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Accompanying the documents

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a blueprint for a European degree

Proposal for a Council recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education

and

Proposal for a Council recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education

{COM(2024) 144 final}

Introduction

In the letter of intent accompanying the 2023 State of the European Union address, President von der Leyen highlighted a blueprint for a European degree as a key priority for 2024, and this is reflected in the 2024 Commission Work Programme[1] in the form of a package with three concrete deliverables:

- **Commission Communication on a blueprint towards a European degree**: joint programmes bring significant value to students, higher education institutions, employers, and society. However, higher education institutions face significant obstacles in designing and delivering joint educational offers, often due to incompatible or restrictive national and regional rules. The Communication presents the added value of introducing a framework for a European degree, showing that it can be a catalyst for the European Education Area. The proposal outlines the blueprint of the European degree and presents a possible pathway towards its implementation.

- **Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system**: transnational cooperation requires trust and agile procedures. Current quality assurance and recognition procedures remain lengthy and cumbersome and are poorly fit for transnational joint programmes. This proposal seeks to further support the alignment, compatibility, and mainstreaming of European and Bologna tools such as the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, and to go beyond by recommending that Member States, if conditions are met, enable higher education institutions to self-accredit their joint education provisions, and to evaluate alliances of higher education institutions externally at cross-institutional level, across all their joint activities, covering all their joint programmes.

- **Proposal for a Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education**: ensuring that academic staff benefit from equitable, inclusive, and rewarding careers is a precondition for deeper transnational cooperation. The proposal aims to support national higher education systems in valorising and rewarding the diversity of the work their academic staff do beyond research, including developing joint programmes, mobility opportunities, and innovative learning and teaching. It invites Member States to step up their actions to promote attractive working conditions, academic freedom, gender diversity and well-being for higher education academic staff.

Beyond the European symbolic value, a European degree would demonstrate a graduate's international experience, academic excellence, language proficiency, cultural adaptability, and a wider perspective, making them attractive to employers seeking globally minded and highly skilled individuals.

The objective is to give students more opportunities to study and train in several EU countries in the context of a joint study programme – such as those offered through the European Universities alliances – and to be awarded a joint degree, as announced by Heads of State and Government in the European Council Conclusions of 14 December 2017[2].

The initiative responds to the call from the higher education sector, in particular European Universities alliances, to facilitate and make more agile and attractive the delivery of joint educational offers in Europe, which are still often hampered by incompatible national administrative rules, legislations, or the lack of adequate professional incentives. It also responds to the call from students and employers to give more visibility to the skills and competencies acquired in a diverse, international setting.

[1] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Commission work programme 2024: Delivering today and preparing for tomorrow, 17.10.2023 COM (2023) 638. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-documents/commission-work-programme/commission-work-programme-2024_en

[2] European Council meeting (14 December 2017) Conclusions, EUCO 19/1/17 REV 1. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf

Students would benefit from the most innovative pedagogies – as deployed for example in the European Universities alliances, Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters, Marie Skłodowska-Curie (MSCA) Joint Doctoral Programmes, or programmes labelled by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) – to acquire future-proof skills sought by employers and to become innovators and entrepreneurs. Higher education institutions would also benefit from simpler processes to strengthen their cooperation in developing joint degree programmes that contribute to building their institutional capacities and raising their international profile.

2018 Eurobarometer[3]

Universities can better solve big societal challenges by engaging more effectively in transnational cooperation.

- 92% of universities identified the elimination of legal and administrative obstacles to international strategic institutional partnerships as a key issue.
- 93% of respondents believe it would be useful to create EU degrees delivered by networks of European universities, offering students the chance to study in different EU countries, with a flexible choice of courses or modules.

A European degree would be delivered at national, regional, or institutional level on a voluntary basis according to a common set of criteria agreed at the European level. The common set of criteria would make these degrees truly European, as they will still be awarded by universities accredited at the national or regional levels and be included in national legislation in the same way as other types of national degrees.

The processes of accreditation and quality assurance would be done following the regular procedures, regardless of whether programme or institutional accreditation is followed. The European degree would be automatically recognised across the European Union without having to meet any additional criteria or undergo additional recognition procedures.

To move towards a European degree, significant work is needed to improve and streamline quality assurance processes in higher education and to ensure attractive conditions for higher education academic staff involved in transnational cooperation.

The way quality assurance is regulated in many Member States and the discrepancies between national legislative frameworks hinders deep transnational cooperation and the development of joint degree programmes. A fit-for-purpose European Quality Assurance and Recognition System is key to facilitating and simplifying the delivery of high-quality learning provisions delivered jointly between different countries, such as a European degree or micro-credentials.

In addition, academic staff are indispensable for thriving European higher education institutions and deeper transnational cooperation. Building joint educational offers that include mobility, such as joint degree programmes, with innovative teaching and learning methods, requires substantial effort and dedication from academics. However, this is still not properly valorised and recognised in their career development and promotion. A European framework for attractive academic careers is key to operationalising the parity of esteem for teaching, research activities, and involvement in transnational cooperation such as the development of joint degree programmes.

The proposed higher education package is based on extensive evidence and consultation carried out with all relevant actors in the higher education sector, including higher education institutions, students, national quality assurance agencies, employers, and Member States authorities. The initiatives also build on the preliminary results of six ongoing Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects on a European

[3] Eurobarometer, *The European Education Area*, 2018, https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2186

degree and four ongoing Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects exploring a legal status for alliances of higher education institutions.

This package aims to: increase deeper transnational cooperation; boost the competitiveness and attractiveness of Europe's higher education sector on the global stage; cultivate a flexible, skilled, innovative and resilient labour force; foster a strong sense of European belonging; and bring Europe a step closer to delivering the European Education Area by 2025[4]: develop a common EU space for learning mobility, multilingualism, and quality education for all, through strong transnational cooperation between education institutions, their staff, and their students.

This Staff Working Document provides the background to and the evidence for this higher education package.

- **Chapter 1** looks at the higher education landscape in Europe and existing joint programmes and identifies current challenges.

- **Chapter 2** presents the added value of a European degree and discusses the main findings of the policy experimentation projects testing the criteria and award process of the European degree.

- **Chapter 3** introduces the main barriers and obstacles identified by the policy experimentation projects that need to be overcome in order to implement the European degree.

- **Chapter 4** introduces the need for a fit-for-purpose European quality assurance and recognition system. Drawing on studies and consultations, it puts forward recommendations addressing the different kinds of existing quality assurance and recognition systems: institutional, programme-based, mixed, and cross-institutional.

- **Chapter 5** discusses the need for a European framework for attractive, flexible, and sustainable careers in higher education. It summarises the findings of consultations and studies on this topic and identifies challenges and steps forward.

- **Chapter 6** summarises the main findings of the Staff Working Document and outlines the future steps towards the European degree.

[4] Communication from the Commission on A European education area by 2025, COM (2017) 673, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/a-european-education-area-by-2025.html

Chapter 1: A European degree - a key element to achieve the European Education Area and to boost Europe's competitiveness and attractiveness

1.1. The importance of transnational cooperation in higher education

Transnational cooperation is a core tenet of our European way of life. Europe's higher education sector has been a pioneer in embracing this principle to give an entire generation of Europeans the opportunity to study, train, teach, and conduct research across borders and sectors. Efforts such as the Erasmus+ programme[5], the Bologna Process[6], Erasmus Mundus[7], and the European Universities Initiative[8] have set the ground for European higher education institutions to network and cooperate across borders, deliver joint education and research, and raise their profile internationally. They have strengthened European integration and consolidated the European Union as a reference in the global higher education landscape.

Anchored in transnational cooperation, Europe's higher education sector has demonstrated extraordinary resilience to address the most complex challenges, including the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic[9]; providing continuous support to Ukraine's education sector amidst Russia's unjustified war of aggression[10]; and encouraging action to ensure that Europe has the skills, talent, and innovation potential to achieve the green and digital transitions[11] [12].

According to the **U-Multirank's Higher Education Cooperation Index**[13]:

- Higher education institutions that work together with other institutions, businesses, industries, governments, regional bodies, or across borders, perform better than those that are less focused on cooperation.
- European universities cooperate more intensively compared to other regions and have more joint degree programmes and higher student mobility rates than non-EU universities.
- Top performers in the Higher Education Cooperation Index have more students who graduate in time; a higher founding of graduate companies; and a larger publication output.

