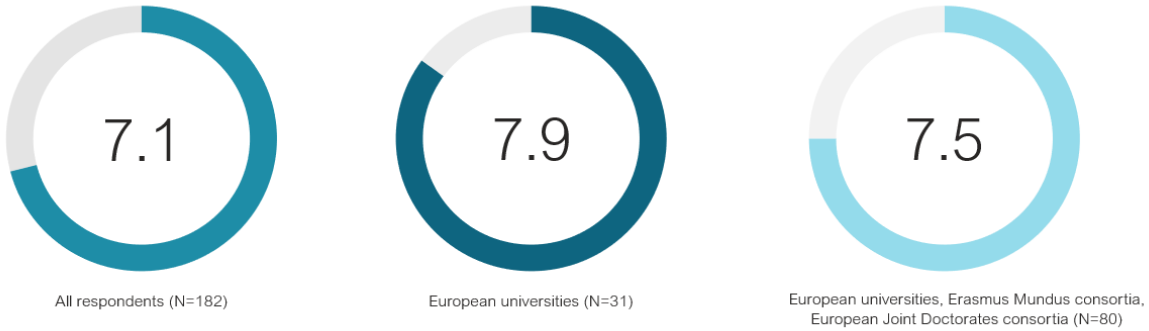
Source: feasibility and impact survey – HEIs and students.

Building blocks for a joint European Degree label

The proposed option of a joint European Degree label foresees a label awarded to joint study programmes that lead to the award of a joint degree, and which meet a pre-defined list of criteria agreed at European level. Under the options foreseen, European HEIs could apply for a joint European Degree label for their joint study programmes. Upon the label being awarded, the partner institutions would then issue a joint European Degree label certificate, along with the diploma, to graduates. A generic joint European Degree label

Figure 5. Extent to which stakeholders associated a joint European Degree with a quality label

certificate template would be used for this purpose, common across the EU.



Source: stakeholder survey.

The table below includes the key building blocks of a quality label that need to be considered when designing the label.

Table 13. Key building blocks of a quality label

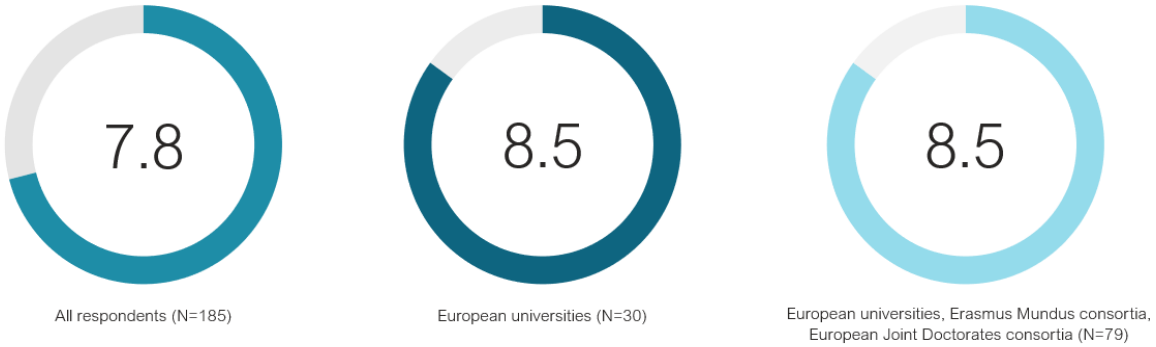
Quality label building block		Focus of the building block
Eligibility criteria	Scope	Types of HEIs that are eligible to receive the quality label
	Level of qualification	Qualification awarded upon completion of the joint study programme (by EQF level)
	Type of degree awarded	Types of degrees that are awarded upon completion of the joint study programme
	Essential features of the study programme	Features of the programme that must be part of the joint study programme design
	Quality assurance	Approach applied to accredit/evaluate the joint study programme
	HEIs involved	Minimum number of HEIs involved in the provision of the joint study programme
Awarding the label	Proof of eligibility	Solutions regarding how applicants for the quality label must prove they meet the eligibility criteria
	Process of awarding the quality label	Description of how the quality label is awarded
	Format	Format of the label (including physical/digital label, elements of digital certification included)
	Promotion of quality label programmes	Consideration needs to be given to the promotion of programmes that receive the quality label. While those institutions receiving the quality label can use it for their own promotional purposes, a single database of labelled programmes could also be considered.

Building blocks for a possible joint European Degree qualification (a joint degree based on common European criteria)

A joint European Degree as a possible joint degree based on common European criteria means that a joint study programme would be accredited in order to offer what could be called commonly a joint European Degree. Common criteria for joint European Degree accreditation would be co-created and agreed at European level by Member States. These criteria might be the same as those for the joint European Degree label or could be further developed, as those for the joint European Degree label. Moving beyond the label, such joint degrees could be added to the national qualifications framework when necessary.

These criteria would then be applied by national accreditation bodies, for joint programmes planning to award a joint European degree (e.g. a joint European Bachelor of Arts, joint European Master of Science, a Joint European Master in Arts and Science, etc.) in specific or interdisciplinary subject areas. This would remove obstacles to the delivery of joint degrees as, having adopted the common criteria for joint degree programmes, national legislation in each Member State would be compatible, avoiding the situation of multiple accreditations/evaluations based on different and sometimes incompatible national criteria.

Figure 6. Extent to which stakeholders associated a joint European degree with a qualification



Source: stakeholder survey.

The table below summarises the key building blocks of a degree system that have been identified as necessary for a possible joint European Degree as a qualification to be recognised by competent authorities for further learning and employment opportunities. We also note some of the existing challenges to implementation and provide suggestions as to how these could be overcome.

Table 14. Key building blocks for a joint European Degree system

Stage of the programme life cycle	**Building block**	**Focus**	**Challenges**	**Suggestions**
Definition	Level of the qualification	Integrated into the NQF, linked to the EQF	Requires the linking of NQFs to the EQF in the Member States and the EHEA Requires a decision regarding whether to limit the European Degree to EQF levels 7-8 or EQF levels 6-8	Pilot on Masters
	Profile	Title and target group Key principles and objectives of the study programme(s) Curriculum of the study programme(s) Pedagogical approaches and methods Modes of learning (contact hours, self-study, distance and/or blended learning) National affiliation, public/private status	Lack of conditions/ experience for facilitating a cooperative model for a joint European Degree (e.g. multilingualism, interculturality, mobility schemes) Lack of autonomy for decision-making on programme level Lack of curricular flexibility Lack of legislative context for the awarding of degrees under an international partnership Variations in admission requirements between countries,	Provide a clear legislative basis for the joint European Degree (by implementing changes to national legislation), as well as concrete guidelines on all profile-related aspects/measurements Focus on those institutions that already have experience in cooperation as role models Use the post-COVID-19 distanced learning experience as an inspiration for new forms of mobility complementary to physical mobility Pilots that can address problems and propose solutions regarding the lack of autonomy,

		Degree of university autonomy Alternative learning modes included in the curriculum: micro-credentials, voluntary service, internships International elements included (physical/blended /virtual mobility of students). Admission requirements	limited institutional autonomy to set admission requirements	flexibility, international outlook, detailed regulations, etc.
	Workload/ duration	The number of ECTS credits required for the achievement of learning outcomes, and the notional workload to achieve these credits Award of ECTS credits for alternative learning modes (micro-credentials, voluntary service, internships)	Divergence in national legislation Differences in defining workload for ECTS Lack of recognition for online or short-term learning activities	Encouraging Member States to accept different lengths (in terms of ECTS credits) and different forms of delivery for degrees, in line with the previous commitments agreed within the Bologna process Even if credits are not assigned for alternative learning, such learning should be still included in the Diploma Supplement Taking the 2015 edition of the ECTS Users' Guide as the only basis for transnational joint programmes, without additional rules or limitations
	Quality assurance	Internal quality assurance concerning all nine aspects of the ESGs External quality assurance and accreditation of HEIs and study programmes (including the bodies involved) Classification of a degree Focus of the quality assurance system on an institution or a degree, or both.	Different national QA systems across the EHEA, where external, programme-level accreditation is not required in all countries, and hence the need for a European Approach is less evident in such countries. Making the EA compulsory might discourage certain HEIs from creating joint degree programmes, as it brings additional bureaucracy in cases where programme-level accreditation is not mandatory. If the EA is to be made compulsory, it should not be in addition to other existing procedures	Application of the European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes by a selected agency registered with EQAR, in those countries where programme-level accreditation is required National requirements for programme-level quality assurance or accreditation should be waived for joint programmes that apply the EA Allow joint programmes to define the template for their joint degree, within the limits of the current legislation Internal QA: making differences in grading transparent, without enforcing a change

			but should rather help to ensure that only one evaluation is carried out per programme, as was intended with the introduction of the EA. Rigid quality assurance systems with preconditions or procedural requirements narrow the flexibility allowed by the ESG and the European Approach and are thus not compatible with international joint programmes. However, if the EA is applied in the manner intended, this should not cause additional problems. A lack of harmonisation in the accreditation process, leading to the replication of accreditation procedures in a multi-partner context (where EA is not implemented as intended) Re-accreditation could discourage partner universities from creating new programmes	
	Learning outcomes	Content and further rights of the qualification holder	Criteria for professional degrees are formulated at the level of national professional communities	Need to provide transparent information to prospective students about future access to professions in different countries
Delivery	Programme delivery	Organisations delivering study programmes that lead to a qualification/degree Number of institutions to be involved in joint programmes	Restrictions on the language of instruction Restrictions on online components (lack of online platforms for digital learning) Lack of online platforms for student management Restrictive national legislation regarding mobility National student support systems require a specific	Promotion of a challenge-based approach that can innovate beyond national lists of fields/disciplines/qualifications. Building virtual inter-university campuses and applying a leaner process for virtual mobility, tapping into online learning resources and staff exchange to develop flexible learning paths Enabling consortia to decide on issues regarding the language of instruction, online

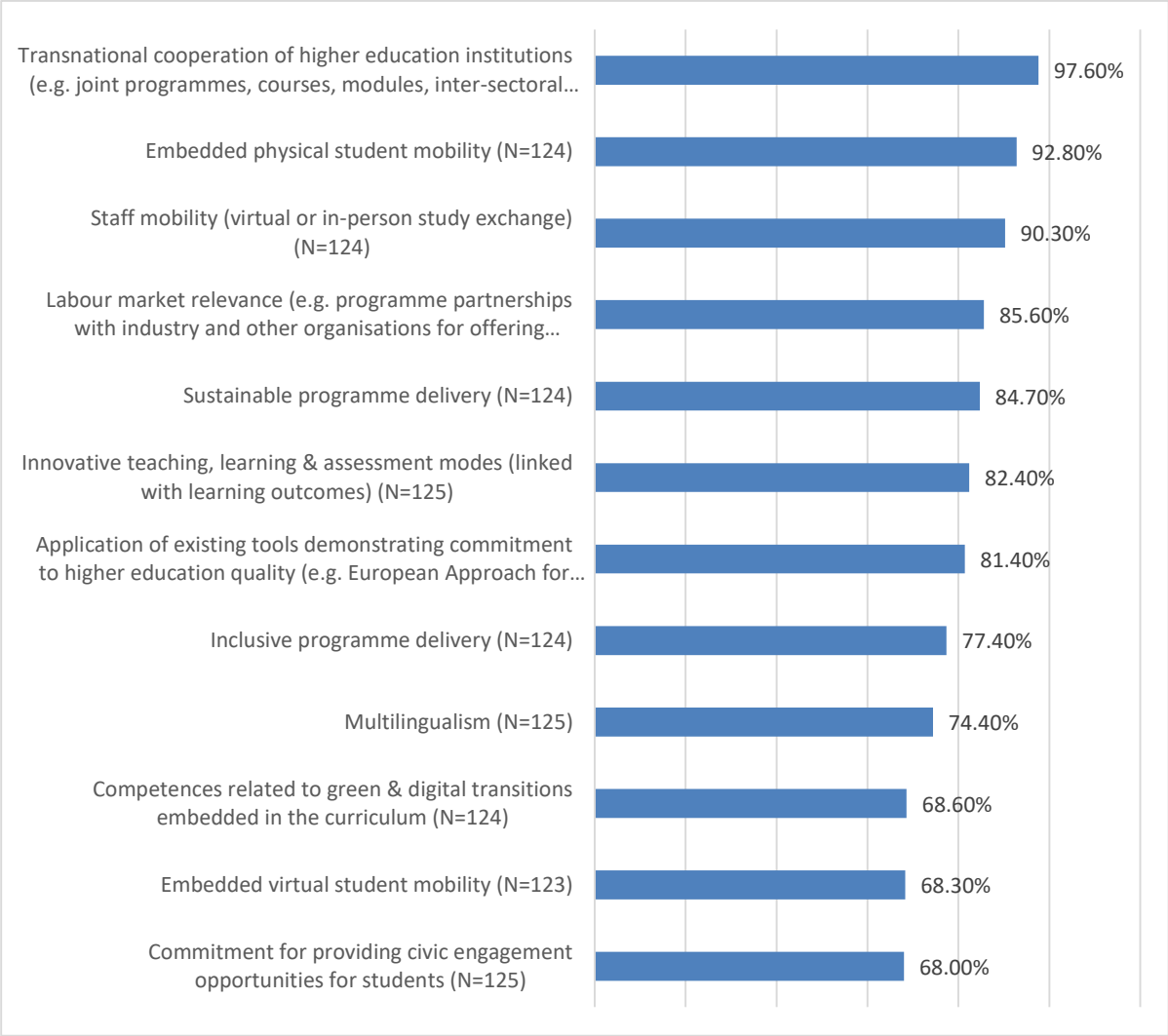
			length/type of mobility	components of the programme and mobility
	Awarding of a degree	Requirements and procedure Bodies conferring diplomas and awarding qualifications/degrees Documentation (diploma and Diploma Supplement)	Mandatory requirements regarding the paper to be used for the diploma, its size, the logo(s) that are printed on it, limits regarding the use of languages, limits regarding who can/should sign the diploma Restrictive national legislation regarding the awarding of degrees. Lack of harmonisation of the documentation and lack of IT background (registration, archive, etc.)	Discussion around degree-awarding powers, and the possibility of setting up a supranational degree-awarding body Defining a common template for the diploma to be issued, based on a European Degree
	Student Enrolment	Responsibility for the development of the enrolment criteria	Differences in the systems for financing higher education, leading to a diverse landscape of tuition fees across countries and HEIs Regulations regarding the recognition of prior learning	Allow partner institutions flexibility in terms of enrolment and fees Introduce flexible criteria for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) without imposing limitations on how many ECTS credits HEIs can award on the basis of RPL.
Recognition		Recognition of degrees Scope (EU/EHEA) Degree of recognition (automatic/ via special agencies) Recognition of learning /credit transfer between HEIs	Recognition of professional qualifications Only ten EHEA (8 of them EU members) countries offered fully automatic recognition of degrees from other EHEA countries in 2018/2019 Difficulties in achieving automatic credit recognition within alliances of HEIs Recognition of virtual and blended learning or short-term mobility within study programmes may not be recognised in the same way as physical mobility, often discouraging students from choosing these options	EU Directives relating to certain regulated professions enable the flexible recognition of professional degrees across borders Encouraging EHEA member states to consistently apply legislation aimed at enabling credit transfer and the recognition of learning across borders Encouraging HEIs regarding flexible credit transfer and the recognition of learning in international partnerships Encouraging HEIs regarding the increased automatic recognition of learning and degrees Further develop processes for the recognition of prior learning

		Recognition of prior learning	

Preliminary criteria for a joint European Degree label

Throughout the project, stakeholders were consulted about what the possible criteria could be for the joint European Degree label. Even though the final criteria for the granting of a possible joint European Degree label are to be co-created by the Member States along with the European Commission, the survey carried out for the project showed that transnational cooperation, student and staff mobility, innovative teaching and learning, labour market relevance and sustainability are the key expectations HEIs have of the label (see figure below). The national agencies surveyed expressed similar opinions and placed a strong emphasis on applying existing tools, demonstrating a commitment to higher education quality.