The transnational component of education is essential to equip Europeans with the competencies they need to thrive in a complex and hyperconnected world. Transnational cooperation enables higher

[5] European Commission, *Erasmus+: EU programme for education, training, youth and sport*, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/
[6] European Agency for Higher Education and Accreditation (EHEA), https://ehea.info/index.php
[7] European Commission, *Erasmus+: Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (students)*, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/opportunities/opportunities-for-individuals/students/erasmus-mundus-joint-masters
[8] European Commission, European Education Area: European Universities initiative, https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative
[9] European Commission, *Back to school: EU support to pupils, students and teachers*, August 21, 2021, https://education.ec.europa.eu/news/back-to-school-eu-support-to-pupils-students-and-teachers
[10] European Commission, *European Education Area: Support for people affected by Russia's invasion of Ukraine*, https://education.ec.europa.eu/support-for-people-affected-by-russias-invasion-of-ukraine
[11] European Commission, *European Education Area: Green education initiatives*, https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/green-education/about-green-education
[12] European Commission, *European Education Area: Digital education initiatives*, https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/about-digital-education
[13] 'U-Multirank creates new "*Higher Education Cooperation Index*", showing the key to strategic success is cooperation', U-Multirank, September 21, 2021. https://www.umultirank.org/press-media/press-releases/u-multirank-creates-new-higher-education-cooperation-index/

education institutions to maximise the benefits of European diversity[14], building on the core shared values of inclusion and excellence.

However, the same diversity that renders the European model unique presents challenges of its own that hamper the creation and delivery of joint educational provisions. They include lengthy and complex quality assurance procedures, incompatible legislative requirements, the lack of automatic mutual recognition of learning periods and qualifications obtained abroad, and the insufficient valorisation of the work of higher education academic staff that engage in transnational cooperation initiatives.

1.2. The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area

Overcoming the complexity of bringing together the varied higher education systems in Europe has been the focus of the Bologna Process for the past two and a half decades. This process started with the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998 when the ministers of Germany, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom committed to harmonising the architecture of the European higher education system. It was formalised in 1999 when 29 countries signed the Bologna Declaration[15], agreeing to work together to develop the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) – a common higher education space built on common values and using common tools that ensures more comparable, compatible, and coherent higher education systems in Europe[16]. Today, the European Higher Education Area includes 49 countries and the European Commission among its Members[17].

From the outset, the Bologna Process has encouraged joint programmes and joint degrees as a key element in supporting the internationalisation of higher education institutions. This has been reflected in every Bologna communiqué that has been adopted since 1998.

Ministerial Conferences are organised every two or three years to assess the progress made within the European Higher Education Area. Decisions are adopted in the form of communiqués. Joint programmes and joint degrees have been encouraged in all of them (emphasis added in bold)[18]:

Sorbonne, 1998:

'Progressive harmonisation of the overall framework of our degrees and cycles can be achieved through strengthening of already existing experience, ***joint diplomas****, pilot initiatives, and dialogue with all concerned.'*

Prague, 2001:

To further strengthen the European dimensions of higher education and graduate employability, *'Ministers called upon the higher education sector to increase the development of modules, courses and curricula at all levels with "European" content, orientation or organisation […] particularly [those] offered in partnership by institutions from different countries* ***and leading to a recognized joint degree.****'*

Ministers also encouraged the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) to '*arrange seminars to explore [among other] areas: […]* ***the development of joint degrees***.'

[14] Dalli, H., '*European diversity: the strength of our union*', The Parliament, May 23, 2022, https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/news/article/european-diversity-the-strength-of-our-union

[15] Bologna Process Committee 1999, *Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education convened in Bologna on 19 June 1999*, (The Bologna Declaration), http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/Ministerial_conferences/02/8/1999_Bologna_Declaration_English_553028.pdf

[16] Council of Europe, *European Higher Education Area*, https://www.coe.int/en/web/higher-education-and-research/european-higher-education-area

[17] 'As of the BFUG Meeting LXXX, held in Strasbourg on 11 and 12 April 2022, it was decided by the BFUG members to suspend the rights of representation of the Russian Federation and Belarus in the EHEA,' https://www.ehea.info/page-members

[18] European Agency for Higher Education and Accreditation (EHEA), *Ministerial Declarations and Communiqués*, https://ehea.info/page-ministerial-declarations-and-communiques

Berlin, 2003:

Ministers noted '*that initiatives have been taken by Higher Education Institutions in various European countries to pool their academic resources and cultural traditions in order to promote the development of integrated study programmes* ***and joint degrees*** *at first, second and third level.*'

They also stressed '*the necessity of ensuring a substantial period of study abroad in* ***joint degree programmes*** *as well as proper provision for linguistic diversity and language learning, so that students may achieve their full potential for European identity, citizenship and employability'*; they agreed '*to engage at the national level* ***to remove legal obstacles to the establishment and recognition of such degrees*** *and to actively support the development and adequate quality assurance of* ***integrated curricula leading to joint degrees.'***

Bergen, 2005:

'*We express support for the subsidiary texts to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and call upon all national authorities and other stakeholders to* ***recognise joint degrees*** *awarded in two or more countries in the EHEA.*'

They called for progress in the '*implementation of the standards and guidelines for quality assurance as proposed in the ENQA report'*; the '*implementation of the national frameworks for qualifications'*; and ***'the awarding and recognition of joint degrees, including at the doctorate level'***.

London, 2007:

*'****Easily readable and comparable degrees*** *and accessible information on educational systems and qualifications frameworks are prerequisites for citizens' mobility and ensuring the continuing attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA.'*

Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 2009:

'Within each of the three cycles, opportunities for mobility shall be created in the structure of degree programmes. ***Joint degrees and programmes*** *as well as mobility windows* ***shall become more common practice****.'*

Bucharest, 2012:

'We will allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements. In particular, we will aim to recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies ***on joint and double degree programmes****.*'

'We ***encourage higher education institutions to further develop joint programmes and degrees*** *as part of a wider EHEA approach.* ***We will examine national rules and practices relating to joint programmes and degrees as a way to dismantle obstacles to cooperation*** *and mobility embedded in national contexts.'*

Yerevan, 2015:

'A common degree structure and credit system, common quality assurance standards and guidelines, cooperation for mobility and ***joint programmes and degrees are the foundations of the EHEA****.'*

Paris, 2018:

'In order to ***encourage the development of more joint programmes and joint degrees****, we will also enable and* ***promote the use of the "European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes" in our higher education systems****.'*

'We will foster and extend integrated transnational cooperation in higher education, research and innovation, for increased mobility of staff, students and researchers, ***and for more joint study programmes*** *throughout the whole EHEA.'*

Rome, 2020:

***'Deeper cooperation between higher education institutions** will help to address the above objectives through joint teaching and research. We will strive to **eliminate obstacles to cooperation** at national levels and to enable all higher education institutions in the EHEA to benefit from it. The alliances formed under the European Universities Initiative constitute one important way of **exploring deeper, larger scale systemic cooperation, which can prove helpful for detecting and overcoming the obstacles to closer transnational cooperation by higher education institutions in the future**.'*

The Bologna Process has led diverse initiatives to build consistency and transparency across the European Higher Education Area to improve quality, inclusion and equity[19], excellence and innovation in higher education[20] teaching and learning, and its global attractiveness[21].

Notably, in 2005, the Ministers of the European Higher Education Area adopted the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), to provide Member Countries with shared standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance of programmes[22].

In 2015, the Ministers approved the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes[23] (European Approach) to facilitate the external quality assurance of joint programmes by using common standards, procedures, and tools, including the ESG.

The European Approach entails a single review for joint programmes coordinated and offered jointly by higher education institutions from two or more countries. The review is led by a quality assurance agency registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)[24]; the result can be positive (valid for six years); positive subject to recommendations being met; or negative. In all cases, the review report is publicly published in the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR)[25].

The European Approach has minimised the workload involved in accreditation by implementing a single procedure and has increased the visibility and added value of joint degrees in the eyes of employers. However, the use of the European Approach remains modest – only 28 joint programmes have been fully accredited to date (February 2024)[26].

[19] European Commission, *European Education Area: Improving quality and equity in education and training*, https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/improving-quality

[20] European Commission, *European Education Area: Higher education*, https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education

[21] European Commission, *European Education Area: The European Education Area in the world*, https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/eea-in-the-world

[22] The ESG were adopted following a proposal prepared by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in cooperation with the European Students' Union (ESU), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and the European University Association (EUA). The ESG were revised in 2015, https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

[23] European Commission, Yerevan Communiqué, Conference of Ministers responsible for higher education, Yerevan, 2015. https://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/70/7/YerevanCommuniqueFinal_613707.pdf

[24] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *Registered agencies*, https://www.eqar.eu/register/agencies/

[25] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *Database of External QA Results (DEQAR)*, https://www.eqar.eu/about/annual-reports/2020-2/database-of-external-qa-results-deqar/

[26] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *Joint programmes that used the European Approach*, https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/european-approach-cases/

1.3. The European Education Area

EU-led initiatives have contributed to accelerating the implementation of Bologna commitments and brought a new impetus to shared ambitions in higher education. Examples include the 2006 European Parliament and Council Recommendation on further cooperation in quality assurance in higher education, which led to the creation of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)[27]; and the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad[28], which called on Member States to ensure the full implementation of the Bologna Process instruments.

A notable development was the European Commission Communication on strengthening European identity through education and culture[29], published on 14 November 2017 in the leadup to the EU Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg, Sweden. The communication set out the vision of the European Education Area as a common space for quality education and lifelong learning across borders for all.

This idea was endorsed at the Social Summit in Gothenburg later that year and in the Council Conclusions of 7 June 2018, where Member States also expressed their support for the emergence of 'European Universities' as 'bottom-up networks that [...] work seamlessly across borders, and which could play a flagship role in the creation of a European Education Area [...], contributing to empower new generations of European citizens and to strengthen the international competitiveness of higher education in Europe'[30].

The first call of the European Universities Initiative was launched that same year. In September 2020, the European Commission Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025[31] identified the need to explore a framework to ease the delivery of joint degree programmes of higher education alliances. The European Council backed this idea in its 2021 Conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education[32], inviting the Member States and the Commission to explore the feasibility of European degrees.

The 2022 Commission Communication on a European Strategy for Universities[33] further developed this vision by proposing exploratory work towards a European degree as part of four flagships to boost the European dimension of higher education. As a first step, the Commission committed to exploring and developing European criteria for the award of a European degree label that could be issued as a complementary certificate for students graduating from transnational joint programmes. Later that year,

[27] Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 February 2006 on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education (OJ L 64 04.03.2006, p. 60), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:064:0060:0062:EN:PDF

[28] Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (OJ C, C/444, 10.12.2018, p. 1), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)

[29] Communication from the Commission on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture, The European Commission's contribution to the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg, 17 November 2017. COM (2017) 673, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2017:673:FIN

[30] Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area (OJ C, C/195, 07.06.2018, p. 7), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018XG0607(01)

[31] Communication from the Commission on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025, COM (2020) 625, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0625

[32] Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education, 17 May 2021, 8658/21, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8658-2021-INIT/en/pdf

[33] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European strategy for universities, 18.1.2022 Com(2022) 16, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2022%3A16%3AFIN

the Council Conclusions on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation[34], invited the Commission to pilot the European criteria.

The Commission co-developed a set of preliminary European criteria with Member States, higher education institutions and other stakeholders and launched a call in June 2022 under the Erasmus+ policy experimentation action to test them[35]. Six project consortia involving over 60 higher education institutions and 17 ministries across the European Union and beyond were selected to conduct the pilots over a one-year period starting in April 2023[36].

The European Parliament, in its resolution of 16 January 2024 on the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027[37], added impetus to the Commission's initiative on a European degree. Members of the European Parliament welcomed 'the steps taken towards a joint European degree label and common European diplomas', highlighting that 'the creation of common curricula and research cooperation between universities in Europe are instrumental to address needs in strategic areas'.

1.4. Joint transnational programmes in Europe

Joint programmes allow higher education institutions to enhance the quality and attractiveness of their academic offer and provide students with learning opportunities that individual institutions cannot deliver on their own. They enrich and facilitate mutual learning and cooperation; enhance student and staff mobility; and encourage the use of innovative pedagogies.

The European approach to Quality Assurance of joint programmes approved by European Higher Education Area (EHEA) ministers at their conference in Yerevan, May 2015, provides a definition of joint programmes and joint degrees[38]:

- **Joint programmes**: an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions from the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) countries and leading to double/multiple degrees or a joint degree.
- **Joint degree**: a single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme.

While it is difficult to estimate the total number of joint programmes that currently exist in Europe, data and literature suggest a growing trend for demand. In 2009, a Bologna Stocktaking Report estimated that there could be 2 500 joint programmes in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) [39]. Building on this, a Background Report on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, published in 2014, suggested that the number of joint programmes could be above 3 000, noting that

[34] Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (2022/C 160/01), OJ C 160, 13.4.2022, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H0413(01)

[35] European Commission, *Call for proposals: European policy experimentation in higher education*, ERASMUS-EDU-2022-POL-EXP, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2022/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2022-pol-exp-he_en.pdf

[36] Six project consortia involving over 60 higher education institutions and 17 ministries were selected in June 2022 under the Erasmus+ policy experimentation action to pilot criteria for the award of a European degree label to joint programmes. The criteria were first proposed in the European Strategy for Universities (18 January 2023) and co-developed by the European Commission, Member States, higher education institutions and other stakeholders following the invitation of the Council in its conclusions on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (5 April 2023).

[37] European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2024 on the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 (2023/2002(INI)), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0007_EN.html

[38] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *Definitions*, https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/definitions/

[39] Bologna Follow Up Group, Andrejs Rauhvargers, Cynthia Deane, Wilfried Pauwels, *Bologna Process Stocktaking Report 2009*, Ministerial Conference in Leuven, April 2009, https://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2009_Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve/94/7/Stocktaking_report_2009_FINAL_594947.pdf

'many more joint programmes could, however, be provided as joint degrees if national legislation, accreditation and recognition practices would become more suitable for awarding joint degrees'[40].

More recently, the six Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects that have explored the feasibility of a European degree have mapped about 1 000 joint programmes in Europe offered among 140 higher education institutions – including partners and associated partners. Given that Europe is home to almost 5 000 higher education institutions[41], the total offer is likely larger and could grow even bigger with enabling frameworks at national, regional, and institutional levels.

Joint transnational programmes have been long established in European higher education. Notable examples include the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters programmes[42] and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Doctoral Networks[43], along with the more recent European Universities alliances.

Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters programmes

The initiation of the Erasmus Mundus programme in 2004 rapidly supported a global reputation for joint programmes at the master level through multi-national consortia from Europe and abroad that construct a 'joined-up' teaching programme[44].

Statistics on the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree programmes (EMJMD) show that during 2014-2020[45]:

- 369 higher education institutions were a coordinator or partner.
- 60% of the top-10 European universities and nearly 75% of the 50 top-ranked European universities[46] participate in at least one of the 250 funded programmes, indicating excellence.
- 60% of participating higher education institutions were ranked beyond the top 500 in the world, underlining inclusiveness.
- Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree programmes have a global reach: 80% of the 7 718 students that received scholarships came from partner countries[47].

The programme remains highly competitive and has delivered significant value for its graduates. Erasmus Mundus has also been a rich testbed to understand the challenges involved in building a transnational teaching and learning offer at the master level.

[40] Background Report on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, 2014, https://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/72/9/European_Approach_QA_of_Joint_Programmes_Background_Report_613729.pdf

[41] European Commission, *European Education Area: Higher education initiatives*, https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/about-higher-education

[42] European Commission, *Erasmus+: Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (students)*, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/opportunities/opportunities-for-individuals/students/erasmus-mundus-joint-masters

[43] European Commission, *Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions: Doctoral Networks*, https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/actions/doctoral-networks

[44] Each master programme is delivered by an international consortium of at least three higher education institutions from at least three different countries and other educational and non-educational partners: https://education.ec.europa.eu/study-in-europe

[45] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, *Erasmus+ Programme, Statistical factsheets on the achievements of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (2014-2020)*, Publications Office, 2021, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/639462

[46] This takes as a reference both the 2020 Academic Ranking of World Universities (Shanghai Ranking) and the 2020 Times Higher Education World University Ranking (THE).

[47] 'Partner Countries' refers to third countries not associated to the Erasmus+ programme in 2014-2020.