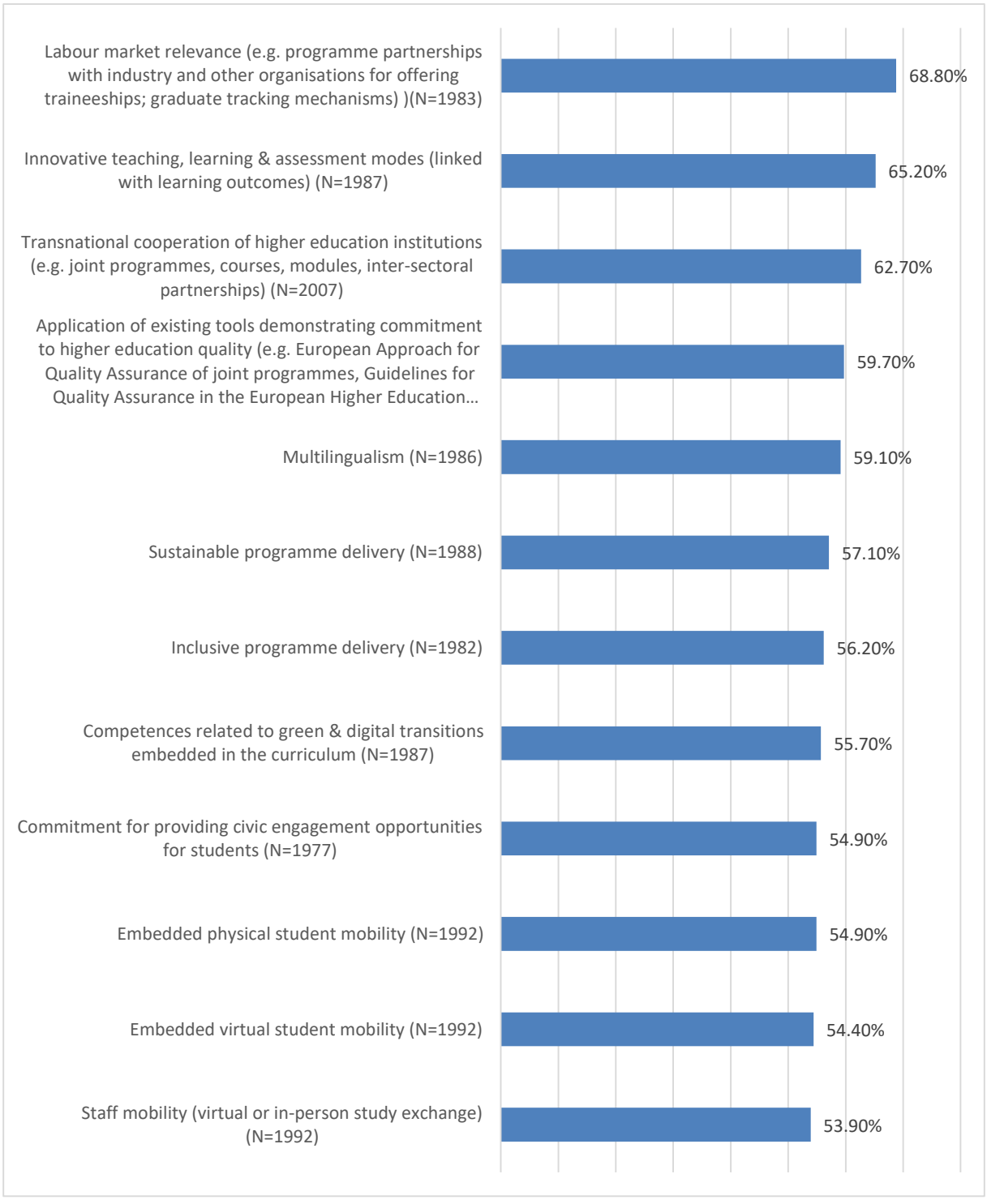
Figure 7. Elements that HEIs believe would be important for a joint European Degree label to certify



Source: feasibility and impact survey – HEIs.

Moreover, students' interests and opinions should also be considered to ensure that those joint degree study programmes that would qualify as joint European Degree study programmes are an attractive choice when selecting studies. The figure below presents an overview of students' opinions concerning the elements that would make a joint study programme attractive for them. The students cared most about access to the labour market. They would be interested in a joint European Degree (both as a label and as a qualification) if it provided good employment opportunities and was recognised by employers. Furthermore, students are highly interested in innovative modes of teaching, learning and assessment, as well as transnational cooperation between HEIs.

Figure 8. Elements that would make students interested in enrolling in joint European Degree programmes (share of students that agreed to a large or very large extent)



Source: feasibility and impact survey – students.

Because education is a national competence, the criteria for a joint European degree would need to be agreed by and between the Member States. The European Commission has carried out consultations with the Member States to propose a list of criteria for a joint European Degree label, which could be put to the test through a piloting phase and further developed. The provisional criteria agreed on are largely aligned with the

expectations of the stakeholders consulted for this study, including placing a focus on the transnational nature of education, innovative study content, and labour market relevance.

Table 15. Criteria for a Joint European Degree label

European criteria for the joint transnational programmes to issue a joint European Degree label		
Higher education institutions involved	The joint programme is jointly designed and delivered by at least 2 higher education institutions from at least 2 different EU Member States[18].	EQF 6, 7, 8
Transnational joint degree delivery	The joint programme leads to the award of a joint degree.	EQF 6, 7, 8
	Dissertations are co-evaluated by supervisors or a committee with members from at least 2 different institutions located in 2 different countries.	EQF 8
Transparency of the learning outcomes	The joint programme is described in ECTS.	EQF 6, 7
	A joint Diploma Supplement is issued to the student at the end of the joint study programme.	EQF 6, 7
Quality assurance arrangements	Internal and external QA is conducted in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The programme, the study field or the institutions are accredited/evaluated by an EQAR-registered agency. If external quality assurance is required at programme level in the countries involved, the transnational programme should be accredited/evaluated preferably using the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA).	EQF 6, 7, 8
Joint policies for the joint programme	The higher education institutions involved have joint policies for admission, selection, supervision, monitoring, assessment and recognition procedures for the joint study programme.	EQF 6, 7, 8
Transnational campus – access to services	The joint programme provides enrolled students, regardless of their location, with seamless and free access to the participating HEI´s services such as e.g. IT services, shared infrastructure and facilities, (online) library services, faculty development and support, academic guidance and psychological counselling, career advice/mentoring, alumni systems.	EQF 6, 7, 8
Flexible and embedded student mobility arrangements	The joint programme includes at least 1 period of student physical mobility at another partner institution of at least 30 ECTS.	EQF 6, 7
	The joint programme includes a total of at least 6 months[19] of physical mobility at another partner institution (including secondment). In addition to physical mobility, the joint programme includes opportunities for doctoral candidates to participate in one or more of these activities at another partner institution: teaching activities, international events, international conferences, joint research scientific projects between partner institutions, and joint research publications with researchers from partner institutions.	EQF 8
Multilingualism	During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different EU official languages[20], language classes excluded. Exposure to EU official languages can take place in active and/or passive use of language(s), at any level in teaching and/or learning activities, examinations, research activities, professional or civic engagement activities and during mobility periods, including by	EQF 6, 7, 8

[18] Beyond this minimum, any higher education institution within or beyond the EU can take part in the joint programme.
[19] The total 6 months mobility period can be the sum of several shorter mobility periods.
[20] This may include students' mother tongue(s).

	going on mobility to a country where a different EU official language is predominantly used in daily life[21].	
Innovative learning approaches	The joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinary and/or intersectoral components using student-centred and/or challenged-based approaches.	EQF 6, 7, 8
Graduate outcomes	The joint programme has a system to monitor graduate outcomes. This system can be at the level of the programme or institutional level(s). If possible, the content is aligned to the survey content of EUROGRADUATE.	EQF 6, 7, 8
Inclusiveness and sustainability	The joint programme commits to wide participation through socially and geographically inclusive admission through tailored measures for all categories of disadvantaged students.	EQF 6, 7, 8
	The joint programme commits to respect the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers and commits to the principles of the MSCA Green Charter.	EQF 8
Optional criteria[22]		
☐	In addition to physical mobility, the joint programme includes additional formats of transnational learning activities with partner higher education institutions (e.g. online or blended, in the format of regular or intensive courses, summer/winter schools).	EQF 6, 7
☐	The joint programme offers the possibility to take language classes to enhance the command of multiple European languages.	EQF 6, 7, 8
☐	The joint programme supports future labour market needs and/or includes cooperation with businesses and sectors in its curriculum.	EQF 6, 7, 8
☐	The joint programme provides opportunities for international professional internships/work-based learning recognised through the award of ECTS.	EQF 6, 7
☐	The joint programme includes a career development plan devised with the candidate and/or exposure to the non-academic sector (such as internships, seminars, or networking).	EQF 8
☐	The joint programme includes components and actions related to environmental sustainability and implements measures to minimise the environmental footprint of its activities.	EQF 6, 7, 8
☐	The joint programme includes components and actions related to the development of high-level digital skills of students, it offers high-quality digital education content, as well as assessment of student skills.	EQF 6, 7, 8
☐	The joint programme offers the possibility for students to participate in activities promoting democratic values and addressing societal needs of the local community(-ies), including volunteering, and to receive ECTS for it.	EQF 6, 7, 8
☐	The higher education institutions offering the joint study programme conduct joint promotion and awareness-raising activities to ensure the visibility of the joint programme and provide the necessary information about it for students and other relevant stakeholders such as future employers.	EQF 6, 7, 8

The expected benefits of a possible joint European degree

A possible joint European degree is expected to bring a number of benefits to transnational higher education in Europe. These potential benefits have been elaborated

[21] Examples: A joint programme is offered in 2 different EU official languages; a joint programme is offered in 1 EU official language and students have the opportunity to go on mobility in a country where a different EU official language is predominantly used in daily life.
[22] Optional criteria are not mandatory but are encouraged to be tested.

on the basis of consultations with stakeholders through individual interviews, focus groups and desk research. As a basis for discussions on the impact and feasibility of the European degree initiative, we have mapped the possible benefits of the joint European Degree as communicated by various stakeholders. In addition to potentially increasing the number of joint degrees delivered, as well as easing and encouraging the delivery of innovative and transformative transnational higher education provision, the joint European Degree presents potential benefits for transnational cooperation in higher education that will affect HEIs, Member States and the EU, with specific potential benefits for students. The HEIs, students and national authorities surveyed were largely positive in their assessment of the potential for a possible joint European Degree to bring about positive changes in the European higher education sphere. The table below presents the list of benefits a joint European degree is expected to bring.

Table 16. Summary of benefits of a possible joint European Degree

BENEFITS FOR HEIS AND MEMBER STATES
• Improved implementation of existing Bologna tools • Automatic recognition of joint degrees • Increased transparency for joint degrees • Easier delivery of joint degrees (as a single document awarded following a joint programme) • Easier implementation of joint innovative educational components • Reduction of the existing barriers related to quality assurance requirements (e.g. differences in national requirements, differences in the level of external quality assurance) • Reduction of the existing barriers related to the design and implementation of transnational joint programmes (e.g. admission and enrolment criteria, language of instruction, the proportion of online elements, credits requirements) • Reduction of the barriers related to the delivery of inter-, multi- and transdisciplinary study programmes
Benefits at the EU level
• Increased global reputation of European higher education • Dissemination of European values such as academic freedom, inclusiveness, solidarity, sustainability, entrepreneurship and innovation/creativity, democracy and the rule of law across Europe and beyond • Better cooperation among ministries and other educational authorities across the EU • Facilitating brain circulation across the EU • Encouraging international students to study in the EU
Benefits to students
• Better access to innovative study programmes • Increased opportunities to study in different European countries • Increased opportunities for transnational mobility (physical, virtual, blended) • Increased sense of European citizenship, identity and belonging • Automatic recognition of degrees and study periods • Receiving an education recognised as excellent by employers • Obtaining skills and competences relevant to the labour market

Feasibility and impact assessment

Having presented the overview of the options for a possible joint European Degree, the preliminary criteria and expected benefits, in this chapter, we assess the feasibility and impact of implementing each of the two options for a joint European degree. First, we assess the feasibility of a joint European Degree label based on the interest and feedback expressed by stakeholders, as well as experiences from existing higher education quality labels. Second, based on the feedback collected and desk research, we explore how a joint European Degree label could evolve towards a gradual and smooth implementation of joint degrees based on common European criteria, to be delivered at national, regional or institutional level, in line with the National Qualifications Frameworks. Third, based on data collected for this study, we review the feasibility of meeting the proposed joint European Degree label criteria. Lastly, we present a cost and utility analysis. In addition, we present the benefits of a possible joint European degree, summarising the strengths, weaknesses opportunities.

Joint European Degree label: description and feasibility considerations

The objective of the joint European Degree label option is to give recognition to the transnational dimension of joint study programmes, promote the use of existing tools and possibly, be the first step towards a possible and voluntary joint degree based on common European criteria. The label would provide a set of criteria agreed at European level, which identify a high level of transnational dimension of joint programmes. The European Commission plans to pilot the label in 2023 via a pilot call within the framework of Erasmus+. Selected applicants (HEIs, relevant authorities) will receive Erasmus+ funding to test the relevance of co-created criteria for a joint European Degree label.

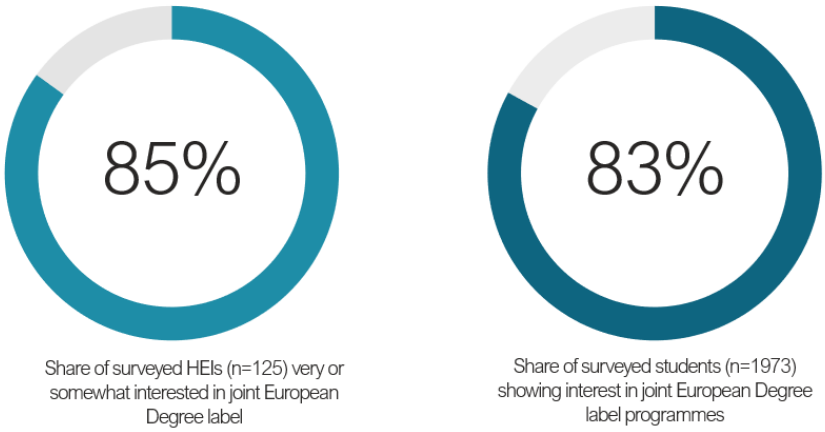
The piloting phase will reveal the remaining key obstacles to the implementation of the joint European Degree label and assess the relevance of the criteria proposed, as well as suggest optimisations. Another key aspect of the selected projects will be to identify possible solutions for delivering the joint European Degree programmes more easily across Europe.

Below, we present a detailed description of how the joint European Degree label could feasibly be implemented beyond the Erasmus+ pilot. This is broken down into key aspects of the label design: application and assessment, awarding the label and awarding certificates. We will describe different ways in which the joint European Degree label could be organised, and present evidence for the feasible implementation of the various elements.

Application and assessment

The surveyed HEIs and students demonstrate high levels of interest in the joint European Degree label.

Figure 9. Shares of HEIs and students interested in joint European degree label



Source: feasibility and impact survey – students and HEIs.

Going beyond the piloting phase, two models for a joint European Degree label can be distinguished in terms of organising the application and assessment procedures. The experience of previous European higher education quality labels shows that the application and award procedure can feasibly be organised in one of two ways.

The first of these is **Assessment via a coordinating body.** For example, the European Institute of Innovation & Technology organises and coordinates the assessment process for granting the EIT label.

Box 4. Overview of the application and assessment models for existing higher education quality labels: EIT label

The EIT Label is awarded to an educational programme at MA and PhD levels.

The EIT operates through its Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs). There are currently eight EIT KICs that operate in the following areas: climate change, digital transformation, energy, food, health, raw materials, urban mobility and manufacturing.

Institutions provide their self-assessments, organised in collaboration with the KIC. The EIT selects a panel of independent external experts to review the applications. The evaluation of the application is conducted remotely, except for one face-to-face discussion involving representatives of the applicants, the KIC and the review team. The purpose of this meeting is purely consultative. After that, the review team prepares its conclusions and recommendations and submits them to EIT, which makes a final decision on the award of the label. The EIT reports on the outcomes of the process to the KICs, which communicate them to the institution.

Source: EIT Label Handbook (degree programmes) -– final (europa.eu)

The second approach is **assessment via quality assurance agencies**, for example, the European Consortium for Accreditation's CeQuInt label and field-specific labels such as EUR-ACE, Eurobachelor/Euromaster/Eurodoctorate, Euro-Inf, EQAS Food Award in higher education.

Box 5. Overview of the application and assessment models for existing higher education quality labels: Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation (CeQuInt)

The 'Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation' (CeQuInt) is a label from the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) that aims to assess, enhance and reward the internationalisation of a programme or institution. The assessment is conducted based on a self-evaluation report providing evidence of compliance with the standards and criteria of the framework, as well as interviews carried out during a site visit. For each standard, the assessment panel presents an overall conclusion.

Source: CeQuInt. Excellence in Internationalisation.

Box 6. Overview of the application and assessment models for existing higher education quality labels: the EUR-ACE label

EUR-ACE is a framework and accreditation system that provides a set of standards to identify high-quality engineering degree programmes at Bachelor's and Master's levels. The EUR-ACE label is awarded after authorisation from the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAEE), which grants authorisation to agencies that accredit degree programmes in engineering in accordance with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) standards and ENAEE standards. Applicant agencies must be members of the ENAEE and must conform to the assigned standards. The Label Committee within the ENAEE conducts a review and provides a recommendation on granting membership status. HEIs seeking the EUR-ACE label have to contact authorised agencies.

Source: EUR-ACE® Label Authorisation Process Online Procedure for Agencies Accrediting Online.

Both models outlined above are largely based on self-assessment reports completed by the applicants. They are usually accompanied by site visits and/or remote consultations. The implementation of either model within the framework of the joint European Degree label will entail a coordinating body responsible for overseeing the implementation of the label as well as, under the second approach, the appointment of a committee of experts to carry out the assessment. An EU body (EC, EACEA) and quality assurance agencies were the most widely preferred options in the surveys carried out for this study.

Table 17. Preferred body for awarding the label

	HEIs	**National agencies**
Preferred body to award the label	An EU body (European Commission, EACEA) (66 respondents)	The quality assurance agency responsible for accreditation/evaluation of the programme/institution (23 respondents)
	Erasmus+ national agencies (62 respondents)	An EU body (European Commission, EACEA) (8 respondents)
	The quality assurance agency responsible for the accreditation/evaluation of the programme/institution (50 respondents)	A national authority (5 respondents)

Source: feasibility and impact survey – HEIs.

These two sub-options are discussed in further detail below.

Sub-option 1a: assessment via a specifically appointed external committee

The label coordinating body (European Commission or other) could appoint specific committees of external experts to assess applications for the label (as in the case of the EIT Label or the case of evaluations for various Erasmus+ calls). Applicants for the joint

European Degree label would complete a self-assessment report which would be assessed by an external committee appointed by the coordinating body. The committee could conduct an assessment remotely based on the documentation provided, and/or organise in-person meetings and visits to facilities. From the applicants' side, the monetary and labour costs are determined using an external committee and the amount of preparation necessary for the application.