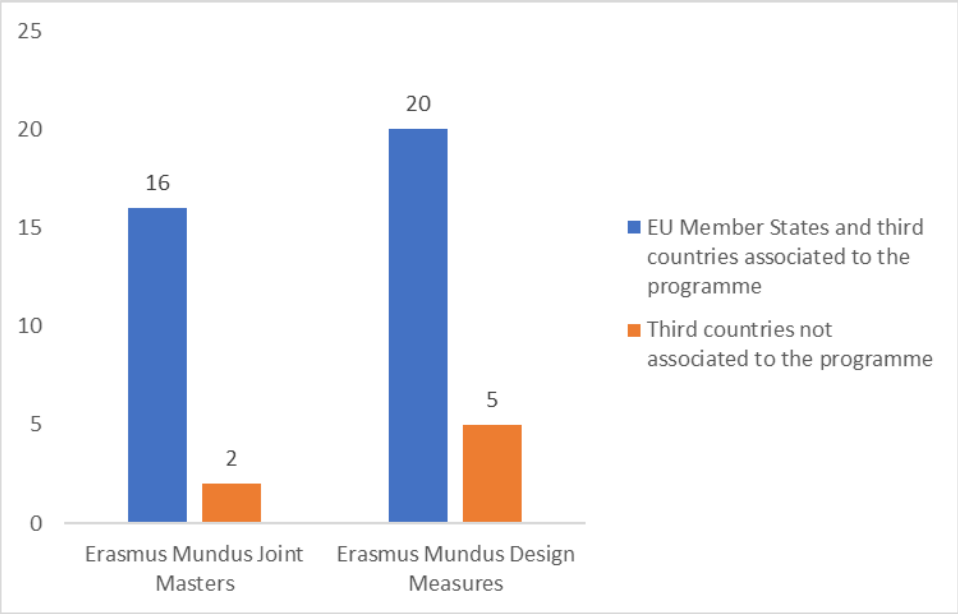
The latest **Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Graduate Impact Surveys**[48] reveal that graduates[49] from these joint programmes:

- Report the greatest impact in their careers and intercultural experiences.
- Improve employment-relevant skills, such as language (78%), critical thinking (77%) sector- or field-specific skills (76%), communication (74%), and analytical and problem-solving (74%) skills.
- Improve personal and intercultural development, including openness about new challenges (82%), tolerance (79%), confidence in their own abilities (76%), and awareness of own strengths and weaknesses (75%).
- Are more likely to find a job that matches their education than the average master graduate[50].

The Erasmus Mundus Design Measures (EMDM) were introduced in 2021 to support the design of innovative, transnational and integrated study programmes at master level[51]. Statistics from the Erasmus Mundus latest call for proposals[52] report that coordinating partners of the newly selected proposals come from several Member States and that a third of the higher education institutions participating in the Erasmus Mundus Design Measures were new organisations.

[48] Preliminary figures from the forthcoming *Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Graduate Impact Survey 2023*.
[49] Both with and without an Erasmus Mundus scholarship.
[50] As reported in the previous Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Graduate Impact Survey 2020/21, which compared the data collected from Erasmus Mundus graduates with the EUROGRADUATE Pilot Survey conducted in 2018 (this analysis was not repeated in the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Graduate Impact Survey 2023). See https://www.esaa-eu.org/fileadmin/esaa/content/news/files/2022/gis_202021_definite_report.pdf
[51] European Commission, *Erasmus+: Erasmus Mundus Design Measures (EMDM)*, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/opportunities/opportunities-for-organisations/cooperation-among-organisations-and-institutions/erasmus-mundus-design-measures-emdm?facets__field_eac_tags=185
[52] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, *Erasmus Mundus, analysis of the results of the second 2021-2027 call (joint masters and design measures) – Erasmus+ Programme*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/38904

Figure 1.1: Geographical origin of coordinating partners of Erasmus Mundus actions under the second 2021-2027 call



Source: European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Erasmus Mundus, analysis of the results of the second 2021-2027 call (joint masters and design measures) – Erasmus+ Programme, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/38904.

Since 2004[53], the Erasmus Mundus programme has funded 719 joint masters and 43 joint doctoral programmes[54], and it has supported 155 Erasmus Mundus Design Measures since 2021[55]. The figures underline that the reach of Erasmus Mundus is strong and still growing after nearly two decades and suggest the clear latent potential to build more transnational joint programmes beyond existing Erasmus-funded measures.

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Joint Doctoral Networks

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Joint Doctoral Networks are a prime example of highly integrated transnational cooperation in doctoral training. PhD candidates are enrolled in a joint programme and are jointly supervised, leading to the delivery of joint, double, or multiple doctoral degrees. The goal of this EU-funded action is to train highly skilled doctoral candidates, stimulate their creativity and innovation capacity, and boost their employability[56].

88 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Joint Doctoral programmes were funded between 2014 and 2023, involving more than 1 200 individual fellowships[57]. The share of submitted proposals for Joint Doctorates has remained stable over time, accounting for approximately 7% of all submitted proposals under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie action between 2014 and 2023[58]. This speaks of the continued interest for joint programmes at the doctoral level.

[53] Eurydice, *'Erasmus Mundus turns 20: reflecting on two decades of a global programme'*, January 30, 2024, https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news/erasmus-mundus-turns-20-reflecting-two-decades-global-programme

[54] The Erasmus Mundus programme originally encompassed joint master and doctorate programmes before becoming part of the Erasmus+ umbrella in 2014.

[55] European Commission services. Internal statistics.

[56] European Commission, *Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions: Doctoral Networks*, https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/actions/doctoral-networks

[57] European Commission services. Internal statistics.

[58] European Commission services. Internal statistics. Applicants can submit proposals for one of three types of doctorates under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie action: standard doctorates, industrial doctorates, and joint doctorates.

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)[59] also has an extensive portfolio of joint programmes across its Knowledge Innovation Communities (KICs) and an 'online campus'[60] that provides education opportunities from over 200 partners.

European Universities alliances

Further impetus for joint transnational programmes at all levels (bachelor, master, and doctoral) came in 2018 with the launch of the first call for European Universities alliances. These are inter-university campuses that pool their expertise, platforms, and resources to integrate long-term joint education strategies, and deliver joint curricula and flexible learning pathways, allowing students, staff, and researchers to move seamlessly between alliance members[61].

To date, the European Universities Initiative[62] has supported the creation of 50 European Universities alliances, involving more than 430 higher education institutions, and has the ambitious goal of expanding to 60 European Universities alliances by mid-2024[63].

Preliminary data from the monitoring framework of the European Universities Initiative, carried out in autumn 2023, shows that European Universities alliances have created nearly 160 joint programmes since the beginning of the initiative[64]. A particularly important development is the creation of joint bachelor programmes, such as the Una Europa joint bachelor on European studies[65].

Una Europa's Joint Bachelor of Arts in European Studies

The Una Europa Joint Bachelor of Arts in European Studies (BAES) is one of the few joint programmes at bachelor level. Co-developed by 11 partner universities and accredited using the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, the programme examines the fundamental aspects and values of the European Union and of European states and societies.

Adopting a multidisciplinary approach, it reflects on Europe's role in the world. Through its extensive mobility programme, students can study in two or three universities, which gives them the opportunity to not only learn about Europe, but also to experience it first hand and grow in a truly international setting.

Additionally, the European Universities Alliances seem to have increased the use of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, reflected on a number of new programmes recently accredited or that plan to do so.

The Bologna Process had succeeded in establishing components and tools for accelerating the provision of transnational teaching and learning throughout the European Higher Education Area, but until the European Universities Initiative[66], there had not been a mechanism in place to bring together all the elements into a full testbed that could further inform policy developments.

[59] European Institute of Technology (EIT), https://eit.europa.eu/
[60] European Institute of Technology (EIT), *EIT Campus online platform*, https://eit-campus.eu/
[61] European Commission, *First 17 "European Universities" selected: a major step towards building a European Education Area*, June 26, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_3389
[62] European Commission, *European Education Area: European Universities initiative,* https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative
[63] European Commission, *European Education Area: 50 European Universities to cooperate across borders and disciplines,* July 3, 2023, https://education.ec.europa.eu/news/european-universities-2023-call-results?
[64] European Commission. Preliminary data from the study *Outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative* (in preparation – not yet published).
[65] Una Europa, *Joint Bachelor of Arts in European Studies*, https://www.una-europa.eu/study/baes
[66] European Commission, European Education Area: One year of European Strategy for Universities marks important achievements, April 5, 2023, https://education.ec.europa.eu/news/european-strategy-for-universities-one-year

Latent potential of joint transnational programmes

The attractiveness and competitiveness showcased by the Erasmus Mundus programme over the past two decades and, more recently, by the European Universities Initiative, have not yet been translated into the widespread and systematic adoption of the transnational model across European higher education systems.

Academic and administrative staff still face many obstacles when building transnational and multi-disciplinary programmes. European Universities alliances themselves have faced considerable difficulties in putting joint programmes in motion: a study by the European University Association shows that conferences of rectors point to accreditation and quality assurance of joint programmes as the most common challenge faced by the alliances[67].

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)[68], which brings together information about the diverse quality assurance practices across European countries, recognises that the European Approach has been an important development to facilitate the creation of transnational joint programmes in Europe. Nonetheless, as experienced by Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programmes and the European Universities alliances, the wider development of transnational teaching and learning is still often hampered by incompatible national administrative rules and legislation.

The diversity of approaches is documented in detail through the European Network of Information Centres and the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (ENIC/NARIC)[69] network which provides country information across areas such as quality assurance, the recognition of foreign qualifications, and overall qualifications frameworks[70].

1.5. The need to act

Despite the considerable progress that Europe's higher education sector has made over the past 25 years, challenges still need to be overcome to meet the demand for transnational educational offer and facilitate the development, delivery, and recognition of transnational joint programmes in the European Education Area.

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced a unique challenge to transnational cooperation, reflected in a steep decline in student mobility rates across the EU, from 11.2% in 2020 to 9.8% in 2021. However, as indicated in the Education and Training Monitor 2023, the limited growth in the share of mobile students in the years leading up to 2021, 'suggests that there are other barriers to mobility besides those imposed by the pandemic that would need to be removed if the EU is to establish a European Education Area.'[71]

Indeed, according to a recent study that included interviews with European Universities alliances, the main obstacles to transnational cooperation arise from restrictive elements of national legislation and a lack of the full implementation of agreed Bologna tools[72].

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[67] Claeys-Kulik, A., Bennetot Pruvot, E., Estermann, T., Jørgensen, T., *The European Universities Initiative and system-level reforms: Current challenges and considerations for the future*, European University Association (EUA), 2022, https://eua.eu/resources/publications/1038:the-european-universities-initiative-and-system-level-reforms.html

[68] European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, https://www.enqa.eu/

[69] European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) and National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (NARIC), https://www.enic-naric.net/

[70] European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) and National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (NARIC), *Countries of the network*, https://www.enic-naric.net/page-countries-of-the-networks

[71] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Education and training monitor 2023 – Comparative report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/936303

[72] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Burneikaitė, G., Pocius, D., Potapova, E. et al., *The road towards a possible joint European degree – Identifying opportunities and investigating the impact and*

> *'The work on the creation of the collaborative degree programmes in the pilot phase of RUN-EU has shown that the implementation of Bologna tools varies quite extensively between European countries. This includes, for instance, different duration and ECTS loads for same level degree programmes, different grading systems, study periods as well as a wide range of barriers to recognition.*'
>
> RUN-EU (European Universities alliance with members in Austria, Belgium, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands) – Call for Evidence.

The implementation of Bologna tools and procedures has been uneven across the European Union. In some cases instruments are not allowed or, while allowed, they are restricted to a limited number of cases or cannot be used in practice due to additional national requirements. This limits the added value and the systemic impact of Bologna tools and means that the legal framework of one single country can limit progress for the rest willing to participate in joint transnational programmes.

The **Mobility Scoreboard 2022/2023**[73] shows uneven progress toward automatic recognition among countries in the European Higher Education Area:

- Only 13 education systems[74] have system level automatic recognition of degrees that are issued in all other European Higher Education Area countries.
- 15 systems[75] have automatic recognition for some European countries, usually based on regional, bilateral or multilateral agreements.
- 11 education systems[76] have no automatic recognition and separate procedures apply to the qualifications issued by all European Higher Education Area countries.

While more joint programmes are being developed by universities to combine the complementary strengths from different institutions, only a minority lead to a joint degree. The 2020 study 'Implementing joint degrees in the Erasmus Mundus action of the Erasmus+ programme' shows that only a third (32%) of Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters' Degree programmes manage to deliver fully joint degrees[77], whereas most of them (44%) deliver multiple or double degrees, and 23% award a combination of joint and single degrees[78].

This means that less than half (43%) of the full partner higher education institutions taking part in an Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters' programme succeeded in establishing joint degree arrangements with

feasibility of different approaches – Final report, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/945147

[73] European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, *Mobility scoreboard – Higher education background report 2022/2023 – Eurydice report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/001589

[74] Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Croatia, Italy, Malta, Austria, Poland, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Türkiye.

[75] Belgium's three higher education systems, Czechia, Iceland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Lichtenstein, Hungary, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, and Slovakia.

[76] Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Ireland, Spain, Switzerland, Slovenia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia, and Cyprus.

[77] 21% provide a single diploma to all students, jointly awarded by all the higher education institutions of the consortium; 11% provide a single diploma jointly awarded by the higher education institutions where the students studied – 'joint degrees per track' – which means that different graduates may get different degrees.

[78] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, *Implementing joint degrees in the Erasmus Mundus action of the Erasmus+ programme*, Publications Office, 2020, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/896549

one or more of their counterparts[79]. The reasons are linked to administrative difficulties and disparities between national (and regional) legislation. The more countries are involved, the more complicated it becomes to develop joint programmes and award joint degrees.

Among the 40 first European Universities alliances supported by the Erasmus+ programme, about 160 new joint degree programmes have been developed at all levels (bachelor, masters, and doctoral). However, preliminary data from the 2023 monitoring framework of the European Universities Initiative indicate that European Universities alliances often struggle to align legal frameworks, academic calendars, accreditation requirements, tuition fees, and administrative practices, even more when creating joint programmes at the bachelor level[80].

An additional challenge concerns the decision of awarding a single joint degree or multiple (dual) degrees. Since awarding a single joint degree is a complex process that requires aligning differing national criteria, it is not always possible for all alliance partners to act as full degree-awarding institutions, leading some European Universities alliances to opt for dual/multiple degrees[81].

Similarly, there is no authoritative or transparent framework to present degree transcripts from transnational joint programmes that detail the extent of the achievements, skills, and competencies of international graduates. This is a problem in the current multi-national, multi-disciplinary labour market driven by innovation ecosystems.

A recent report examining the state of play of joint degrees under Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters' programmes identifies legislative, institutional, and recognition barriers to the implementation of joint degrees[82].

At doctoral level, a 2022 report analysing the obstacles faced by Marie Skłodowska-Curie Joint Doctoral Networks in Horizon 2020, indicates similar or even more complex incompatibilities, since doctoral degrees are subject to more rigid regulations[83].

A coherent and transparent framework for transnational joint degrees in the field of higher education is still missing and systemic change is required to bring it into existence. Some national and/or regional legislative frameworks in EU Member States do not clearly distinguish between joint degrees and joint programmes, and when legal provisions exist, the terminology differs substantially[84]. Although joint programmes and even joint degrees might not be explicitly forbidden, existing regulations on the necessary components of joint programmes can render them de facto impossible.

An important obstacle to the implementation of joint programmes is related to quality assurance. Despite the adoption of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in 2015 by Ministers of the European Higher Education Area, its uptake remains modest, with only 28 joint

[79] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, *Erasmus+ Programme, Statistical factsheets on the achievements of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degrees (2014-2020),* Publications Office, 2021, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/639462.

[80] European Commission. Preliminary data from the study *Outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative* (in preparation – not yet published).

[81] European Commission. Preliminary data from the study *Outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative* (in preparation – not yet published).

[82] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative, Zalunardo, V., and Fernández-Figares, I. *'Joint Degrees and Erasmus Mundus: State of play report for the 2023 Erasmus Mundus Annual Conference "Boosting the potential of Joint Degrees in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes"'*, 2023, https://erasmus-networks.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/Joint-Degrees-and-Erasmus-Mundus.pdf

[83] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Dėlkutė, R., Nikinmaa, J., Pupinis, M. et al., *Study on mobility flows of researchers in the context of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions – Analysis and recommendations towards a more balanced brain circulation across the European Research Area – Executive summary*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/40d1c038-03e7-11ed-acce-01aa75ed71a1/language-en%C2%A0

[84] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, *Implementing joint degrees in the Erasmus Mundus action of the Erasmus+ programme*, Publications Office, 2020, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/896549

programmes having been accredited to date (February 2024)[85]. This confirms the need for further action to simplify and widen quality assurance for joint degree programmes.

Indeed, a recent study investigating the impact and feasibility of a European degree found that some of the main challenges that higher education institutions need to overcome when setting up joint programmes include the need to undergo multiple accreditation procedures, difficult reaccreditation procedures, and the varying durations for which joint programmes are accredited. While in theory a single accreditation for joint programmes should suffice, 'multiple parallel procedures are often a reality'.[86]

Closely related to quality assurance is the challenge of ensuring automatic recognition of joint degrees. The 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad[87] called for the implementation of automatic recognition by 2025 – a key objective of both the European Higher Education Area and the European Education Area.