An external committee is the most viable sub-option in the case of a limited number of applications (a few dozens) and could prove feasible under two conditions. First, the planned joint European Degree label pilot could evolve from supporting the development of joint European Degree label programmes to awarding labels based on HEIs' applications. Second, such an implementation sub-option would be most feasible if the joint European Degree label were to be initially restricted to the European Universities, due to possible similarities in procedural applications to the EIT Label. As done when granting the EIT label, three experts are hired for two months each year to proceed with approximately 20 applications. If more applications are received, the creation of a second panel of experts could be considered.

Assessment via a specifically appointed external committee would also entail developing a centralised application procedure. The documents required to apply for a joint European Degree label could be submitted via email if the number of applications is limited (as in the EIT Label) or via an online platform (as in Erasmus+ calls).

Sub-option 1b: assessment via a quality assurance agency

Organising the assessment of applicants for a joint European Degree label through a quality assurance agency would mean HEIs submitting applications directly to the selected agency to undergo the assessment procedure. Based on the research carried out on existing quality labels, such an approach is one of the most common ways to demonstrate proof of eligibility for a quality label. Adopting such an approach in the context of a joint European Degree label would mean that the quality assurance agency would be responsible for controlling the fulfilment of the agreed criteria.

The experiences of existing labels shows that if this approach is to be implemented, the agencies should be authorised to award the joint European Degree label. While in the case of field-specific labels and CeQuInt, authorisation is granted by associations[23] that are owners of the labels, in the case of the joint European Degree label, EQAR-registered agencies[24] could be automatically considered eligible for authorisation. The coordinating body for the joint European Degree label would authorise those EQAR-registered agencies willing to participate in the delivery of the joint European Degree label. Being EQAR-registered would ensure the necessary common ground among the agencies providing a European quality label, including adherence to the ESG.

The joint European Degree label assessment could be linked to mandatory Quality assurance processes (accreditation/evaluation) guaranteeing that the implementation of the label is smooth and does not add any procedural layer for HEIs, possibly linked to the use of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA). The experiences of field-specific labels and CeQuInt show that both options are feasible and

[23] In such cases, membership of an organisation responsible for providing a label might be a requirement for an institutional or programme-level application to be considered. This could require additional costs from an institution or a programme in cases where the membership fee is not one-time, but a regular one.

[24] The EQAS Food Award label also has a requirement for the agencies to be registered with EQAR in order to be eligible for authorisation.

can be implemented in practice in a way that is attractive to HEIs (see the box below on the number of labels being awarded). If the joint European Degree label application is linked to mandatory accreditation/evaluation, additional joint European Degree label criteria (to national accreditation criteria) would need to be checked during the assessment.

The evaluation committee would then communicate their decision to the quality assurance agency, which would grant the right to award the label.

Box 7. Popularity of selected quality labels in higher education

1. EIT Label. Currently, 71 Master's programmes (including joint degree programmes) and eight PhD programmes have been awarded the EIT Label.
2. EUR-ACE label. In total, 3,945 programmes have received the EUR-ACE label (3,773 from EHEA countries). These programmes come from 701 HEIs, including 648 from EHEA countries. Most recently, 512 programmes received the EUR-ACE label on 31 December 2021.
3. CeQuInt. In total, 56 CeQuInt certificates (to programmes and institutions) have thus far been awarded.

The differences in the popularity of the analysed labels could be explained by the following factors:

- EUR-ACE label has been in operation longer compared with the two other labels, thus having more time to establish its name and increase popularity.
- The application for EIT Label is restricted to the KICs, whereas any HEI can apply for EUR-ACE (if delivering engineering studies) or CeQuInt.
- CeQuInt has a relatively niche focus, that may not be relevant across all types of programmes or for all institutions.

Preparing and submitting applications

Irrespective of how the procedure for application and assessment will be organised, guidance for applicants will need to be developed in the context of the joint European Degree label. Based on the experience of existing labels, the important aspects to consider in developing such guidance are:

- application procedure (what are the steps, timeline)
- application package (what documents should be submitted, in what format, where should they be submitted)
- template for self-assessment (if required at the application stage)
- interpretation and assessment of joint European Degree criteria
- scoring
- requirements for experts (internal from QA agency or external ones)
- criteria and procedure for continuing or withdrawing the label
- guidance for monitoring and evaluation of the label through the period of its validity (including instructions for reporting).

Awarding the label

At the end of the assessment period, the agency or coordinating body that grants the joint European Degree label informs the applicant of its decision. This can be communicated through an assessment report (which could be integrated into accreditation/evaluation reports) or by adding them to the list of members on the official website (of the agency and at European level). Decisions to award the joint European Degree label could also be published on EQAR (if the sub-option for qualifications agencies is implemented). EQAR-listed agencies are required to publish all reports that fall under the ESG. Thus, label reports would be published if such agencies are involved, eventually integrated as an addition to existing reports. Only after this can the results be announced.

The label could be granted on the condition that additional conditions must be fulfilled before the label is officially awarded. The right to award the label could be granted to an institution or directly to a programme without a termination date. Alternatively, a procedure for extension would need to be developed. This could be done by the applicant resubmitting the documents package once during an agreed period, automatically through the regular provision of data for the grantor's monitoring process (as is done for the EIT label) or through regular evaluation or reaccreditation of the programme. Based on the survey of HEIs, institutions that took part in the survey are willing to invest time in the monitoring of the label (e.g. by submitting reports on its implementation in line with the agreed criteria).

Table 18. Willingness to invest time in the label's monitoring

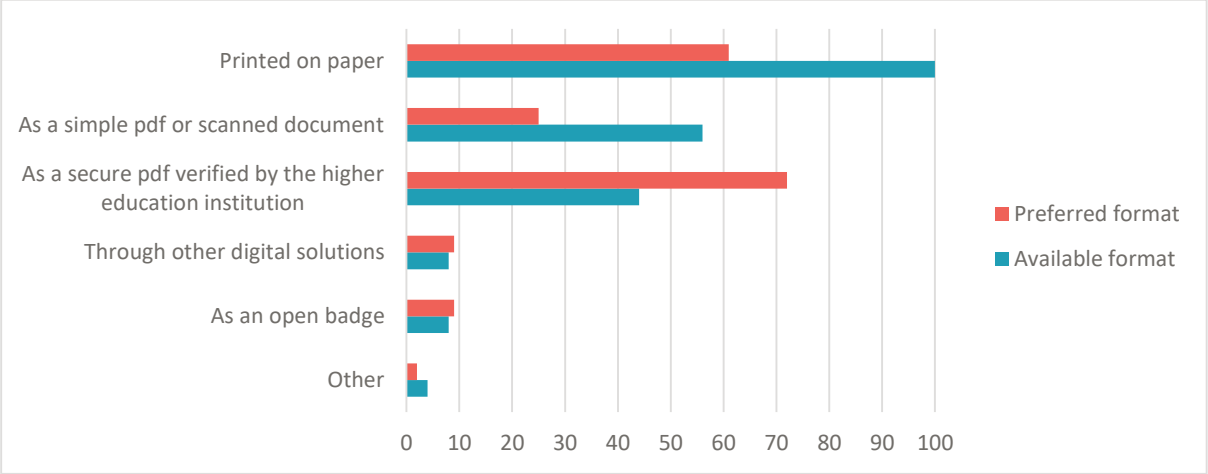
	Up to 1 working day	**2-3 working days**	**3-5 working days**	**5-10 working days**	**More than 10 working days**	**More than a month**	**More than half a year**	**Do not know/ cannot answer**
Time needed to monitor the label's implement ation (e.g. submitting reports) (N=107)	8%	10%	11%	9%	11%	18%	20%	13%

Source: feasibility and impact survey – HEIs. \
Note: it is possible that those selecting the option "More than half a year" interpreted the option as the maximum duration of their commitment to various monitoring activities.

Awarding certificates

Certificates ensure that a programme or institution has a quality label that can be implemented physically or digitally. The physical format includes the option of a printed certificate or a simple pdf file added to the Diploma Supplement. Among the options for digital formats are secure pdf certificates verified by the HEI, open badges, and digitally signed documents. According to the survey of HEIs, the paper-based format is the most widely used. At the same time, a secure pdf verified by the HEI is the preferred option for issuing certificates.

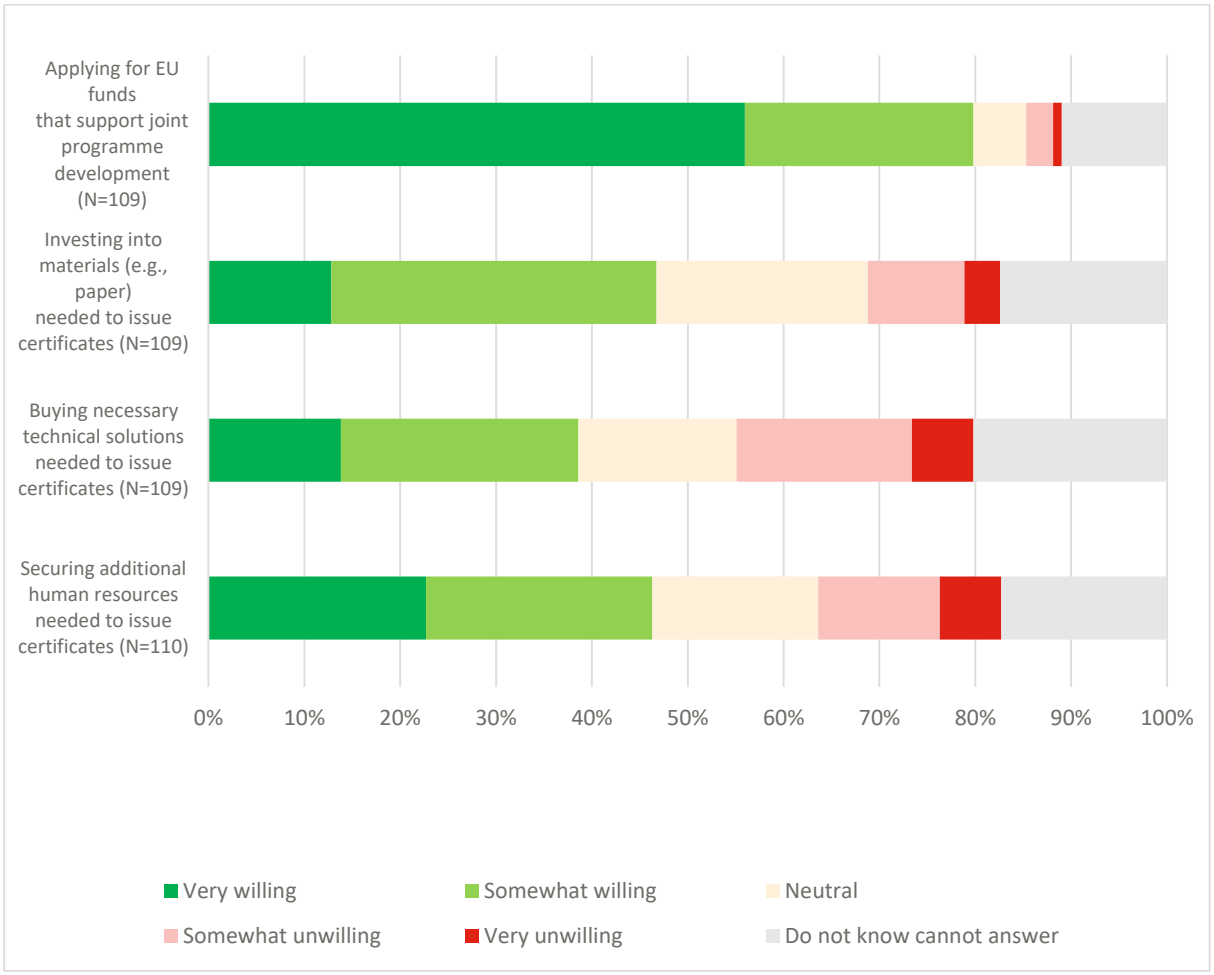
Figure 10. Formats for issuing joint European Degree Certificates (Number of responses)



Source: feasibility and impact survey – HEIs.

The HEIs surveyed agreed that issuing certificates to graduates of joint European Degree label programmes could create some burden administratively (60% of HEIs responding to the survey); that it could be technically challenging (56%); could require significant human resources (58%), and could represent some financial cost (45%). Yet, at the same time, they would be also willing to invest in the solutions necessary to issue certificates, making this element of a joint European Degree label feasible to implement. Based on the responses received, issuing joint European Degrees in a secure pdf format (e.g. digitally signed) presents the most balanced approach.

Figure 11. Willingness to invest in the delivery of joint European Degree certificates



Source: feasibility and impact survey – HEIs.

Summary

In the table below, we present a summary of the options regarding how the joint European Degree label could be implemented.

Table 19. Summary of the European Degree label implementation process

	Via an external committee appointed by the coordinating body	**Via quality assurance agencies**
Application and assessment	– The coordinating body (e.g. EACEA) appoints an external committee composed of experts that will be responsible for assessing applications for the Joint European Degree label – Applicants complete self-assessment reports and submit them to the coordinating body. [In case the Joint European Degree label is limited to consortia such as the European University alliances, these alliances would submit applications on behalf of their members] – An external committee evaluates the self-assessment reports, accompanied by site visits and/or remote consultations – The external committee submits its assessment reports, along with its decision, to the coordinating body	– The coordinating body authorises quality assurance agencies (registered with EQAR) to award Joint European Degree labels – The quality assurance agencies appoint an external committee to assess applications. If the application is part of compulsory accreditation/evaluation, the same committee assesses whether the label criteria are met – Applicants complete self-assessment reports and submit them to a selected authorised quality assurance agency – The external committee evaluates the self-assessment reports, accompanied by site visits and/or remote consultations if necessary – The external committee submits its assessment reports, along with its decision, to the quality assurance agency
Awarding the label	– The coordinating body signals its decision to the applicant, based on the reports submitted by the external committee – The label is granted for the duration of the programme accreditation – Results are announced and published	– The quality assurance agency signals its decision to the applicant based on the reports submitted by the external committee – The label is granted for the duration of the programme accreditation – Results are announced and published (including on the EQAR website)
Awarding certificates	– Certificates are issued in a secure pdf format by the HEIs to the graduates of the Joint European Degree label programmes	

A step-by-step approach towards a possible joint degree based on common European criteria: description and feasibility considerations

Moving step by step from a label to a possible joint degree based on common European criteria

The possible outcome of a step-by-step approach to a joint European Degree would be for the label to smoothly evolve into a possible widely available joint degree based on common European criteria as a qualification awarded at national, regional or institutional level. The design for the label has the potential to facilitate its evolution to such a model of joint degrees. The options discussed above could present a way for a joint European

Degree label to evolve naturally and on a voluntary basis towards a joint degree based on common European criteria that is available at all levels and is delivered in line with the National Qualifications Frameworks.

Step 1: piloting with Erasmus+
Beginning with a pilot of the joint European Degree label through Erasmus+ will allow the criteria and feasibility of common criteria for joint degree programmes to be tested in practice. The lessons learned from the pilot will help to inform the most relevant models and criteria and the possible next steps.

Step 2: use the conclusions of the pilot activities to propose a list of criteria for a joint European Degree label, to be agreed by the Member States
The results of the pilot will need to be assessed to come up with a list of relevant criteria for a joint European degree label. The final criteria would then be proposed to the Member States in order to establish a label available across Europe.

Once the pilot ends and once the criteria for a joint European degree label would be agreed by the Member States, joint European Degree label assessment could move to EQAR-registered agencies. Initially, the assessment of whether a programme meets the criteria for the joint European Degree label could be integrated on a voluntary basis into compulsory accreditation/evaluation (including as part of the European Approach). Specifically linking the joint European Degree label with the EA at this (as well as earlier) stages could be used as a tool to boost the implementation of the EA, update it, and increase the scope of its use. Due to its decentralisation and the large number of agencies involved, this option would allow many programmes to be reviewed. Moreover, the involvement of quality assurance agencies in the joint European Degree label would be beneficial in reducing administrative burden.

Step 3: assessing the relevance of the joint European Degree label to the common criteria for the Member States
Furthermore, the criteria for the joint European Degree label could be discussed among the Member States to allow the delivery of joint degrees in Europe without additional national requirements. Subject to the agreement of the Member States, the label could evolve into a widely available approach for joint degrees, provided that the necessary legislative conditions are ensured when necessary (see the section below).

Legislative context

Legislative changes at the level of Member States would constitute a key pathway to achieve this possible transition and arrive at a widely available joint degree based on common European criteria. Legislative changes would be needed to accommodate the possibly agreed criteria for a joint degree based on common European criteria (including quality assurance, profile, delivery and recognition).

The key element in implementing a possible joint European degree as a qualification would be its integration into national qualifications frameworks. This would facilitate the recognition of these qualifications by linking them with respective NQF/EQF levels.

The national agencies consulted in the survey carried out for this study agreed that it is essential for the possible joint European degree to be included in NQFs in the countries in which the degree is awarded (all 25 respondents agreed) and in the country where the degree is recognised (21 respondents agreed) to ensure that joint European Degree holders have access to further education and the labour market. The existing legal basis

for NQFs[25] varies between those countries committed to implementing the EQF recommendation. Thus, implementation of a possible joint European degree as a qualification would entail changes at the parliamentary level, governmental and ministerial level across these countries.

Table 20. Legal basis for NQFs

Legal basis for NQF	EU Member States	Other countries that committed to the implementation of the EQF recommendation
Parliament level	Austria, Belgium-FL, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France (two separate laws - 1, 2), Greece, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia	Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia
Government or interministerial level	Belgium-DE, Belgium-FR, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Romania, Sweden, Malta	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey (two regulations - 1, 2)
Ministerial level	Germany, France, Norway, Portugal	
Other		Iceland (series of acts and decrees)

Source: compiled by PPMI, based on Cedefop's National Qualifications frameworks (NQFs) online tool. Available at: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/nqfs-online-tool.

Moreover, because not all countries have linked their NQFs to the EQF and self-referenced it to the QF-EHEA, this would need to be implemented to facilitate the recognition of a possible joint European degree as a qualification (a joint degree based on common European criteria).

Table 21. Linking of NQFs to the EQF and QF-EHEA

	Self-referenced with QF-EHEA	Not self-referenced with QF-EHEA
Linked with the EQF	Austria, Belgium-FL, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey	Belgium-FR, Czech Republic, Greece, Slovakia
Not linked with the EQF		Albania, Belgium-DE, Bosnia and Herzegovina

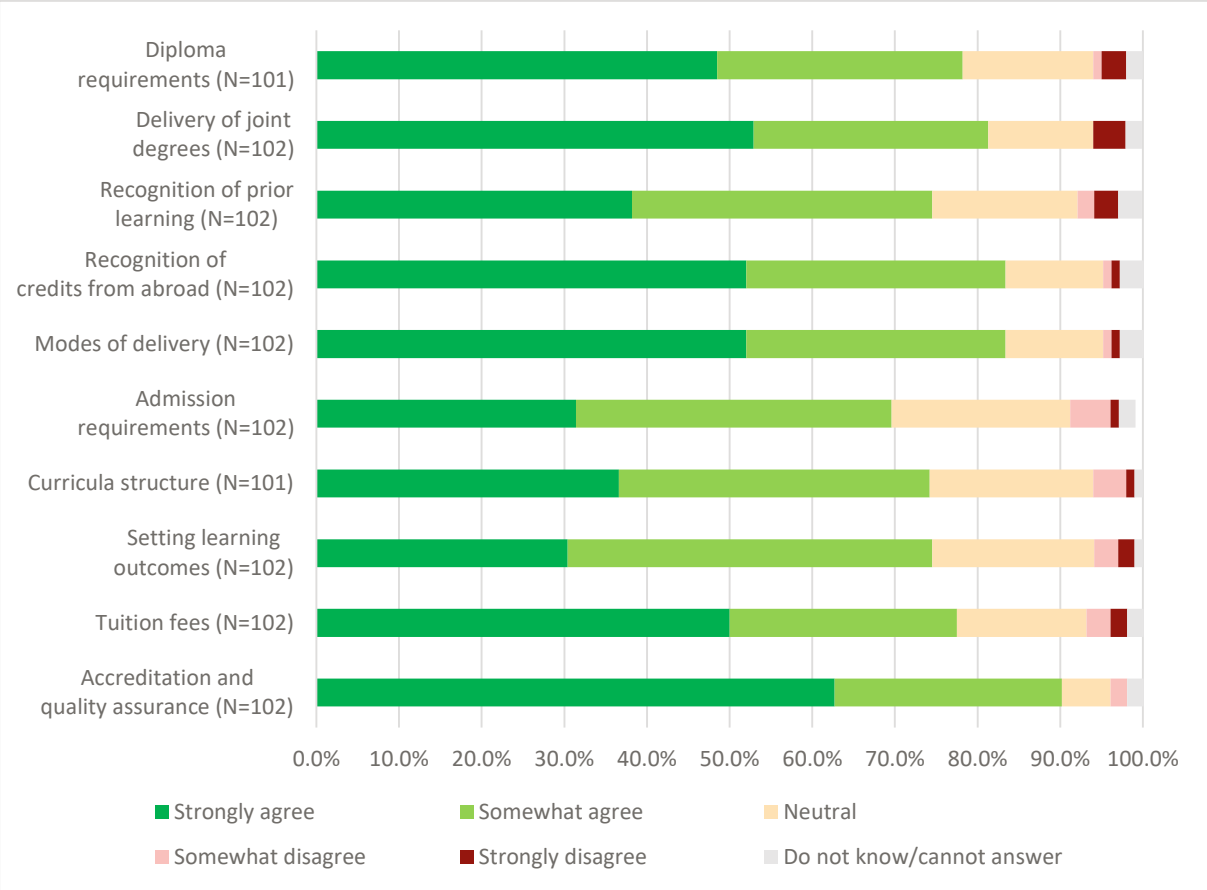
Source: compiled by PPMI, based on Cedefop's National Qualifications frameworks (NQFs) online tool. Available at: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/nqfs-online-tool.

Existing obstacles to the delivery of joint programmes (see Chapter 3.1 and the figure below) would hinder the effective implementation of a possible joint European degree qualification and the integration of the qualification into national qualification frameworks.

[25] The legal basis for the NQF defines the qualification levels, descriptions of different levels and titles of qualifications awarded.

For a possible joint European degree qualification to become a reality, legislation must be adapted to allow the consistent implementation of possible joint European degree programmes meeting the criteria across the Member States without any additional national criteria being added to it, to ensure consistency of the criteria across all Member States. A large majority of the HEIs surveyed (84%) agreed to a large or very large extent that legislation in the Member States to facilitate the design and delivery of joint programmes would encourage them to deliver more joint programmes. The necessary adaptation of national legislation, if left unresolved, would make the implementation of a possible joint European degree highly challenging in practice, as well as limiting its potential impact.

Figure 12. To make joint programme delivery (with partners from EHEA) easier, more flexibility is needed in:



Source: feasibility and impact survey – HEIs.

Depending on the final criteria for a possible joint European Degree, the Member States could have to introduce solutions allowing greater flexibility for these specific types of transnational joint programmes (e.g. amending existing acts, introducing new ones or exceptions for joint degree programmes). When assessing specific features of the legislation required for a possible joint European degree to be integrated into the NQFs, respondents from the national agencies highlighted the following as areas requiring some changes: flexibility in the lengths of degree programmes (ECTS), in the recognition of prior learning (PRL), and in the setting of tuition fees by HEIs. Interestingly, sometimes responses from different persons coming from the same country diverged. This could be explained by either existing differences in interpreting current legislation, or existing regional differences (especially in countries with decentralised education systems).

Table 22. Elements of legislation required for the integration of a possible Joint European Degree into NQFs (number of responses)

	Significant legislative changes would be needed	**Some legislative changes would be needed**	**It is already allowed to some extent**	**It is already fully allowed**
Allowing HEIs to set learning outcomes, competences and skills in a flexible way, in line with NQFs	Armenia Croatia	Ireland Italy Serbia	Netherlands France Spain Armenia Malta Kazakhstan Slovenia Lithuania	Spain Georgia Germany France
Allowing flexibility in curricular structures (modules, courses, thesis length etc.)		Spain Croatia Germany Serbia	Ireland Spain Georgia France Slovenia Armenia Germany Italy Malta Kazakhstan Lithuania	France Slovenia
Allowing higher education institutions to set admission requirements in a flexible way	Georgia	Spain Germany Serbia Lithuania	Ireland France Spain Armenia Slovenia Italy Malta Kazakhstan	Netherlands Croatia Germany France
Allowing higher education institutions to set tuition fees in a flexible way		Spain Georgia France Spain Armenia Slovenia Germany Serbia	Ireland Italy Kazakhstan	Armenia Croatia Malta Lithuania
Allowing flexible learning modes (micro-credentials, voluntary service, internships) to be included in the curriculum, with ECTS credits attached	Georgia Armenia	Spain Italy Serbia Lithuania	Ireland France Spain Germany Kazakhstan	Netherlands Germany Malta France Slovenia
Enabling higher education institutions to select modes of learning flexibly (contact hours, self-study, distance and/or blended learning)		Georgia Serbia	Ireland Spain France Germany Italy Kazakhstan Slovenia	Netherlands Spain Croatia Armenia Germany Malta Lithuania
Enabling HEIs to set assessment processes in a flexible way		Serbia	Ireland Spain Georgia France Slovenia Germany Italy Kazakhstan	Spain Armenia Croatia Germany Malta France Slovenia Lithuania

Accepting European Degree programmes of different lengths (in ECTS), in line with previous commitments agreed on within the Bologna process		Georgia Spain Slovenia Germany Italy Serbia Lithuania	Ireland Spain Netherlands Spain Armenia Malta Kazakhstan France	Croatia Germany
Introducing flexible criteria for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) without imposing limitations on the amount of ECTS credits HEIs can award based on RPL	Armenia Italy	Spain Georgia Slovenia Germany Serbia	Ireland Netherlands Armenia Malta Kazakhstan Slovenia	France Croatia Germany
Facilitating the alignment of assessment criteria/requirements (i.e. cognitive level and quantity of tasks that students have to fulfil)/grading practices		Georgia Serbia Lithuania	Ireland Spain France Armenia Italy Malta Kazakhstan France	Netherlands Armenia Croatia Germany

Source: feasibility and impact survey – national authorities.

Note: The table presents the countries of respondents that answered the question: "In your view, how feasible it would be to integrate a possible joint European Degree as a qualification commonly agreed on at the European level into national qualification frameworks by embedding the following elements into legislation".

Note: Not all respondents chose to identify their country of origin. Only the answers of those that did are presented.

Legislative changes are also needed in relation to the awarding of the degree and the diploma. Respondents from the national agencies indicated that flexibility regarding the requirements for the diploma (paper, size, logo, languages, signatures), including the use of an official common European template (physical and/or digital) if this was to be agreed on, would require at least some adjustments to national legislation.

Feasibility of meeting the provisional criteria for the joint European Degree label, and associated costs

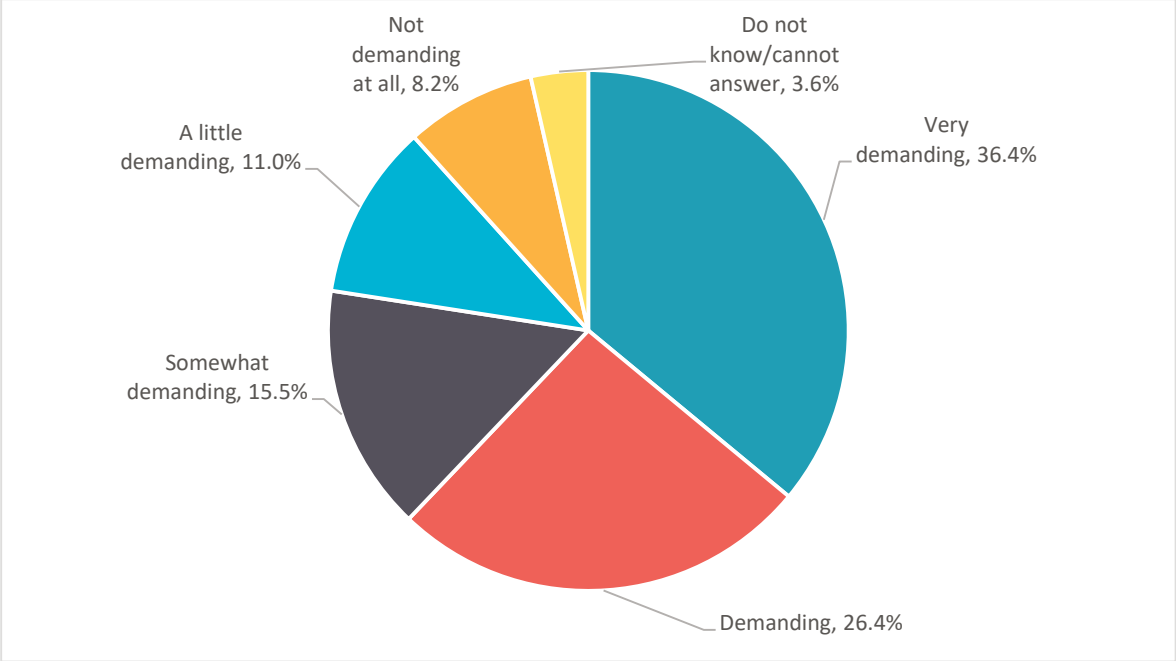
The feasibility of complying with the provisional criteria for the joint European Degree label correlates strongly with the obstacles that would need to be solved for a possible joint European Degree to possibly become a qualification. In the shorter term, especially concerning the joint European Degree label, meeting the criteria relating to the issuing of joint degrees and complying with QA requirements are likely to be the ones requiring the most flexible framework.

Awarding a joint degree

The awarding of joint degrees to graduates of joint study programmes can remain a challenge for some (see 2.1.2). According to most of the HEIs surveyed, having to award joint degrees to the joint European programme graduates would be either demanding or very demanding (see the figure below). The majority of the national authorities surveyed also confirmed that the awarding of joint degrees is not fully allowed across all countries. Currently, it is possible to receive *ex-ante* joint programme accreditation for a planned joint degree, without having the certainty that it will ultimately be possible to award joint degrees. An external report on the CHARM-EU European University Alliance application for a joint programme accreditation via the EA notes that, while a joint degree can be planned, backup measures are needed in case the joint degree proves unfeasible due to national regulations (Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya,

2020). Thus, currently, there is the likelihood that while HEIs can aim to issue joint degrees, they also need to set up contingency measures in case that would not be possible. On the other hand, Member States have agreed to ease the delivery of joint programmes and joint degrees in the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation. Thus, this criterion is expected to become less challenging as Member States implement the Council Recommendation.

Figure 13. To comply with the label criteria, graduating students would need to receive a joint degree (a single document awarded jointly by HEIs from different countries)



Source: feasibility and impact survey – HEIs (N=110).

Quality assurance

Requiring a review by an EQAR-based agency from another country or applying the EA may not be feasible across all of Europe. As illustrated in the table below, EA is currently not available in all countries, and not all countries allow their HEIs to choose an EQAR-registered agency freely. Issues are more likely to arise in countries where EA is not available, where it is not possible to choose an EQAR-registered agency, and where there is no EQAR-registered national agency (see countries marked in red in the table below).

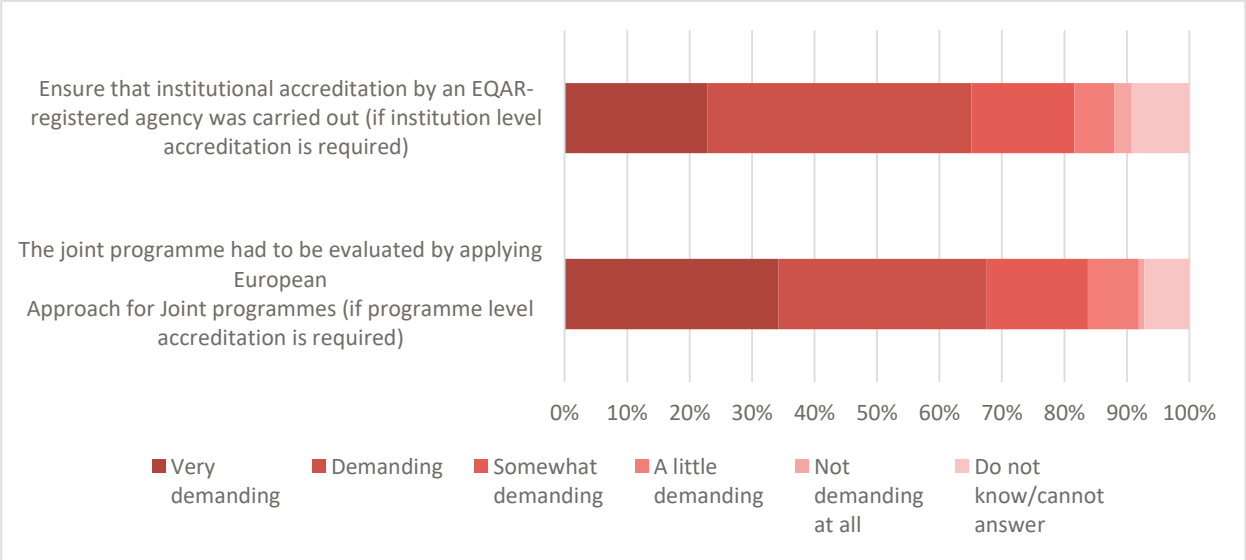
Table 23. Availability of the EA and the option to choose an EQAR-registered agency

	EA is available	**EA is partly available**	**EA is not available**
Can choose an EQAR-registered agency from another country	Austria[26], Belgium-FL, Belgium-FR, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Switzerland	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Germany	Latvia, Slovakia
Can choose an EQAR-registered agency from another country under certain conditions	Denmark, Malta, Netherlands	Estonia*, France*, Luxembourg, Portugal*	Albania, Czechia, Greece, Montenegro, Turkey
Cannot choose an EQAR-registered agency from another country	Serbia	Ireland*, Norway*, Slovenia*	Croatia*, Iceland, North Macedonia, Sweden*
Information on the ability to choose an EQAR-registered agency from another country is not available			Italy

Source: compiled by PPMI, based on EQAR (2022) Country information. Available at: https://www.eqar.eu/kb/country-information/.
* National agency is registered with EQAR.

The lack of full availability of the EA and the flexibility to choose an EQAR-registered agency also aligns with the opinion of HEIs, which claim that such requirements in relation to quality assurance would be demanding or very demanding to achieve. The careful wording used in the criteria does not make the use of the EA compulsory, but only encourages its use in the context of an accreditation/evaluation carried out by an EQAR-registered agency.

Figure 14. How demanding would the application for a joint European Degree as a label be for your institution if:



[26] Some exceptions exist regarding private HEIs and colleges of teacher education.

Source: feasibility and impact survey – HEIs (N=110).

An overview of the feasibility of achieving the criteria for a joint European Degree label (as presented in section 2.4.2) is provided in the table below.