However, the experience of European Universities alliances suggests that the lack of automatic recognition remains a pressing issue for joint programmes[88]. This is confirmed by the recent report from the European Commission to the European Council that shows that one-third of higher education institutions check the quality assurance processes of the other institution when deciding on whether to recognise a qualification[89].

A final issue is the need to ensure attractive working conditions and reward mechanisms for the academic staff engaged in excellent teaching and learning, including the design and implementation of joint programmes. World-class innovative teaching and learning are needed to deliver world-class joint programmes, but the career focus of most higher education institutions remains research. There is limited parity of esteem for other activities such as teaching and learning, administration, community outreach, business development, or engagement in transnational cooperation.

According to a recent study that surveyed higher education institutions representatives and academic staff, two thirds of respondents indicate that transnational cooperation in teaching and learning is part of the higher education institutional strategy, and that career pathways for academic staff enable, support, and encourage engagement in transnational cooperation activities. However, only 40% agree that engagement in transnational cooperation is effectively considered in appraisal, promotion, and rewards mechanisms[90].

[85] https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/european-approach-cases/

[86] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Burneikaitė, G., Pocius, D., Potapova, E. et al., *The road towards a possible joint European degree – Identifying opportunities and investigating the impact and feasibility of different approaches – Final report*, p. 25. Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/945147

[87] Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (2018/C 444/01) OJC 444/1, 10.12.2018, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01))https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)

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

[89] Report from the Commission to the Council on the implementation of 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, COM/2023/91, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=COM:2023:91:FIN

[90] Ecorys, based on research carried out in 2023 to assess the current situation regarding academic staff in higher education in Europe.

In November 2022 the Commission published its progress report towards the achievement of the European Education Area[91]. The report noted the strategic importance of expanding transnational learning mobility for all students across the European Education Area; having a fit-for-purpose European quality assurance and recognition system; and piloting a European degree label that attests the learning outcomes and skills obtained from joint transnational programmes.

Following on from this report, the Commission has proposed a new target of at least 25% of graduates in higher education having a learning mobility experience (up from the current 20% target)[92]. This adds urgency to the challenge of overcoming barriers to transnational cooperation, including administrative burden, lack of automatic recognition schemes, and incentives for academic staff engaging in the development and delivery of transnational joint programmes.

1.6. Building bridges for effective European cooperation in higher education

On 5 April 2022, the Council adopted a Recommendation on building bridges for effective European cooperation in higher education[93] with the aim of enabling deeper and more sustainable transnational cooperation among higher education institutions across Europe.

The recommendation invited EU Member States to implement more coherent legislative frameworks at national level that encourage and facilitate transnational cooperation; enable students to engage in cross-border study programmes and training; and strengthen the inclusiveness, excellence, diversity, attractiveness, and global competitiveness of Europe's higher education sector.

The Council specifically called on Member States to facilitate the implementation of joint programmes and the award of joint degrees, as well as to explore the delivery of a joint European degree label and the introduction of institutionalised cooperation instruments, including a possible legal status for European Universities alliances.

It also included concrete recommendations to encourage sustained financial support for transnational cooperation (such as national funding for alliances of European universities); strengthen institutional autonomy; support an institutional approach to quality assurance and the implementation of the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes; encourage the provision of high quality virtual collaborative learning and lifelong learning opportunities; and ensure diversity, inclusion, equality, and gender balance in the governance structures of higher education institutions.

The European Commission was tasked with evaluating the progress made by Member States in implementing the recommendation. To this end, the Commission launched an online survey in spring 2023 following consultations with Member States' representatives taking part in the European Education Area Strategic Framework Working Group on Higher Education. 29 responses from 28 countries[94] were received with considerable feedback from national administrations.

The draft survey report[95] revealed that some Member States have made considerable progress in some areas. However, it also showed that progress is uneven, and that considerable work remains ahead.

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[91] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Progress towards the achievement of the European Education Area – Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/059480

[92] Proposal for a Council Recommendation 'Europe on the Move' – learning mobility opportunities for everyone, 15.11.2023 COM(2023) 719, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/europe-on-the-move-recommendation-COM_2023_719_1_EN.pdf

[93] Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (2022/C 160/01), OJ C 160, 13.4.2022, p. 1–8, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H0413(01)

[94] The EU 27 Member States (including the Flemish and Walloon regions in Belgium) and Norway.

[95] The draft report is currently being updated with clarifications from respondents. The results reported in this Staff Working Document are thus merely indicative and subject to modification.

Exploring the potential implementation of a European degree and a legal status for alliances of higher education institutions

Most countries indicated that they encourage the provision of joint programmes and joint degrees, although the measures and scope vary. In some cases, members of European Universities alliances were encouraged to apply to the Erasmus+ call to test the implementation of European degree label. In others, the establishment of joint programmes and the delivery of joint degrees is simply 'allowed' in the framework of the institutional autonomy that higher education institutions have, with no specific support in place. Some countries reported having amended their higher education legislation to simplify the implementation of joint degrees, although in some cases the amendments apply only to higher education institutions that are part of a European Universities alliance.

Two thirds of the countries said that they are waiting for the outcomes of the Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects (launched in 2023) before they examine the potential delivery of a European degree label.

Over half of the countries surveyed indicated that some of their higher education institutions are able to test the implementation of a legal status for alliances of European universities. In half of those countries, this was possible before the adoption of the Council recommendation. Just as with joint programmes and joint degrees, the possibility to test a legal status for alliances of higher education institutions applies mostly to members of existing European Universities alliances. This represents, nonetheless, a positive step forward.

Implementation of innovative joint transnational education activities

There are other barriers that could restrict deep transnational cooperation, including the implementation and delivery of joint programmes and joint degrees. They encompass admission and enrolment criteria, the languages of instruction, the absence of flexible learning pathways (such as small learning experiences and micro-credentials), inconsistent use of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the lack of automatic mutual recognition, and strict rules defining the template of joint degrees.

Most countries reported no barriers to student mobility in joint programmes on any of the aspects mentioned above, arguing that all (or most of them) had already been addressed in the past. However, this does not match the findings from the literature review, the studies carried out in preparation for this higher education package, or the outcomes from the Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects.

Some of the respondents that provided more detail on identified or removed barriers, highlighted the use of EU funding to address issues, including the provision of digital education opportunities, or enabling the use of micro-credentials. Where barriers remain, some countries invoked the institutional autonomy of higher education institutions to determine their own approach to the provision of joint transnational education activities.

Embedded mobility in joint transnational educational programmes

Two thirds of respondents indicated that they provide legal or financial support for higher education institutions to increase and embed student mobility (physical, virtual, or blended) in joint programmes. Some of the support measures mentioned include changes in national qualifications frameworks to allow the delivery of joint degrees; funding for higher education institutions participating in a European Universities alliance; embedding mobility and internationalisation in performance-based funding; providing students with grant top-ups and grant portability; the introduction of mobility windows; and the implementation of EU initiatives, such as the European Student Card[96]. Only a minority of higher

[96] European Commission, European Student Card Initiative, https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-student-card-initiative

education systems reported having adapted their academic calendars, admission and enrolment systems, tuition fees, or grading rules.

Sustained financial support for transnational cooperation

Most respondents reported providing some kind of financial support for transnational cooperation This can be for all higher education institutions or additional support for specific transnational cooperation activities, such as taking part in European Universities alliances. Most respondents also indicated having mobilised funding sources to match or complement EU funding (Erasmus+) for higher education institutions taking part in European Universities alliances. However, the mechanisms and amount of support vary across Member States – from specific contributions to the mandatory co-funding requirement for members of European Universities alliances[97] to fixed amounts, specific programmes at the national level, or financial support embedded in core funding for higher education institutions (sometimes performance-based).

Institutional autonomy

Two thirds of respondents indicated that they perceived no need to take action to strengthen institutional autonomy. However, the rest indicated that change is needed to enhance autonomy in areas such as internal financial matters, involvement of staff and students in decision-making, internal governance arrangements, staffing and academic matters, and the protection of academic freedom. Among those that indicated no need for action, several countries pointed to the fact that institutional autonomy and academic freedom are protected in their national legal frameworks.

These results do not always match the information reflected in the 2023 Autonomy Scorecard, published by the European University Association (EUA)[98]. Interestingly, some of the low performers in the 2023 Autonomy Scorecard were among those that reported no need for action, whereas the highest performers tended to highlight the need to pay continued attention to safeguard institutional autonomy.