Table 24. The feasibility of achieving the criteria for a joint European Degree

European criteria for the joint transnational programmes to issue a joint European Degree label			**Feasibility consideration**
Higher education institutions involved	The joint programme and its curriculum are jointly designed and delivered by at least 2 higher education institutions from at least 2 different EU Member States	EQF 6, 7, 8	Joint programmes involving at least two HEIs from two EU Member States are currently designed and delivered (e.g. examples included in DEQAR). Qualitative feedback collected through a workshop also suggests that the requirement to have two partners from two Member States is considered feasible
Transnational joint degree delivery	The joint programme leads to the award of a joint degree	EQF 6, 7, 8	See above
	Dissertations are co-evaluated by supervisors or a committee with members from at least 2 different institutions located in 2 different countries	EQF 8	This has been the practice in the MSCA Joint Doctorates
Transparency of the learning outcomes	The joint programme is described in ECTS	EQF 6, 7	Existing national requirements relating to curriculum flexibility and programme lengths represent a key obstacle to the feasibility of describing the programmes in ECTS credits. While not impossible, it can sometimes be challenging to align the programme lengths to meet national requirements (based on feedback from the European University alliances)
	A joint Diploma Supplement is issued to the student at the end of the joint study programme	EQF 6, 7	Evidence from the survey of Erasmus Mundus Joint Master coordinators shows that the majority (61%) issue a joint Diploma Supplement (European Commission & EACEA, 2020), suggesting that it is usually feasible to implement a joint Diploma Supplement
Quality assurance arrangements	Internal and external QA is conducted in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The programme, the study field or the institutions are accredited/evaluated by an EQAR-registered agency. If external quality assurance is required at programme level in the countries involved, the transnational programme should be accredited/evaluated, preferably using the	EQF 6, 7, 8	See above.

	European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA)		
Joint policies for the joint programme	The higher education institutions involved have joint policies for admission, selection, supervision, monitoring, assessment and recognition procedures for the joint study programme	EQF 6, 7, 8	Joint policies for the joint programme are part of the criteria applied within the EA. Thus, those opting to use the EA are already required to develop these. Joint policies are also required for the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters.
Transnational campus – access to services	The joint programme provides enrolled students, regardless of their location, with seamless and free access to the participating HEIs' services such as e.g., IT services, shared infrastructure, and facilities, (online) library services, faculty development and support, academic guidance and psychological counselling, career advice/mentoring, alumni systems	EQF 6, 7, 8	The European Universities reported digital challenges that could hinder the effective implementation of a transnational campus
Flexible and embedded student mobility arrangements	The joint programme includes at least 1 period of student physical mobility at another partner institution of at least 30 ECTS.	EQF 6, 7	Physical mobility periods are common in the European higher education sphere (being part of Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters, MSCA Joint Doctorates, or provided through Erasmus+ mobility opportunities)
	The joint programme includes a total of at least 6 months of physical mobility at another partner institution (including secondment). In addition to physical mobility, the joint programme includes opportunities for doctoral candidates to participate in one or more of these activities at another partner institution: teaching activities, international events, international conferences, joint research scientific projects between partner institutions, and joint research publications with researchers from partner institutions.	EQF 8	
Multilingualism	During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different EU official languages, language classes excluded. Exposure to EU official languages can take place in active and/or passive use of language(s), at any level in teaching and/or learning activities, examinations, research activities, professional or civic engagement activities and during mobility periods, including by going on mobility to a country where a different EU official language is predominantly used in daily life	EQF 6, 7, 8	Excluding language, classes will make meeting this criterion more challenging and will require a greater effort from the applicants in terms of the programme design and/or provision of opportunities outside the formal curriculum
Innovative learning approaches	The joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinary and/or intersectoral components using student-centered and/or challenged-based approaches	EQF 6, 7, 8	The possibility of including interdisciplinary or intersectoral modules (as opposed to a fully interdisciplinary programme) helps to increase the feasibility of this criterion

Graduate outcomes	The joint programme has a system to monitor graduate outcomes	EQF 6, 7, 8	Establishing a graduate tracking system will require resources to set it up and run it, yet there should not be significant obstacles to this (given that appropriate GDPR permissions are obtained)
Inclusiveness and sustainability	The joint programme commits to wide participation through socially and geographically inclusive admission via tailored measures for all categories of disadvantaged students	EQF 6, 7, 8	No significant obstacles to meeting these requirements are foreseen. Investments in time will have to be made to ensure that the criteria are met
	The joint programme commits to respect the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers and commits to the principles of the MSCA Green Charter	EQF 8	

While some of the criteria will sometimes be challenging to meet, HEIs are willing to invest a significant amount of time in complying with the joint European Degree criteria (see the table below).

Table 25. Time HEIs are willing to invest in complying with the joint European Degree criteria

		Up to 1 working day	**2-3 working days**	**3-5 working days**	**5-10 working days**	**More than 10 working days**	**More than a month**	**More than half a year**	**Do not know/ cannot answer**
Time needed to ensure that existing programme meets the criteria:	Label (N=107)	12%	17%	14%	11%	16%	13%	3%	14%
	Qualification (N=100)	10%	7%	10%	14%	13%	22%	10%	14%
Time needed to develop a new programme:	Label (N=107)	0.9%	0%	4%	6%	8%	19%	52%	11%
	Qualification (N=100)	1%	0%	2%	7%	10%	17%	51%	12%

Cost and utility analysis

Costs of a joint European Degree as a label

Development costs

Even though different implementation options may exist for the procedure used to award the label, a set of one-off costs are required for its launch and development. The essential step in defining the label's content is the definition of eligibility criteria and guidance regarding assessment criteria from the side of the European Commission. Irrespective of the setup of the application and award procedures, guidance regarding assessment criteria needs to be universal and accessible to all of the parties involved.

Depending on how the application procedure is designed (via email or in a pre-set online environment), there may be an additional need to create a website or online tool for submitting and storing applications. This step might become necessary at more advanced stages of implementation with a higher number of participants. According to the survey of HEI representatives, the more the procedure for applications is decentralised and digitalised (i.e. an institution or a programme conducts a self-assessment and submits supporting documentation online), the easier and less demanding it will be for the applicants.

Another set of costs involved at the initial stage of quality label implementation relates to design. The label identity and its visual representation, including the brand name, logo, and tagline that will be used consistently on the websites of the stakeholders involved, should be produced before the label's official launch. In addition to this, the certificate template needs to be designed, since this has to be universal for all of the programmes and institutions taking part in the assessment. The estimated cost of design services for this is 100,000 EUR. This estimate is made based on a service contract used to develop a visual identity for the Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI), which included the development of a logo, publications, stationery, corporate identity manual and a design for the website interface (Innovative Health Initiative, 2021). Ensuring that costs are shared between the different levels will ensure that they remain minimal for all parties involved.

Costs of application and assessment procedure

On the basis of existing experiences, cost categories can be distinguished for the various application and assessment procedures.

Table 26. Cost categories for various application and assessment procedures

Sub-option for application and award procedure	EU-level Coordinating body costs (EC or other)	Applying HEIs costs	Quality assurance agencies' costs
Option 1a: assessment via external committee recruited by the coordinating body	**Recurring costs:** 1-3 FTEs to coordinate label implementation Paying the salaries of external experts selected through a competitive funding procedure	Application fee (e.g. the CeQuInt quality label charges EUR 16,000 per programme, or EUR 27,000 per institution) if set (if not application fee is set, all costs related would be born by the coordinating body) Time needed to prepare the application (based on the survey, half of responding HEIs are willing to invest more than 10 days)	-

Option 1b: assessment via quality assurance agency registered in EQAR	**Recurring costs:** 1-3 FTEs to coordinate label implementation	Application fee (e.g. the CeQuInt quality label charges EUR 16,000 per programme, or EUR 27,000 per institution) Time needed to prepare and submit the application (based on the survey, half of responding HEIs are willing to invest more than 10 days) Possibilities to reduce these costs by integrating the application and evaluation steps into existing external QA procedures.	EQAR membership fee (current fees range from EUR 3,318 to EUR 13,272, depending on the GDP of the country) Human resources: 1-2 FTEs for coordination Paying the salaries of at least three external experts

Cost of issuing certificates

Table 27. Cost categories for issuing certificates

Sub-option for format	Costs for HEIs awarded with the label
Paper	Investment in paper Printing capacities (use of watermarks or other protection if required by national legislation) Human resources to ensure the printing and distribution of a sufficient number of certificates
Pdf certificates verified by the higher education institution	Human resources to prepare the certificates Cloud storage to keep all the issued certificates
Digitally signed pdf	Human resources to prepare the certificates Cloud storage to keep all the issued certificates
Open badge	Ensuring that the currently used LMS system allows for the implementation of open badges (if not, additional investments in the development of this capacity)

Promotion of quality label programmes

To overcome the lack of sufficient awareness among potential applicants regarding the joint European Degree label and its added value, active campaigning will be needed. In addition to launching a website providing all information about the label (including the procedure and decisions regarding its award), a series of events, including presentations and conferences, will need to be organised.

Costs of moving toward a joint degree based on common European criteria

The transition from a label to joint degrees based on common European criteria involves mostly non-monetary costs such as the making of changes to legislation, where necessary, to accredit, grant and recognise such degrees. The cost of these in terms of time needed is likely to be substantial, due to the lengthy legislative processes needed to adopt new laws or regulations (especially in cases where parliamentary involvement is required). Once a joint degree based on common European criteria is introduced, the cost of setting up and running such joint degree programmes would be smaller than the current costs of setting up and running such joint programmes. Compared with the

current status quo, the overall cost of running the programme is likely to be reduced if the existing obstacles are solved by implementing necessary changes to the legislation. On the part of the accreditation agencies, additional effort may be needed to check commonly agreed European criteria that may currently not be part of the accreditation procedure (including national criteria, ESG criteria, or the criteria for the EA). However, the fact that the commonly agreed European criteria for joint degrees would be the same in different countries would avoid the need for multiple accreditations for the same joint programme.

The ultimate design of the label will affect the costs of the potential transition from label to joint degree based on common European criteria. In particular, the following design elements could reduce the costs for the transition period:

- Involving national quality assurance agencies in the assessments leading to the awarding of the label would allow them to assess the relevant criteria, reducing the need to provide additional training when moving from a label to a joint degree based on common European criteria.
- Requiring the use of the tools agreed within the Bologna process and requiring the award of joint degrees would be beneficial in framing the changes to legislation needed for the effective delivery of possible joint European Degrees.
- Encouraging the application of the European Approach or accreditation by an agency registered with EQAR (which would mean adherence to the ESG) entails additional specific criteria that the programme will have to meet. These criteria are summarised in Annex 3. Importantly, adherence to the ESG should ensure that programmes can be linked to the EQF (by being linked to NQFs and the QF-EHEA) and that the principle of student-centred learning is followed. Meanwhile, applying the European Approach would ensure compliance with joint education delivery and the use of the ECTS.

Benefits of a joint European degree as a label and as a qualification

The data available from the surveys of representatives of HEI and national agencies shows that the absolute majority of respondents believe that a European Degree, both as a label and a joint degree based on common European criteria (referred to as a joint European Degree qualification in the survey) could help to increase the number of joint degrees delivered, enable the joint delivery of innovative and transformative education, facilitate transnational HE cooperation, and bring a number of benefits for students and EU.

The table below illustrates that both the label and the qualification (understood as a joint degree based on common European criteria) are considered beneficial to transnational higher education cooperation. For example, according to the national agencies, the qualification could have a bigger impact than the label in terms of reducing existing barriers to quality assurance requirements and automatic recognition of joint degrees; meanwhile, respondents from HEIs believe that qualification would work better only in terms of the improving the implementation of the existing Bologna tools and that all other goals are more likely to be achieved at the label stage.

Table 28. Share of respondents who agree that the joint European Degree would bring the following benefits in facilitating transnational higher education cooperation

Possible benefits of a joint European Degree	Label		Qualification	
	HEIs (N=102)	National authorities (N=25)	HEIs (N=95)	National authorities (N=25)
Reduction of barriers relating to the delivery of inter-, multi- and transdisciplinary study programmes	81 (79%)	19 (76%)	79 (83%)	19 (76%)
Reduction of existing barriers relating to the design and implementation of transnational joint programmes	83 (81%)	20 (80%)	80 (84%)	20 (80%)
Reduction of existing barriers relating to quality assurance requirements	87 (85%)	19 (76%)	82 (86%)	21 (84%)
Easier implementation of joint innovative educational components	85 (83%)	21 (84%)	85 (89%)	20 (80%)
Easier delivery of joint degrees as a single document	88 (86%)	22 (88%)	84 (88%)	21 (84%)
Increased transparency of joint/double degrees	92 (90%)	23 (92%)	86 (90%)	22 (88%)
Automatic recognition of joint/double degrees	91 (89%)	20 (80%)	88 (93%)	21 (84%)
Improvement of implementation of the existing Bologna tools	84 (82%)	23 (92%)	90 (95%)	23 (92%)

Source: feasibility and impact survey – HEIs, National agencies.

Respondents from both HEIs and national agencies believe that the joint European Degree label will largely increase the global reputation of European higher education and support the dissemination of European values across Europe and beyond. A greater proportion of respondents from HEIs see the possibility of EU-level benefits already being achieved at the stage of introduction of the label, while according to national authorities, the European Degree as a qualification (understood as a joint degree based on common European criteria) is more likely to encourage international students to study in the EU and may be more productive for cooperation between ministries and other educational authorities across the EU.

Table 29. Share of respondents who agree that the joint European Degree would bring the following benefits at the EU level:

Possible benefits of a joint European Degree	Label		Qualification	
	HEIs (N=101)	National authorities (N=25)	HEIs (N=96)	National authorities (N=25)
Increased global reputation of European higher education	88 (87%)	22 (88%)	86 (90%)	21 (84%)
Disseminating European values such as academic freedom, inclusiveness, solidarity, sustainability, entrepreneurship and innovation/creativity, democracy and the rule of law across Europe and beyond	88 (87%)	23 (92%)	84 (88%)	22 (88%)
Better cooperation between ministries and other educational authorities across the EU	87 (86%)	21 (84%)	86 (90%)	22 (88%)
Facilitating brain circulation across the EU	86 (85%)	21 (84%)	86 (90%)	21 (84%)

Encouraging international students to study in the EU	87 (86%)	22 (88%)	85 (89%)	23 (92%)

Source: feasibility and impact survey – HEIs, National agencies.

Respondents from both HEIs and national authorities recognise the benefits that a joint European Degree would bring to students differently from the students themselves. The former consider transnational mobility as a key benefit, irrespectively of the shape the European Degree might take. Student respondents, meanwhile, prioritise labour market skills. Both HEI respondents and students recognise the possibility that all the key benefits may already be achieved with the label. Table 13 below summarises how the different reference groups view the benefits to students of a joint European Degree.

Table 30. Share of respondents who agree that the joint European Degree would bring the following benefits for students:

Possible benefits of a joint European Degree	**Label**			**Qualification**		
	HEIs (N=103)	National authorities (N=25)	Students (N=2,026)	HEIs (N=96)	National authorities (N=25)	Students (N=2,026)
Completion of innovative study programmes	88 (82%)	21 (84%)	1,860 (92%)	86 (90%)	-	1,779 (88%)
Opportunity to study in different European countries	92 (89%)	25 (100%)	1,837 (91%)	85 (89%)	25 (100%)	1,855 (92%)
Increased opportunities for transnational mobility (physical, virtual, blended)	91 (88%)	25 (100%)	1,837 (91%)	85 (89%)	25 (100%)	1,826 (90%)
Increased sense of European citizenship, identity and belonging	89 (86%)	24 (96%)	1797 (89%)	83 (86%)	22 (88%)	1,742 (86%)
Receiving an education recognised as excellent among employers	90 (87%)	21 (84%)	1,836 (91%)	83 (86%)	21 (84%)	1,833 (90%)
Obtaining skills and competences relevant to the labour market	89 (86%)	20 (80%)	1,888 (93%)	84 (88%)	22 (88%)	1,859 (92%)

Source: feasibility and impact survey - HEIs, National agencies

Overall, the survey responses indicate that stakeholders agree that a possible joint European Degree will bring various benefits. Such findings point to the fact that the criteria, that were unknown to the respondents and that will define the possible joint European Degree are at the core of bringing the expected added value. Moreover, as the label also focuses on how programmes are designed (i.e. not only their content but also their format), it already goes some way towards a more ambitious understanding of a joint European Degree. Thus, a similarly high overall assessment of the expected benefits of a possible joint European Degree ultimately rests on the final criteria agreed, and the willingness of the Member States to implement the changes necessary to facilitate the delivery of transnational higher education.

SWOT analysis of the two options

Below, we present a SWOT analysis of the two options detailed in this report. This analysis illustrates that while similar, the possible move from a label to a joint degree based on common European criteria might be expected to boost the added value of a joint European Degree by making it more accessible and integrating it into the processes routinely undertaken by HEIs.

Table 31. SWOT analysis of a joint European Degree as a label and a possible joint degree

Label	**Joint degree based on common European criteria**
STRENGTHS	
- Feasible to implement in the short term - Easier delivery of joint degrees (as a single document awarded following a joint programme) - Support and willingness from HEIs to apply for the label - Interest in the label by students and HEIs - Support for a dialogue between HEIs and national authorities - Inclusion in the Council Recommendation, demonstrating political priority for implementation, and support from the Member States - The pilot already launched under Erasmus+	- Emergence of comparable national legislative frameworks for the joint European Degree, dismantling several existing obstacles - Easier delivery of joint degrees (as a single document awarded following a joint programme) - Support from HEIs - Interest from students - Wide availability without the need to invest in overcoming obstacles - A specific, jointly agreed European degree could be linked to existing qualification frameworks and ease recognition - Inclusion in the Council Recommendation, demonstrating political priority for implementation, and support from the Member States
WEAKNESSES	
- Possibility to add complexity to the existing system of quality awards - The label has no legislative value and, as such, does not necessarily dismantle existing obstacles to the development of joint degrees - Possible reluctance among European HEIs to bear costs implied by application for a quality label, when labels have previously been attached to EU funding	- National competence in education - Challenges to implementation due to necessary legal processes in the Member States - Lengthy legislative processes needed to implement necessary changes
OPPORTUNITIES	
- Label piloting procedure will enable the identification of best practices and suitable collaborative models, thus creating a foundation for the joint degree based on common European criteria - Label piloting procedure will increase dialogue between HEIs and national authorities regarding the obstacles relating to joint degrees - Increase in the number of joint degrees delivered - Increased delivery of joint and innovative higher education - Access to innovative higher education for students - Achieving benefits at various levels, detailed in chapter 4.4.3	- Greater flexibility in creating new, innovative, international joint study programmes - Greater flexibility in creating interdisciplinary knowledge at European level to solve global challenges - Increase in the number of joint degrees delivered - Increased delivery of joint and innovative higher education - Access to innovative higher education for students - Removing obstacles to transnational HE (consistently across countries) - Achieving benefits at various levels**,** detailed in chapter 4.4.3
CHALLENGES	

- Achieving a common understanding among stakeholders as to what constitutes the added value of a joint European Degree as a label - Implementing a strong communication/public relations campaign to attract sufficient attention to the label - Positioning the joint European Degree against existing quality labels in higher education - Introducing criteria that ensure the joint European Degree is recognised as signalling high-quality joint study programmes - Designing procedures to minimise the administrative burden	- Securing commitment from the Member States in implementing the necessary changes without adding national-specific requirements - The lengthy legislative process to embed the joint European Degree into national legislation where necessary - Lack of clear understanding of how it would differ from currently existing degrees - Possible recognition problems of student degrees outside EHEA

Conclusions

Significant challenges in developing joint degree programmes in the EHEA continue to prevent the smooth and effective provision of transnational higher education. Notably, challenges in quality assurance and accreditation, the awarding of joint degrees, recognition, and joint programme implementation remain a reality for those higher education institutions and alliances of HEIs that try to deliver innovative joint programmes. While a number of instruments have been developed within the Bologna process to facilitate transnational higher education delivery, significant obstacles still exist to their implementation across the EU Member States and EHEA countries.

When discussions concerning a 'European Degree' began within the framework of this study, stakeholders had a limited understanding of what such a degree would entail. Nevertheless, when associating a European Degree with either a label or a qualification, the stakeholders expressed the view that a European Degree could become a solution to existing challenges and barriers. Challenges in quality assurance and accreditation, recognition, joint study programme delivery and the awarding of joint degrees remain prominent in the European higher education sphere. Stakeholders regarded the development of a European Degree as an instrument that could help to alleviate such challenges.

This study focused on two options for the implementation of a possible joint European Degree – as a label, and as a qualification (understood as a joint degree at all levels, based on co-created European criteria, to be delivered at national, regional or institutional level, in accordance with the national qualifications frameworks as described in the Council Recommendation on building bridges). On the basis of the analysis carried out, a step-by-step approach appears most feasible. In the short term, the implementation of a joint European Degree as a label is most feasible. This conclusion is supported by existing evidence from the experiences of other labels in higher education, and the high levels of interest in the label expressed by both HEIs and students.

The joint European Degree label could pave the way towards a gradual and smooth implementation of transnational joint degrees at all levels and in all subject areas, based on agreed European criteria, to be delivered at national, regional or institutional level, in line with the national qualification frameworks. Notably, the following step-by-step approach could be proposed:

- **Step 1: piloting with Erasmus+:** testing the feasibility of a joint European Degree in practice would inform the most relevant models and criteria.
- **Step 2: agreeing the label criteria with the Member States:** on the basis of the results of the pilot, the Member States could discuss and agree on the criteria for a joint European Degree label to be available across Europe. The right to award the joint European Degree label could be assessed by EQAR-registered agencies on the basis of voluntary applications, and be integrated into the general programme and/or institutional-level accreditation/evaluation (including through applications of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes), and offered as a separate service.
- **Step 3: enabling the award of joint degrees based on common European criteria:** lastly, Member States could adapt, where necessary, national legislation to allow for the delivery of joint degrees based on the same or similar European criteria that are tried and tested for the label, across Europe, and without additional national obstacles.

The development of a joint European Degree label would entail some bearable costs. At the same time, a possible joint European Degree is expected to bring various benefits at different levels (students, HEIs, Member States, and the EU), including saving the costs of overcoming obstacles to the delivery of transnational education provisions. The potential benefits of such an instrument could act as one of the key motivating factors for higher education stakeholders to support the implementation of a joint European Degree as a label or a qualification. For a fully effective joint European Degree, the full implementation of the Bologna tools and potential legislative adaptation will be needed across the Member States to enable the delivery of transnational joint programmes based on commonly agreed criteria.

Lastly, the criteria for a possible joint European Degree form the basis for creating added value. While the foreseen pilot of a joint European Degree label through Erasmus+ will be useful for gathering insights on their relevance, it is of the utmost importance to retain a high level of ambition. This should be viewed as a key condition for promoting a truly transformative European higher education through the delivery of possible joint European Degrees.

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Annex 1. Interview questionnaire - an exploration of a joint European degree concept

Introduction

1. Could you please introduce yourself and describe what you do in your organisation?
2. How well aware are you of the ongoing discussions regarding the introduction of the European degree? How does your work (e.g. recent research, policymaking, or other professional experience) relate to the potential introduction of the European degree? If the person is not well aware of discussions on the European degree:
    - How does your work relate to cross-border cooperation in the provision of higher education?
3. How does the implementation of the European degree fit into the broader EU higher education policy agenda? How was the idea of the European degree introduced into the EU policymaking, including following the work on the European Universities, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees and European Joint Doctorates? What are the key objectives of introducing the European degree?

European degree: concept

4. There are different possible options for establishing the European degree, from the European degree award as a label to the European degree as a qualification in its own right. We would like to ask some hypothetical questions about how you perceive a European degree could be implemented:
    - Could you describe how you perceive the implementation of a European degree?
    - What are the key building blocks of the European degree that you deem to be necessary?
    - What could be the scope of the European degree?
    - What could be the key quality hallmarks of a European degree in terms of study content, pedagogical approaches and methods, and programme delivery?
    - Who could be the key actors delivering the European degree? What could be their roles?
    - Which of the options for implementing the European degree do you prefer? Which of the options would you consider the most feasible?
5. In your view, why a European degree is needed? What key benefits it could bring?
6. How do you see the current trend for micro-credentials could be integrated into a European degree?
7. How can the implementation of the European degree complement the existing initiatives in higher education (e.g. European Universities, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees and European Joint Doctorates)?
8. Why were neither the existence of the European Approach nor the existence of Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters sufficient as enablers? Why was this tool and the funding through Erasmus+ not sufficient as incentives to national authorities to make the necessary changes in their legislation, to make the European Approach work smoothly in the short term?
9. What further incentives should be given to national legislators to enable the full implementation of the European Approach, without national add-on rules, with single accreditation via one country and inherent trust?

European degree: key challenges

10. What **key challenges/obstacles** have you faced, **lessons learned,** and **solutions** found:

- in your work on the delivery of Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (EACEA/Eurydice)?
- in your work on the Bologna Process? What has been the progress in achieving jointly agreed reforms, including the three-tier structure, quality assurance, recognition, transparency tools, and joint programmes? (EACEA/Eurydice)
- in your work on the assurance of quality and recognition of joint degrees? (European Network of National Information Centres, National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, European Consortium for Accreditation)
- in your work on joint programme delivery? (European University Association and European Association of Institutions in Higher Education)
- through participation in joint programmes? (European Students' Union)
- regarding obstacles to professional certification, and degree recognition? (BUSINESSEUROPE, Education International and European Trade Union Committee for Education)

11. In your view, how will these challenges be relevant for implementing the European degree? For example, in terms of delivery and recognition of qualification, quality assurance?
12. Based on your experience, what are the most challenging discussion points (resulting in disagreement among stakeholders) related to the implementation of the European degree?
13. Are you aware of possible solutions to these challenges? For example, some projects/initiatives that managed to successfully overcome any of the identified challenges that may be relevant for implementing the European degree. If not, can you imagine what solution could be found?

Prerequisites for success

14. In your view, what will be the key prerequisites for successfully reaching a consensus among the stakeholders on how the European degree should be designed?
15. What will be the key prerequisites for successfully implementing the European degree?

Closing remarks

16. Would you like to add something that has not been covered through previous questions?
17. Overall, what are your key expectations from this study?
18. Do you have any recommendations regarding sources or persons we should consult when implementing the study?

Annex 2. Workshop report - an exploration of a joint European degree concept

Plenary session

The need for and benefits of a European degree

The participants were invited to submit their opinions via Mentimeter regarding the possible benefits a European degree could bring. The stakeholders identified the benefits and also raised some risks with the possible implementation of a European degree. Their opinions are summarised in the table below (as submitted by the participants).

IN YOUR VIEW, WHAT BENEFITS COULD THE EUROPEAN DEGREE BRING? SUMMARY OF RESPONSES PROVIDED BY WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS	
Benefit identified	***Number of times mentioned***
Recognition, including automatic recognition / easy recognition / better recognition	17
Mobility, including career and work-life mobility	9
Promotion of EU integration / EU values	9
Visibility / attractiveness / prestige / professional added value / quality	8
Increasing number or easier implementation of joint degrees / joint programmes	6
Flexibility/innovation in study programmes, multilingualism, collaboration, intersectoriality	5
Collaboration	3
Transparency	2
Common good for the Alliances	1
Quality assurance	1
Consolidation of teaching programmes	1
Risks identified	
Undermining of national competence	
Social exclusion	
Negative impact on the development of innovative joint degrees, outside the standards of the European degree	
Negative impact on the advancement of recognition of all other programmes	
Gendered pressure/inequality	
Recognition outside Europe	
Discrimination in the job market of non-European degree holders	
Complexity	
Tensions between national (accreditation) and European labelling	
Questions regarding the added value and benefits outside of EHEA	

Some workshop participants noted that the benefits are currently unclear and depend on the options. It was noted by one participant that many of the benefits identified through Mentimeter are actually the aims of the Bologna process/EHEA. Some questions regarding how the European degree would affect the Bologna process were raised. Notably, some participants expressed concern that the European degree could end up limiting the proper implementation of automatic recognition for all degrees. It was also noted that the

benefits will be different depending on the stakeholder groups as the advantages are competing rather than converging (e.g. increased clarity versus flexibility)
The workshop participants raised questions regarding whether the European degree should be aimed at solving the existing obstacles or instruments that are not working well right now (e.g. related to accreditation, recognition, and quality assurance). It was stressed that the European degree could be viewed as an additional tool to arrive at the goals of EHEA, rather than a tool to solve existing problems. It was noted that the European degree could be viewed as a method for better international cooperation with simplified accreditation and recognition. The Commission highlighted the importance of existing political momentum to enhance cooperation in higher education between the Member States and promote innovation, interdisciplinarity, and international elements. Thus, while the European degree could be viewed as a tool to facilitate removing of existing obstacles, it should go beyond that (boost the existing cooperation, rather than repeat what is already done).

Options for a European degree

Following a short introduction to three possible options regarding what a European could be, the participants were given the possibility to express their preferences and opinions using Mentimeter. Beyond the three options that had been presented, the attendees were also encouraged to propose any other alternative options they could think of. The European degree as a quality label (option 1) and as a new qualification (option 2), almost equally favoured, were the options cited most often (see details of the responses in the table below).

OPTION	NUMBER OF TIMES MENTIONED
Option 1: quality label	20
Option 2: a new qualification for joint degrees	21
Option 3: a degree delivered by a new EU body	4

Other opinions:

- A set of bricks. The bricks are courses/combinations of courses offered throughout European universities, homogenously quality assured. The student then chooses freely in this interdisciplinary offer and builds his/her very own European degree.
- A university-specific degree with European recognition
- Connecting to EA could help implementation but what about innovation/transformative goals?
- Interoperability
- It should still be a university degree (BA, MA, PhD) and not fall not into the certificate category
- Qualifications meeting European degree criteria
- Something universal for all EUROPEANS and not just a part of European universities
- Transnational cooperation

A participant defended the perspective of a flexible structure for the European degree to support innovation. It was nevertheless questioned whether national legislation would allow for the implementation of such a flexible framework.
It was noted by one participant that option 2 would not go much further than what has already been agreed on, for example in relation to the application of the European Approach. Rather, option 2 was seen as a possibility to follow up on the existing commitment. It was underlined that while option 2 seems to be what exists on paper, it has nevertheless not been fully implemented yet. On the other hand, it was commented

that option 2 could have several meanings, potentially allowing for going beyond what has already been agreed on towards a more ambitious approach that could be supported by the political momentum. Some questions regarding the feasibility of this option were nevertheless raised.
Option 3 was little mentioned, although one participant acknowledged that it could be the most innovative as compared to the two other ones that have been already explored to some extent. However, it was questioned how to implement this option. A participant noted that the real issue regarding this option was about who would award the degree, and not necessarily Quality assurance. Thinking about EU bodies awarding degrees, another participant mentioned the case of the College of Europe. However, it was noted that over time, the College of Bruges has moved towards the recognition of the degree by a (sub)national accreditation system. From this example, it was underlined that if the European degree was not embedded into national accreditation systems, it would lead to challenging situations to secure the privileges associated with the degree.

Defining elements of a European degree

The participants were presented with a list of defining elements that could be potentially associated with a European degree. Through Mentimeter, they were invited to select from the list up to five elements that they consider would be the most important for a European degree. Transnational cooperation, embedded European mobility and European values were the most frequently chosen elements, while civic and community engagement gathered the lowest number of votes. The detailed results of the votes are presented in the table below.

DEFINING ELEMENT	VOTES
Transnational cooperation	29
Embedded European mobility	26
European values	20
Modularisation and flexibility	16
Student-centred learning	15
Multilingualism	12
Trans-disciplinarity	12
Academic, research and professional excellence	12
Innovative pedagogies	12
Alignment with future labour market needs	9
Challenged-based and work-based learning	7
Exposure/engagement with research	6
Civic and community engagement	1

A participant commented on the importance of selecting for the European degree defining elements that are different from those associated with national degrees, or that are at least adding extra layers compared to those characteristics that national degrees might already have.

Breakout rooms

Benefits and added value

1. What could make a European degree attractive to students and employers?

- The attractive characteristics and quality of a European degree in comparison to existing national degrees: complementing research-based components offered by several European HEIs (content, methodology, learning outcomes).

- Special competences and skills relevant to the future labour market (adaptability, flexibility), that may not be available at the national level.
- For students: automatic recognition, academic/professional, also by the European public sector. Global recognition. Both formal and labour market recognition. Formal is only possible through national authorities.
- The European degree would be easier to comprehend than joint/multiple degrees, and also easier to develop/implement.
- Students: higher salary level upon graduation (☐REDEEM project on joint degrees in engineering).
- Students: join the European community of students.
- Accessibility: could be either more or less accessible /exclusive vs. Inclusive

2. What could be the added value as compared to a national degree? What conditions would make sure that the implementation of a European degree brings added value to the existing ones?

- Added value: automatic recognition, visibility, knowledge from other European countries could be more widely recognized, European curriculum (content), flexible mobility (formally recognised virtual mobility).
- HEIs: easier to develop and implement innovative joint educational components, programmes, visibility, and pooling resources. The European degree should support academics/researchers to work jointly. Developing the European degree would support peer learning and procedural simplifications (e.g. multilingual PhD training). Enhancing links between education and research agendas and also EHEA/ERA. Non-European partners have adopted Bologna tools and a European degree could intensify the global attractiveness (both global HEI partners and students). A European degree should be enforced by giving incentives.
- Others (Ministries, national QA agencies, recognition authorities, employers, etc): increased dialogue and mutual understanding between Ministries and HEIs. Intensified discussion on characteristics of quality.
- Key conditions to ensure added value: mapping of competences/skills that would be different than is available at the national level, a wide adaptation/alignment with national legislation of a unified approach to a degree structure, including degree-awarding rights, QA, recognition, visible links to partner HEIs (branding, reputation). Pedagogical/methodological autonomy should be allowed. Close interaction with the industry would be important. The European degree should be open to all HEIs.

3. What other benefits are associated with the establishment of a European degree?

- Enhances a European discussion on quality and harmonisation
- Knowledgeable graduates with competences relevant to the future European economy
- Branding the EHEA in a global perspective
- Increasing the global attractiveness of the EHEA

Policy options

The participants agreed that the quality label is the easiest to implement, while the new qualification and degree delivered by an EU body would be more challenging. It was agreed that the quality label could be implemented under existing conditions. The question regarding whether the quality label could be available for national degrees was raised. Although easier to implement, it was questioned whether the quality label could indeed solve the existing challenges. Furthermore, the quality label was seen as the loosest framework, as compared to existing initiatives in secondary education: the European Baccalaureate (relying on an intergovernmental agreement and automatically recognised across the EU) (strictest framework) and the International Baccalaureate (intermediate framework).

The other options - new qualification and a degree issued by an EU body - were identified as more challenging to implement. It was reiterated that a European degree as a new qualification would likely mean implementing the already existing agreements. The European degree as a degree issued by an EU body would raise questions regarding the EU competence (would the Member States be willing to delegate their competences to an international body?) and would require legal changes in the countries. There were also some interrogations regarding what would mean the option "new qualification", which stayed still quite unclear and gave room for interpretation.