Quality assurance

Only a third of the countries reported relying mostly on institutional external quality assurance (which provides more flexibility for the award of joint degrees and other forms of transnational cooperation). Over half of the countries surveyed rely on a mixed approach to quality assurance that combines institutional and programme-based approaches. Only a minority of them indicated having plans to transition towards a full institutional approach to quality assurance.

Regarding the implementation of the European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (European Approach), nearly two thirds of respondents mentioned that they either do not use it or use it with additional national criteria. While most countries allow external quality assurance to be carried out by any agency registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), about a third do not allow it or impose additional national requirements.

This underlines the uneven implementation of Bologna Process tools and commitments, as well as the complex quality assurance landscape facing the implementation of joint programmes and the award of joint degrees.

High-quality virtual collaborative learning and recognition of transnational cooperation in academic careers

[97] EU funding can only cover up to 80% of the approved European Universities alliance's budget; the remaining 20% must be covered by the participating institutions.

[98] European University Association (EUA), Bennetot Pruvot, E., Estermann, T., Popkhadze, N., *University Autonomy in Europe IV: The Scorecard 2023*, EUA, 2023 https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/eua%20autonomy%20scorecard.pdf

The survey revealed that two out of three higher education systems affirm that they provide (or plan to provide) support for higher education institutions to develop virtual and online collaborative international learning models and courses. More than half of the countries surveyed reported that they valorise and recognise (or have plans to do so) the time spent by academic staff on developing innovative pedagogies and new research practices through transnational cooperation.

A similar proportion stated that they support (or plan to support) the development of shared and interoperable learning environments (virtual and blended) and virtual campuses; the exchange of educational content and FAIR data[99]; and the piloting of open-source solutions to overcome common challenges.

Development of joint interdisciplinary transnational education activities

Most respondents reported supporting challenge-based approaches where learners from different backgrounds cooperate with researchers, companies, cities, regions, non-governmental organisations, and local communities in finding creative and innovative solutions to global and shared challenges.

However, half of them do so by referring to the institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and flexibility enabled by their regulatory frameworks or to the fact that their higher education institutions receive general financing for all types of activities essential to them. Half of those that reported providing no support in this area cited similar reasons, since the institutional autonomy that their higher education institutions enjoy already allows them to engage in challenge-based approaches if they wish to. Specific legal and financial support was reported by few countries.

Almost all respondents reported providing support (or having plans to support) high-quality lifelong learning opportunities to facilitate upskilling and reskilling. Again, some responses highlighted the institutional autonomy of higher education institutions as the key enabler, but half of the countries reported having financial support measures in place that draw on national or EU funding.

Governance

The inclusive engagement of different members of the higher education community in governance structures is essential to ensuring effective transnational cooperation. Some countries said that they had no concrete plans to step up their efforts in this area, but this could be a sign of the maturity of a higher education system with a long tradition of autonomous institutions.

The results suggest that the governance structures of most higher education institutions in Europe generally include internal and external stakeholders – from students and academic staff to social partners, employers, and others. However, it is not clear how their involvement impacts decision-making related to transnational cooperation.

Over half of the respondents reported supporting diverse backgrounds of members in governance structures, gender balance, and opportunities for peer learning.

[99] FAIR data refers to data that is Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable. See https://researchtips.ugent.be/en/tips/00001866/.

Chapter 2: A European degree - key parameters and its added value

In recent years there has been a steady increase for the demand of joint study programmes and joint degrees, supported by the Bologna Process and the vision of a European Education Area, as well as by the development of more Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters programmes, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Doctoral Networks, programmes labelled by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and the launch of the European Universities initiative. However, this increase remains well below demand, as there are still too many obstacles for administrative staff, academics, and students in developing joint programmes and joint degrees.

The evidence gathered points to many obstacles and barriers to the development of joint programmes, even more so for joint degree programmes. The underlying reasons are, among others, big administrative difficulties and too many disparities between national (and regional) legislation. In addition, the complexity increases dramatically with the number of countries involved in the delivery of joint programmes and award of joint degrees. Many more joint programmes could be offered as joint degrees if national legislation, accreditation and recognition practices became more conducive to their development.

At the same time, there has been a strong political will to take forward the ambition of a framework to facilitate the delivery of joint degrees, starting with the European Council Conclusions of 14 December 2017[100] which called for the creation of European Universities alliances enabling students 'to obtain a degree by combining studies in several EU countries and contribute to the international competitiveness of European universities'.

In 2021, the Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative - Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education[101] acknowledged the need to take action to ease the delivery of joint degree programmes of higher education institutions. It invited Member States and the Commission to develop, within the context of the European Education Area and in full respect of the national and regional higher education systems, 'clear proposals, starting from 2022, hand in hand with the relevant higher education national and regional authorities, higher education institutions and stakeholders, to help remove where necessary the obstacles for cooperation at the European level, by exploring, for example, the need and feasibility for European degrees within the alliances of "European Universities", and by promoting further European cooperation on quality assurance and automatic mutual recognition in higher education'.

Following the invitation, in January 2022, the Commission Communication on a European Strategy for Universities[102] took up the challenge of proposing a pathway towards a European degree. Shortly afterwards, in April 2022, this endeavour was further encouraged in the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation with a mandate to conduct Erasmus+ policy experimentation.

Meanwhile, available evidence from studies[103] and the Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects shows that relevant stakeholders, including higher education institutions, national quality assurance agencies and students, also recognise the added value of a European degree for transnational higher education

[100] European Council meeting (14 December 2017) Conclusions, EUCO 19/1/17 REV 1, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf

[101] Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education, 17 May 2021, 8658/21, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8658-2021-INIT/en/pdf

[102] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European strategy for universities, 18.1.2022 Com (2022) 16, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2022:16:FIN

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

cooperation and for the European Union as a whole. The contributions collected suggest that higher education institutions and national agencies believe that the European degree will greatly enhance the global reputation of European higher education and support the dissemination of European values across Europe and beyond, while students expect it to improve their employability in the labour market[104].

In the light of the above considerations, this chapter presents a step-by-step approach that could be taken towards the awarding of a European degree, i.e., the awarding of a European degree label to joint programmes that meet a set of European criteria, or as a degree inserted as a formal type of qualification in national legislative frameworks, awarded by higher education institutions on the basis of the set of European criteria.

First, the chapter presents an overview of the benefits of a European degree. It then synthesises the preliminary findings of the policy experimentation projects funded by the Erasmus+ programme, which were set up to test and explore the concepts of a European degree label and a possible European degree as a type of qualification. The findings include the identification of the challenges that remain for the implementation of joint degrees, the evaluation of the co-created award criteria and how the award process could be operationalised.

2.1 Benefits and added value of a European degree

The data available from studies[105] and the preliminary outcomes of policy experimentation projects, show that a European degree would help to increase the number of joint programmes and joint degrees delivered, would enable the joint delivery of innovative and transformative education, facilitate transnational higher education cooperation, and bring several benefits for students, staff, employers, higher education institutions, higher education systems, and the EU as whole.

A European degree would be delivered at the national level based on a common set of criteria agreed at the European level. It is this common set of criteria that would make these degrees truly European, as they will still be awarded by universities accredited at the national or regional levels and be included in national legislation as are other types of national degrees. The processes of accreditation and quality assurance could also be done following the regular procedures, regardless of whether programme or institutional accreditation exists. The European degree would be automatically recognised across the European Union without having to meet any additional criteria or undergo additional recognition procedures.

Benefits for students

Beyond the European symbolic value, the European degree would demonstrate a graduate's international experience, academic excellence, language proficiency, cultural adaptability, and a wider perspective, making them attractive to employers seeking globally minded and highly skilled individuals. It would offer not only more mobility opportunities, but also empower students to choose what, where and when to study, promoting brain circulation across Europe.

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

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

In a recent study[106], 9 out of 10 students signalled that a European degree would bring them opportunities for:

- Studying in another European country.
- Completing innovative study programmes.
- Receiving excellent education.
- Obtaining skills and competencies relevant to the labour market.

A European degree would give students a pathway to excellence, employability, and a global perspective, encapsulating the essence of a well-rounded and transnational-oriented education. It would provide access to truly transnational joint degree programmes and streamline the process of credit recognition across diverse institutions, ensuring a seamless academic experience and allowing students to forge their own transnational educational pathways.

'Students should benefit from a European degree in terms of individual visibility when entering the labour market, and study programs should benefit as well in terms of attracting students.

Heidelberg University (Germany) – Call for Evidence.