The European degree as a qualification should make it easier to: 1) easily set up the curriculum; 2) get accreditation through a single procedure; 3) receive automatic recognition of the diploma. Setting up the curriculum was perceived as the most challenging step. It could eventually rely on financial incentives to change national legislation. On the other hand, it was underlined that securing a sufficient amount of funding for the European degree to support this perspective of competitive financing might be difficult.

The issue of accreditation was mentioned as important for considering different options. It was noted that the European degree should not create an additional burden for those universities that have institutional accreditation. Different accreditation possibilities were mentioned, such as the use of the European Approach (the easiest way) and the creation of a new accreditation body.

Overall, the options were viewed on a spectrum from the easiest (label) to the most difficult to implement (EU body awarding a degree). It was suggested that a step-by-step approach might be possible, moving from the easiest to the most ambitious option.

Defining elements, accreditation, and quality assurance

As regards the defining elements of a European degree, the participants agreed that multinational elements, such as embedded mobility, transnational cooperation, and European values were the most important as they would best reflect the European dimension and added value that should be associated with a European degree. Transdisciplinarity and multilingualism were also mentioned to some extent. Some of the other elements, such as student-centred learning, were seen as basic Bologna requirements that could define all degrees. It was questioned whether adding such features as specific defining elements of a European degree would not bear the risk to limit their implementation in the frame of other degrees, which would thus not share the aspirations of the EHEA. On the other hand, the question was raised whether disregarding such elements as defining the European degree to focus exclusively on its distinctive features could undermine the ambition and quality of the degree. A representative of the European Commission indeed noted that the defining elements of the European degree should not only focus on its added value (i.e. what makes it different as compared to other existing degrees) but also on signalling high quality.

Therefore, defining elements such as student-centred learning should also constitute one of the building requirements for a European degree.

The participants discussed possibilities of how the European degree could be quality assured. One participant noted that Quality assurance would not represent an issue for the European degree, which could build on existing QA infrastructures (e.g. the European Approach, EQAR agencies, European Standards and Guidelines). The participants also discussed the criteria that could be used: should they be of a general nature to take into account the innovation associated with a European degree? Does the European Approach give enough visibility to criteria that could be important for a European degree?

It was stressed that QA for a European degree would mainly depend on the option chosen for the degree. If the European degree ended up being a label, one participant noted that EQAR agencies probably would not be the best option. Rather, agencies could award the label, as it is the case for Eur-ACE and other labels: a European association could check the agencies and give them a right to evaluate and award the label for the European degree on the basis of the agreed criteria. A participant also commented that it would be important that institutions are not overburdened with multiple accreditation procedures (seeing as national procedures would not be replaced).

Annex 3. Criteria covered through the use of the ESG, the European Approach, and the European Degree Label

ESG	EUROPEAN APPROACH	JOINT EUROPEAN DEGREE CRITERIA
1.1 Policy for QA. Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes while involving external stakeholders.	The cooperating institutions should apply joint internal quality assurance processes in accordance with part one of the ESG.	**Quality assurance arrangements** Internal and external QA is conducted in accordance with the ESG; that is, the programme, the study field or the institutions were accredited/evaluated by an EQAR-registered agency, preferably using the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA).
1.2 Design and approval of programmes. Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.	The intended learning outcomes should align with the corresponding level in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), as well as the applicable national qualifications framework(s). The programme should be able to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are achieved. The structure and content of the curriculum should be fit to enable the students to achieve the intended learning outcomes The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) should be applied properly, and the distribution of credits should be clear. A joint bachelor programme will typically amount to a total student workload of 180-240 ECTS credits; a joint master programme will typically amount to 90-120 ECTS credits and should not be less than 60 ECTS credits at the second cycle level (credit ranges according to the FQ-EHEA); for joint doctorates, there is no credit range specified. The workload and the average time to complete the programme should be monitored.	**Higher education institutions involved** The joint programme and its curriculum are jointly designed and delivered by at least 2 higher education institutions from at least 2 different EU Member States. **Transnational joint degree delivery** The joint programme leads to the award of a joint degree. Dissertations are co-evaluated by supervisors from at least 2 different institutions located in 2 different countries. **Transparency of the learning outcomes** The joint programme is described in ECTS. A joint Diploma Supplement is issued to the student at the end of the joint study programme.
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment. Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.	The programme should be designed to correspond with the intended learning outcomes, and the learning and teaching approaches applied should be adequate to achieve those. The diversity of students and their needs should be respected and attended to, especially given the potential different cultural backgrounds of the students. The examination regulations and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes should correspond with the intended learning outcomes. They should be applied consistently among partner institutions	**Flexible learning modes and open research environments and cultures** The joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinary and/or intersectoral modules using student-centred and challenged-based approaches suitable for a diverse student body.

1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition, and certification. Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.	The admission requirements and selection procedures should be appropriate considering the programme's level and discipline. Recognition of qualifications and periods of studies (including recognition of prior learning) should be applied in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and subsidiary documents.		**Joint policies for the joint programme** The higher education institutions involved have joint policies for admission, selection, supervision, monitoring, assessment and recognition procedures for the joint study programme.
1.5 Teaching staff. Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.	The staff should be sufficient and adequate (qualifications, professional and international experience) to implement the study programme. The facilities provided should be sufficient and adequate given the intended learning outcomes.		
1.6 Learning resources and student support. Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.		**Transnational campus** The joint programme provides enrolled students, regardless of their location, with seamless and free access to the participating HEI´s services such as e.g. IT services, shared infrastructure and facilities, (online) library services, faculty development and support, academic guidance and psychological counselling, career advice/mentoring, alumni systems.	The student support services should contribute to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. They should take into account specific challenges of mobile students.
1.7 Information management. Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.			
1.8 Public information. Institutions should	Relevant information about the programme like admission requirements and procedures, course catalogue, examination and		

publish information about their activities, including programmes, in clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible ways.	assessment procedures etc. should be well documented and published by taking into account specific needs of mobile students.	
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes. Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.		
1.10 Cyclical external QA. Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.	The joint programme should be reviewed periodically every 6 years, which should be specified in the published decision.	**Quality assurance arrangements** Internal and external QA is conducted in accordance with the ESG; that is, the programme, the study field or the institutions were accredited/evaluated by an EQAR-registered agency, preferably using the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA).
2.1 Consideration of internal QA. External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.		
2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose. External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and		

continuous improvement.			
2.3 Implementing processes. External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include - a self-assessment or equivalent; - an external assessment normally including a site visit; - a report resulting from the external assessment; - a consistent follow-up.	The external quality assurance procedure should be based on a self-evaluation report (SER) jointly submitted by the cooperating institutions. The site visit should enable the review panel to discuss the joint programme based on the self-evaluation report and assess whether the programme complies with the Standards. The review panel should prepare a report that contains relevant evidence, analysis and conclusions with regard to the Standards. The agency should agree with the cooperating institutions on a follow-up procedure to assess the fulfilment of conditions – if applicable – and/or to evaluate the follow-up actions on recommendations – if applicable.		The agency should appoint a panel of at least four members.
2.4 Peer-review experts. External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).			
2.5 Criteria for outcomes. Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.	If required, the agency should take a decision based on the review report and the recommendation for the decision, considering the comments by the higher education institutions as appropriate.		
2.6 Reporting. Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be	The review panel should prepare a report that contains relevant evidence, analysis and conclusions with regard to the Standards. The agency should publish the review report and, if applicable, the formal outcome or the accreditation decision on its website.		

published together with the report.		
2.7 Complaints and appeals. Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.	The institutions should have the right to appeal against a formal outcome or an accreditation decision.	
	The institutions that offer a joint programme should be recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries.	
	The joint programme should be offered jointly, involving all cooperating institutions in the design and delivery of the programme.	
	The terms and conditions of the joint programme should be laid down in a cooperation agreement.	
	If relevant for the specific joint programme, the minimum agreed training conditions specified in the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC, or relevant common training frameworks established under the Directive should be taken into account.	
	The cooperating institutions should jointly select a suitable EQAR-registered quality assurance agency. The agency should communicate appropriately with the competent 4 national authorities of the countries in which the cooperating higher education institutions are based.	

Source: European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education 2015.

Annex 4. Complementarities of criteria

	Joint European Degree criteria	Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters	MSCA Joint Doctorates
Higher education institutions involved	The joint programme is jointly designed and delivered by at least 2 higher education institutions from at least 2 different EU Member States[27].	3 HEIs from 3 different countries are required.	The degree should be awarded at least by three independent legal entities, each established in a different EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country and with at least one of them established in an EU Member State.
Transnational joint degree delivery	The joint programme leads to the award of a joint degree.	Joint degrees are encouraged but not mandatory	Joint or multiple degree
	Dissertations are co-evaluated by supervisors or a committee with members from at least 2 different institutions located in 2 different countries.	Not specified in the requirements	Joint supervision of the researchers is mandatory for EJD and EID and encouraged in ETN. In EID, the joint supervision of the researcher must be ensured by at least one supervisor from the academic sector and one supervisor from the non-academic sector.
Transparency of the learning outcomes	The joint programme is described in ECTS.	Joint Diploma Supplement is required	Not specified in the requirements
	A joint Diploma Supplement is issued to the student at the end of the joint study programme.	Equivalents of the ECTS can be used	Not specified in the requirements
Quality assurance arrangements	Internal and external QA is conducted in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The programme, the study field or the institutions are accredited/evaluated by an EQAR-registered agency. If external quality assurance is required at programme level in the countries involved, the transnational programme should be accredited/evaluated preferably using the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA).	Partner HEIs must prove that they fulfilled external QA requirements of their jurisdiction. Adhering to Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is required unless national legislation requires otherwise	Not specified in the requirements
Joint policies for the joint programme	The higher education institutions involved have joint policies for admission, selection, supervision, monitoring,	Joint student admission requirements, application, fee policy, monitoring, examination/performance valuation rules/procedures,	Joint governance structure is mandatory

[27] Beyond this minimum, any higher education institution within or beyond the EU can take part in the joint programme.

	assessment and recognition procedures for the joint study programme.	joint programme design and integrated teaching/training activities are required.	
Transnational campus – access to services	The joint programme provides enrolled students, regardless of their location, with seamless and free access to the participating HEI´s services such as e.g. IT services, shared infrastructure and facilities, (online) library services, faculty development and support, academic guidance and psychological counselling, career advice/mentoring, alumni systems.	The necessary institutional commitment of all the organisations participating in the EMJM consortium must be ensured before the enrolment of the first EMJM students to guarantee solid institutional embedding and backing. This EMJM Partnership Agreement will have to cover all academic, operational, administrative and financial aspects related to the implementation of the EMJM and the management of the EMJM scholarships.	Training should prepare early-stage researchers for increased research collaborations and information-sharing made possible by new (digital) technologies (e.g. collaborative tools, opening access to publications and to research data, FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Re-usable) data management, public engagement and citizen science, etc.)
Flexible and embedded student mobility arrangements	The joint programme includes at least 1 period of student physical mobility at another partner institution of at least 30 ECTS.	Compulsory physical mobility for all enrolled students is required (two study periods in two countries, of which one must be an EU Member State; each study period must correspond to 30 ECTS or equivalent). Physical mobility cannot be replaced with virtual mobility	Physical mobility is required (cannot spend more than 12 months in the country of recruiting organisation)
	The joint programme includes a total of at least 6 months[28] of physical mobility at another partner institution (including secondment). In addition to physical mobility, the joint programme includes opportunities for doctoral candidates to participate in one or more of these activities at another partner institution: teaching activities, international events, international conferences, joint research scientific projects between partner institutions, and joint research publications with researchers from partner institutions.	Not specified in the requirements	International networking is included in the EU Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training, which the programmes need to follow
Multilingualism	During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different EU official	Not specified in the requirements but enabled through physical mobility	Not specified in the requirements but enabled through physical mobility

[28] The total 6 months mobility period can be the sum of several shorter mobility periods.

	languages[29], language classes excluded. Exposure to EU official languages can take place in active and/or passive use of language(s), at any level in teaching and/or learning activities, examinations, research activities, professional or civic engagement activities and during mobility periods, including by going on mobility to a country where a different EU official language is predominantly used in daily life[30].		
Innovative learning approaches	The joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinary and/or intersectoral components using student-centred and/or challenged-based approaches.	Strategy to foster excellence and innovation is considered under the award criteria	References to inter- and multidisciplinary fields are required. The programme should be aligned with EU Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training
Graduate outcomes	The joint programme has a system to monitor graduate outcomes. This system can be at the level of the programme or institutional level(s). If possible, the content is aligned to the survey content of EUROGRADUATE.	Impact on employability is considered among the award criteria	Researchers should be exposed to the non-academic sector to increase employability. A Career Development Plan is required.
Inclusiveness and sustainability	The joint programme commits to wide participation through socially and geographically inclusive admission through tailored measures for all categories of disadvantaged students.	Specific support measures for facilitating equal and inclusive access are considered among the award criteria	Not specified in the requirements
	The joint programme commits to respect the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers and commits to the principles of the MSCA Green Charter.		The MSCA pay particular attention to physical accessibility and inclusion and foresee financial support for the additional costs entailed by recruited or seconded researchers/staff members with disabilities whose long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments40 are as such that their participation in MSCA

[29] This may include students' mother tongue(s).

[30] Examples: A joint programme is offered in 2 different EU official languages; a joint programme is offered in 1 EU official language and students have the opportunity to go on mobility in a country where a different EU official language is predominantly used in daily life.

			would not be possible without extra financial support.
Optional criteria			
In addition to physical mobility, the joint programme includes additional formats of transnational learning activities with partner higher education institutions (e.g. online or blended, in the format of regular or intensive courses, summer/winter schools).		Not specified in the requirements	International networking is included in the EU Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training, which the programmes need to follow
The joint programme offers the possibility to take language classes.		Common services offered to students (e.g. language courses).	Not specified in the requirements
The joint programme supports future labour market needs and/or includes cooperation with businesses and sectors in its curriculum.		Impact on employability is considered among the award criteria	Researchers should be exposed to the non-academic sector to increase employability.
The joint programme provides opportunities for international professional internships/work-based learning lasting more than two months and is recognised through the award of ECTS.			
The joint programme includes a career development plan devised with the candidate and/or exposure to the non-academic sector.			A Career Development Plan should be established jointly by the supervisor(s) and each early-stage researcher recruited by the selected network. In addition to research objectives, this plan comprises the researcher's training and career needs, including training on transferable skills, teaching, planning for publications and participation in conferences.
The joint programme includes components and actions related to environmental sustainability and implements measures to minimise the environmental footprint of its activities.		Not specified in the requirements	Not specified in the requirements
The joint programme includes components and actions related to the development of high-level digital skills of students, it offers high-quality digital education content, as well as assessment of student skills.		Not specified in the requirements	Substantial training modules, including digital ones, addressing key transferable skills common to all fields and fostering the culture of Open Science, innovation and entrepreneurship will be supported. A Career Development Plan comprises the researcher's training and career needs, including training on transferable skills.
The joint programme commits to addressing the societal needs of the local community, builds it into its curriculum, and offers the possibility for students to participate in		Not specified in the requirements	Not specified in the requirements

activities, including volunteering, and to receive ECTS for it.		
The higher education institutions offering the joint study programme conduct joint promotion and awareness-raising activities to ensure the visibility of the joint programme and provide the necessary information about it for students and other relevant stakeholders such as future employers.	Joint promotion and awareness-raising activities to ensure worldwide visibility of the programme as well as of the Erasmus Mundus scholarship scheme. The promotional strategy should include an integrated and comprehensive specific website (in English, as well as in the main teaching language(s) if different) providing all the necessary information about the programme for students and other relevant stakeholders such as future employers.	The European Researchers' Night involving researchers funded by Horizon 2020, including the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions, brings researchers closer to the general public and increases awareness of research and innovation activities, to support the public recognition of researchers, create an understanding of the impact of researchers' work on citizen's daily life, and encouraging young people to embark on research careers.

Source: Erasmus+ 2022 Programme Guide, Horizon 2020 Work Programme 2018-2020, and Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training

Annex 5. Criteria covered through the use of the European Approach and Joint European Degree[31]

EUROPEAN CRITERIA FOR THE JOINT TRANSNATIONAL PROGRAMMES TO ISSUE A JOINT EUROPEAN DEGREE LABEL		***EUROPEAN APPROACH***
Not covered by European Approach	*Partly covered*	*Fully covered by European Approach*
Higher education institutions involved	The joint programme and its curriculum are jointly designed and delivered by at least 2 higher education institutions from at least 2 different EU Member States.	Definitions: Joint programmes are understood as an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions from EHEA countries[32] […] 1.2 Joint design and delivery: The joint programme should[33] be offered jointly, involving all cooperating institutions in the design and delivery of the programme.
Transnational joint degree delivery	The joint programme leads to the award of a joint degree.	- (EA also "allows" double/multiple degree)
	Dissertations are co-evaluated by supervisors or a committee with members from at least 2 different institutions located in 2 different countries.	- (not specified)
Transparency of the learning outcomes	The joint programme is described in ECTS.	3.2 Credits: The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) should be applied properly, and the distribution of credits should be clear.
	A joint Diploma Supplement is issued to the student at the end of the joint study programme.	- (not specified, thought to "go without saying")

[31] Analysis of the provisional criteria for a joint European degree label done by Colin Tuck.
[32] The European Approach relates only to joint programmes offered jointly by higher education institutions from two or more countries and does not address the quality assurance of programmes delivered jointly by different institutions from a single country.
[33] The Standards use of the common English usage of "should" which has the connotation of prescription and compliance.

Quality assurance arrangements	Internal and external QA is conducted in accordance with the ESG; that is, the programme, the study field or the institutions were accredited/evaluated by an EQAR-registered agency, preferably using the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA).	9. Quality Assurance [ESG 1.1 & part 1]: The cooperating institutions should apply joint internal quality assurance processes in accordance with part one of the ESG.
Joint policies for the joint programme	The higher education institutions involved have joint policies for admission, selection, supervision, monitoring, assessment and recognition procedures for the joint study programme.	1.3 Cooperation Agreement: The terms and conditions of the joint programme should be laid down in a cooperation agreement. The agreement should in particular cover the following issues: [...] Admission and selection procedures for students [...] Examination regulations, student assessment methods, recognition of credits and degree awarding procedures in the consortium. 4.1. Admission: The admission requirements and selection procedures should be appropriate in light of the programme's level and discipline. 4.2. Recognition: Recognition of qualifications and periods of studies (including recognition of prior learning) should be applied in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and subsidiary documents. 5.2 Assessment of students: The examination regulations and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes should correspond with the intended learning outcomes. They should be applied consistently among partner institutions.
Transnational campus	The joint programme provides enrolled students, regardless of their location, with seamless and free access to the participating HEI´s services such as e.g. IT services, shared infrastructure and facilities, (online) library services, faculty development and support, academic guidance and psychological counselling, career advice/mentoring, alumni systems.	6. Student Support [ESG 1.6]: Student support services should contribute to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. They should take into account specific challenges of mobile students. 7.2 Facilities: The facilities provided should be sufficient and adequate given the intended learning outcomes
Flexible and embedded student mobility arrangements	The joint programme includes at least 1 period of student physical mobility at another partner institution of at least 30 ECTS.	- (no minimum specified)
	The joint programme includes a total of at least 6 months of physical mobility at another partner institution (including secondment). In addition to physical mobility, the joint programme includes opportunities for doctoral candidates to participate in one or more of these activities at another partner institution: teaching activities, international events, international conferences, joint research scientific projects between partner institutions, joint research publications with researchers from partner institutions	- (no minimum specified)

Multilingualism	During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different EU official languages, language classes excluded. Exposure to EU official languages can take place in active and/or passive use of language(s), at any level in teaching and/or learning activities, examinations, research activities, professional or civic engagement activities and during mobility periods, including by going on mobility to a country where a different EU official language is predominantly used in daily life	- (not specified)
Flexible learning modes and open research environments and cultures	The joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinary and/or intersectoral modules using student-centred and challenged-based approaches suitable for a diverse student body.	2.1 Level [ESG 1.2]: The intended learning outcomes should align with the corresponding level in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), as well as the applicable national qualifications framework(s). 5.1 Learning and teaching: [...] The diversity of students and their needs should be respected and attended to, especially given the potential different cultural backgrounds of the students.
Graduate outcomes	The joint programme has a system to monitor graduate outcomes. This system can be at the level of the programme or institutional level(s). If possible, the content is aligned to the survey content of EUROGRADUATE.	- (not specified)
Inclusiveness and sustainability	The joint programme commits to wide participation through socially and geographically inclusive admission through tailored measures for all categories of disadvantaged students.	5.1 Learning and teaching: [...] The diversity of students and their needs should be respected and attended to, especially given the potential different cultural backgrounds of the students.
	The joint programme respects the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers and commits to the principles of the MSCA Green Charter.	- (not specified)
Optional criteria		
☐	In addition to physical mobility, the joint programme includes additional formats of transnational learning activities with partner higher education institutions (e.g. online or blended, in the format of regular or intensive courses, summer/winter schools).	-
☐	The joint programme offers the possibility to take language classes.	-
☐	The joint programme supports future labour market needs and/or includes cooperation with businesses and sectors in its curriculum.	-
☐	The joint programme provides opportunities for international professional internships/work-based learning lasting more than two months and is recognised through the award of ECTS.	-
☐	The joint programme includes a career development plan devised with the candidate and/or exposure to the non-academic sector.	-

☐	The joint programme includes components and actions related to environmental sustainability and implements measures to minimise the environmental footprint of its activities.	-
☐	The joint programme includes components and actions related to the development of high-level digital skills of students, it offers high-quality digital education content, as well as assessment of student skills.	-
☐	The joint programme commits to addressing the societal needs of the local community, builds it into its curriculum, and offers the possibility for students to participate in activities, including volunteering, and to receive ECTS for it.	-
☐	The higher education institutions offering the joint study programme conduct joint promotion and awareness-raising activities to ensure the visibility of the joint programme and provide the necessary information about it for students and other relevant stakeholders such as future employers.	8. Transparency and Documentation [ESG 1.8]: Relevant information about the programme like admission requirements and procedures, course catalogue, examination and assessment procedures etc. should be well documented and published by taking into account specific needs of mobile students.

Annex 6. Workshop summary note - joint European degree criteria

The online technical workshop on a Joint European Degree Label pilot took place on 3 March 2020, 14:00-17:00 (UCT+1). The workshop was organised in cooperation between the European Commission (DG EAC) and PPMI in the framework of the feasibility study "Road towards a European Degree: Identifying opportunities and investigating the impact and feasibility of different approaches" (carried out by PPMI).
The workshop started with a plenary session with presentations on:

- the rationale and benefits of a joint European degree by Ms Vanessa Debiais-Sainton (DG EAC) and Ms Gerda Burneikaitė (PPMI)
- the road towards a Joint European Degree label through a co-creation "step by step" exploratory approach by Ms Debiais-Sainton (DG EAC)
- a proposal for European criteria to be tested as a first step in the form of a joint European degree label by Mr Yann-Maël Bideau (DG EAC)

The plenary discussion was followed by discussions on the possible criteria of a joint European degree label in the breakout rooms structured around three key topics of the transnational dimension, flexible and innovative curricula, and inclusiveness and sustainability. This workshop note first summarises the general discussions and then presents the outcomes of the breakout rooms discussions

General Discussion

Throughout the workshop, the participants reacted to the presentations and discussions, noting the following general issues relevant to the implementation of a possible joint European degree:

- **The role of the joint European degree vs restrictive national legislation**. The participants discussed to what extent the establishment of a joint European degree could help solve the existing obstacles in delivering joint degree programmes, noting that many obstacles still exist (e.g. conflicting rules and regulations regarding accreditation, public funding and issuing joint degrees). Concerning more flexible national legislation, some participants asked to what extent Member States would be willing to share some of their powers over their national degrees (quality assurance, credit requirements, etc.) to allow for a joint European degree. Other participants observed that universities have already many tools to create joint degree programmes but sometimes lack ideas to overcome obstacles created by different national laws. It was also noted that it is easier to create double degree programmes than joint degree programmes. Participants agreed that many issues could be solved if - in the long-term - there would be a common legislative framework for a joint European degree, integrated into national legislation of the Member States. It was also noted that some of the obstacles could be solved by implementing the commitments that were previously made within the Bologna process.
- **Innovation potential**. It was noted that the joint European degree could provide an opportunity to innovate and create more flexible and student-centred learning paths that would be personalised and respond to societal needs. The participants highlighted the importance of exploiting the existing momentum to innovate in joint higher education.
- **Step-by-step approach**. Participants identified positive aspects of starting with the joint European degree as a label, noting that the first step could also already be used to address some of the existing obstacles. Participants

suggested that it is important to use the label as an incentive. The label could be linked to prestige, incentivising universities and the Member States to innovate and make changes.

- **Criteria and eligibility for the label. Some** participants proposed to make a distinction between mandatory and optional criteria. For example, quality assurance with the Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) could be an eligibility criterion. The label could then focus on additional and specific "European" and "joint" elements. It was also noted that the weight of the three areas of criteria (transnational dimension, flexible and innovative curricula, inclusiveness and sustainability) should be considered, focusing more on removing obstacles than overloading curricula.
- **Differentiation of criteria.** It was suggested to differentiate between Doctoral, Bachelor and Master programmes criteria. It was also noted that the usage of Bologna tools for the third cycle needs to be promoted.

Participants also had the opportunity to raise questions about the joint European degree during the dedicated time within the workshop, and the following aspects were clarified:

- It was highlighted that the EU does not have the competence to award degrees. The added value of the joint European degree would be to facilitate common criteria for the agreement of Member States and help them overcome different obstacles that are being discussed.
- One of the objectives is also to strengthen the trust in quality assurance, which could facilitate the delivery of joint degrees in the EU. This objective is embedded in the *Proposal for a Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation* that the Commission put forward, specifically Article 7.

Breakout rooms discussions

The workshop included discussions in breakout rooms structured around three key topics: transnational dimension, flexible and innovative curricular, and civic/green dimension. Participants were divided into three breakout rooms and discussed all three topics, building on the outcomes of the discussions by the previous groups. Below the outcomes of the discussions are presented. It has to be noted that some of the topics came up during the discussions within all three thematic sessions.

Transnational dimension

Five broad topics for potential European degree criteria emerged in the discussions about the transnational dimension of the joint European degree during the breakout rooms discussions. These cover composition of the consortium, issuing the label to joint programmes, compatibility of national legislation, sharing of data and virtual mobility, and use of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (European Approach).

Composition of the consortium

The requirement for the number of consortium partners was discussed extensively, with differing opinions regarding whether two or three partners should be the minimum. The participants suggested that at least three partners would be welcome, citing the value of multilateral (as opposed to bilateral) cooperation. While it was noted that bilateral engagements are easier to implement, having more than two partners involved would show ambition. Nevertheless, it was stated that keeping the minimum requirement to two partners could enable more joint degrees to be awarded with the label and stressed

the importance of flexibility. It was suggested that while the join European degree label could have only two official partners, others could contribute through guest lectures, online/blended components, etc. Finally, a majority of the participants believed higher education institutions should come from **at least two countries**.

Issuing the label to joint programmes resulting in a joint degree

The participants discussed awarding the joint European degree label only to a joint programme resulting in a joint degree. It was noted that awarding the label only to joint degree programmes would be ambitious and selective. The differences in what a joint degree means across countries were raised (e.g. in some countries, it means one qualification on one certificate, in others, multiple qualifications are allowed) and the necessity to clearly define what is meant by a joint degree.

Compatibility between national legislation

The participants emphasised that the label should help promote compatibility between the different national legislation and highlighted the importance of exploiting this opportunity to move forward with the necessary changes. It was suggested that there could be a criterion that links the label to work towards more compatibility between national legislation; the label's criteria should encourage taking down national hurdles. Higher education institutions could for example demonstrate that they already have worked with national ministries and that their input should be visible.

Use of existing tools

The participants noted the possible links of the joint European degree criteria discussed with those already included in the European Approach for quality assurance of joint programmes. It was noted that the European Approach should be used to develop the joint degrees that would receive the label. The doctorate level was also discussed, noting that there need to be clear national criteria set for doctorate level accreditation to include it into the label. It was noted that not all countries have quality assurance procedures for PhD programmes and stressed the importance of applying ESG to doctorate level

Overall, participants agreed on the importance of using the European Approach as well as other existing tools, including the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the Diploma Supplement (DS), the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), and European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). It was suggested that quality assurance, in general, could be an eligibility requirement for the pilot. The use of the European Approach could be encouraged but not made mandatory to allow for flexibility within the pilot.

Sharing of data and virtual mobility

The breakout room discussions about the transnational dimension also touched upon virtual mobility and sharing of data. It was noted that there are different takes on GDPR and sharing of data, highlighting the need for recommendations on how to address data sharing and some standardisation on how the data is shared. The use of European Student Card initiative was proposed as a tool that could help with GDPR and data exchange regarding student mobility.

Flexible and innovative curricula

Four key topics for potential European degree criteria emerged in the discussions about flexible and innovative curricula during the breakout rooms discussions. Notably, mobility, multilingualism, innovative dimension of the curricular and labour market relevance dimensions were identified as key areas for developing criteria of the European degree label related to flexible and innovative curricula.

Mobility

Various mobility requirements were discussed within all three breakout rooms. The participants put forward various options of possible criteria. The importance of embedded mobility for the joint European degree label programmes was widely acknowledged. Some participants claimed that it is taken for granted that mobility should be part of the joint European degree label. The following aspects related to mobility were discussed:

- **Balance between physical and virtual mobility**. There was some disagreement among the participants regarding the balance between physical and virtual mobility required. Some suggested that physical mobility should be required as a mandatory criterion. Allowing to drop physical mobility would likely nudge applicants towards choosing virtual mobility, negating the importance of face-to-face engagements. At the same time, others favoured keeping the criteria more flexible, allowing for different types of mobility to be considered, including digital. The key argument in favour of online mobility is related to inclusion. It was also noted that defining what constitutes virtual mobility would be necessary, including how it differs from internationalisation.
- **Minimum length of mobility**. Various opinions regarding the minimum length of mobility were raised. Usually, one-semester length mobility (30 ECTS) was mentioned, with additional possibilities for student mobility available in addition. Others suggested considering shorter mobility periods (less than 30 ECTS) as a criterion instead of requiring full semester mobility. It was noted that shorter mobilities would be more suitable for employed students or students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Moreover, shorter mobilities could be relevant for Doctorate level students.
- **Mobility of staff**. The mobility of staff was discussed in addition to the mobility of students, noting the need to highlight it separately. It was also noted that staff mobility could also lead to joint education and research due to new relationships that integrate European Education Area (EEA) and European Research Area (ERA).

Multilingualism

Exposure to multilingualism was highlighted as important, though there were differences in opinion of its implementation. It was noted that having courses offered in two EU languages may be a challenging criterion to implement due to English's prominence as a teaching language. It was then suggested that exposure to multilingualism could happen through the courses taught as part of the programme and through traineeships, availability of language classes, and civic engagement. In particular, it was noted that exposure to multilingualism through civic engagement could be an interesting approach, promoting a more comprehensive understanding of multilingualism not limited to languages but broader cultural experiences. It was also noted that physical mobility would automatically mean exposure to some other language.

Innovative dimension of the curricula

Several elements of innovative curricula were discussed in the breakout rooms. The participants put forward the following suggestions:

- **Focus on learning outcomes.** It was suggested that higher education institutions that would be offering joint programmes with the joint European degree label would work based on learning outcomes as the basis of awarding credits. Students could take their own set of learning outcomes with them and gather evidence/proof in a different learning environment. This would exist next to the shared set of learning outcomes used by the cooperating study programmes. Measures to ensure student achievement of learning outcomes and competences at the level of the programme consortium should be set up.
- **Joint creation.** The joint creation of study programmes/modules was highlighted as a key condition for innovation. This also happens due to the need to deal with issues of assessment.
- **Various approaches to teaching and learning**. The challenge-based approach, collaborative learning, involvement of students, and student-centred

learning were mentioned as key approaches for achieving innovation. Transdisciplinary modules using flexible learning modes, innovative online opportunities, intersectoral learning opportunities, and micro-credentials (including through modularisation of learning) were also identified as options leading to innovation.

Labour market relevance

The importance of alignment with future labour market needs and/or cooperation with businesses and sectors was acknowledged. Two criteria for ensuring the labour market relevance of the joint European degree programmes were put forward by the participants:

- **Establishment of an internal graduate tracking mechanism**. It was suggested that those offering joint European degree programmes should establish a graduate tracking mechanism (e.g. graduate surveys). The establishment of such a mechanism would help higher education institutions track activities and measure the input and output of their programmes, including employment and further education outcomes.
- **Offer traineeships**. Traineeships that are part of the joint European degree label programme were suggested as the most direct link between the programme and the labour market relevance.

Inclusiveness and sustainability

Several potential joint European degree label criteria topics emerged in the discussions about inclusiveness and sustainability during the breakout rooms discussions. The topics suggested cover embedding inclusiveness and sustainability into programme content and delivery, promoting civic engagement, access to digital facilities, and commitment to various existing initiatives. The following suggestions were put forward in terms of inclusiveness and sustainability criteria:

- **Weight of the criteria.** The criteria related to inclusiveness and sustainability should not create a huge additional workload. In terms of environmental sustainability, it is important to identify whether it is required for the content or the delivery.
- **Civic engagement.** The general importance of civic engagement (especially encouraging peace and respect for individuals) was acknowledged. It was suggested that civic engagement could lead to ECTS awarded but could also be implemented beyond the curricula.
- **Contribution to innovation.** The link between diversity and civic engagement, integration into community life, professional orientation and innovative teaching was noted.
- **Operationalisation and measurement.** It was noted that criteria related to inclusiveness and sustainability are difficult to operationalise and measure. There needs to be clarity on what is considered green, civic engagement, etc. At the same time, the curricula should not be overloaded and influenced by a tick boxing exercise. It was also suggested to draw on the EUROSTUDENT initiative for ideas on measuring inclusiveness.
- **Distinction between content and delivery.** The distinction between the content (e.g. including topics in the curricula, focusing on 17 United Nations sustainability goals) and the delivery of the programme (e.g. commitment to socially and geographically inclusive admissions, tailored support to disadvantaged/employed students, minimal carbon footprint) should be made. It was stressed that project management should be sustainable and digital.

- **Tension between priorities.** It was noted that criteria related to inclusiveness might be contradictory to other criteria (especially related to mobility). For instance, if blended mobility is offered, it can undermine the inclusion of visually impaired people.
- **References to other existing documents.** It was suggested that higher education institutions commit to the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education. Moreover, in terms of Doctoral programmes, the respect for the principles of the European Charter for Researchers, Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, and MSCA Green Charter were mentioned.
- **Access to digital facilities.** The importance of ensuring access to digital facilities, including libraries, course catalogues, online learning environments and others, was highlighted. It was noted that joint digital infrastructure is costly to build and may need support at the European level. Virtual mobility management in line with the technical standards of the European Student Card Initiative was promoted.
- **Scope of the label.** It was noted that the label's scope should be inclusive, covering not only Bachelor and Master levels but also Doctorate and short cycle programmes. The participants also noted the need to consider the label's connection with the lifelong learning perspective.

The outcomes of these discussions were discussed with representatives of ministries in the Higher Education Working Group on 16 March.

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