Beyond academic benefits, the degree would also enhance students' employability by equipping them with high-level skills gained through high-quality programmes and connecting them to extensive networks of partner institutions. A survey that analysed three Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters graduation cohorts (2010/11, 2015/16, and 2019/20), found that graduates are more likely to find a job that matches their education than the average graduate from another masters' programme; graduates also report that the area in which they perceive their studies to have had the highest impact is their careers[107]. This builds on the findings on the benefits of Erasmus+: a majority of Erasmus+ students (72%) report that mobility has been beneficial for their careers, and data suggests that mobile students tend to find a job faster and to be more satisfied with it than non-mobile students[108].

According to joint programme graduates who participated in the REDEEM 2 project survey, the three most important benefits they gained from their joint programme included personal development (96.5%), a better understanding of the professional activity in their area of expertise (94.9%), and a better understanding of a culture other than their own (90.5%). They also reported that the skills they improved the most were the ability to work in an international context (63.7%), the capacity to adapt and act in new situations (52.5%), and intercultural competence (50.5%).

Further analysis revealed that graduates from joint programmes tend to show slightly higher employment rates than regular graduates (90% vs 85%) and report a greater overlap between their work and their study field[109]. Moreover, the emphasis on interdisciplinary experiences and diverse learning opportunities cultivates a broad set of cross-cultural competencies, preparing graduates to thrive in diverse environments and contributing to strengthening a European perspective and identity.

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

[107] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna, Robert Jühlke, Martin Unger, *Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Graduate Impact Survey 2020/21: Comprehensive report of results*, 2021, https://www.esaa-eu.org/fileadmin/esaa/content/news/files/2022/gis_202021_definite_report.pdf

[108] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Erasmus+ higher education impact study – Final report*, Publications Office, 2018, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/162060

[109] REDEEM2, *Shaping the next generation of Joint Programmes in Science and Technology*, https://www.redeem2.eu/

According to a recent study by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), employers use language proficiency to identify characteristics such as adaptability and openness to other cultures, which are difficult to evaluate in recruitment processes[110]. The OECD highlights that multilingual Individuals are more likely to display a heightened intercultural understanding and actively participate in global issues than monolingual individuals. These are crucial skills that promote social cohesion in today's diverse societies. The benefits that a European degree would bring to students are aligned with the expectations of young Europeans.

The 2018 Eurobarometer on the European Education Area[111] clearly identified the value that young Europeans attach to transnational education:

- 90% of them regard an experience in another country as being important.
- 91% of them agreed that their academic qualifications and learning periods in another country should be automatically recognised across all Member States.
- 93% of them saw real value in creating European degrees being awarded by 'networks of European universities, offering students the chance to study in different EU countries, with a flexible choice of courses or modules offered within the network'.
- 97% agreed that it would benefit their learning experience if they had an opportunity 'to work on innovative projects alongside academics, researchers and companies from different countries […] [and] to study and work together across disciplines and departments'.
- 77% wanted to learn a new language and 84% 'would like to improve the knowledge of a foreign language they have previously learnt'.

These were powerful messages from our young people, and they place a strong expectation on higher education to deliver opportunities in transnational teaching and learning. Some seven years on from this survey, and with both physical and blended mobility featuring in Erasmus+, it is time to enable their expectations and take teaching and learning into a richer European context.

Benefits for higher education institutions and academic staff

For higher education institutions, a European degree offers numerous advantages. Firstly, it would support rationalisation efforts through a complementarity approach, allowing institutions to collectively provide more opportunities than they could individually. This collaborative vision enhances the standing of universities within alliances on a European (and global) scale. Joint degree programmes prompt institutions to rethink teaching structures, learning methods, and competency assessment, fostering a dynamic and modernised educational environment.

Furthermore, the European degree would enhance internationalisation opportunities by significantly reducing the administrative burden linked to the design and delivery of joint degree programmes. In doing so, it would contribute to attracting a more diverse student body and raising the institutional profile on the global stage. It would also facilitate collaborative research and development projects with partner institutions, offering specialisations in fields where individual expertise may be limited. The dissemination of successful models in education, research, and societal engagement further contributes to institutional growth.

[110] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, '*OECD Skills Outlook 2023: Skills for a Resilient Green and Digital Transition'*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1787/27452f29-en

[111] European Commission, *Eurobarometer: The European Education Area*, http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/flash/surveyky/2186

> *'The idea of a European Joint Degree - the initiative, aiming to streamline the legal frameworks for awarding degrees across Europe, is seen as a pivotal step towards removing the national and international barriers that have historically hampered the establishment and sustainability of joint degree programmes'.*
>
> EURASHE (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education) – Call for Evidence.

The European degree would be a way to recognise and highlight the effort put into developing and implementing joint programmes. It would help to empower staff and provide them with additional opportunities for recognition, professional development, and international collaboration and innovation. Better acknowledgement and valorisation of their involvement in transnational education would support academic staff in seeking out and exploiting mobility opportunities and expanding their academic networks.

The complementarity approach of joint degree programmes not only enables staff to contribute to a more comprehensive educational offering but also supports the exchange of teaching methodologies with faculty from partner institutions. Staff would be encouraged to be more mobile, work with international partners, and update their knowledge, skills, and methodologies for the benefit of the whole academic community, for instance, by experimenting and testing new pedagogies, engaging in research projects, and increasing their capacity to navigate diverse classrooms.

A report by the European Tertiary Education Register (ETER) covering more than 1 500 European higher education institutions, showed that the internationalisation of academic staff is uneven across European countries and types of institutions: north-western and research-oriented higher education institutions attract the largest proportions of foreign academic staff[112].

Additionally, academic and non-academic staff would benefit from simpler cooperation mechanisms to establish, deliver and manage joint programmes. The development and delivery of joint programmes place a significant burden on staff in terms of efforts, time, and resources as many barriers need to be overcome for a joint programme to become a reality.

A recent study showed that about 80% of higher education institutions surveyed consider that a European degree would reduce existing barriers to the design, implementation, and delivery of joint and transdisciplinary programmes, as well as ease quality assurance requirements and the implementation of innovative educational components. Furthermore, 90% agree that a European degree would increase transparency and facilitate the automatic recognition of joint and double degrees[113].

Benefits for employers

A European degree would allow employers to identify the talent that they need. The European degree is designed to be easily understood, facilitating streamlined recruitment processes for employers seeking internationally minded individuals who are resilient, open to change, and have future-oriented skills.

> *'From the point of view of companies, especially SMEs, this initiative could contribute to meeting the challenges of the labour market, especially related to digital and green transitions, with qualified professionals who meet the required skills. The testing of the level of knowledge of a foreign language, the carrying out of a traineeship period abroad, a preparation oriented towards environmental and social sustainability, the ability*

[112] European Tertiary Education Register, *Internationalisation of Academic Staff in European Higher Education,* 2019, https://www.eter-project.com/uploads/analytical-reports/ETER_AnalyticalReport_01_final.pdf

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

to use technologies and digitalisation are common requirements that should be at the basis of the joint European degree'.

Confartigianato Imprese (European network of Italian artisan businesses and small entrepreneurs) – Call for Evidence.

A study on the impacts of learning mobility on the skills and employability of students, found that 64% of employers consider an international experience as important for recruitment and that 92% look for transversal skills such as tolerance, confidence, problem-solving, and curiosity – all of which are boosted during international mobility[114].

This is further highlighted by mobile students themselves, who report perceived improvements in skills relevant to the labour market after their mobility abroad, including adaptability (91%), intercultural competencies (90%), communication skills (89%), foreign language skills (88%), critical thinking (79%), planning and organisational skills (77%), analytical and problem-solving skills (76%), teamwork (72%), and sector- or field-specific skills (71%)[115].

The skills of the future

- The recent report, 'The Future of Recruiting'[116], emphasises that the top five soft skills that recruiters will be looking for in the next five years include communication, relationship building, adaptability, problem-solving, and business acumen.

According to the 2023 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Skills Outlook[117]:

- Multilingualism is associated with increased employability and higher wages.
- Multilingual individuals exhibit enhanced linguistic capacity, divergent thinking skills (associated with creativity), attentional control, working memory, and abstract and symbolic representation skills, which are growing in importance with digital innovations and Artificial Intelligence.
- Critical thinking is crucial for identifying fake news and is supported by dispositions such as open- and fair-mindedness and curiosity.
- Envisioning and creating sustainable futures requires creativity, adaptability, critical thinking, and the capacity to engage in effective communication and collective action.

In essence, graduates holding a European degree would stand out as uniquely qualified candidates, bringing a combination of problem-solving prowess, adaptability, multilingualism, multiculturalism, and interdisciplinary expertise that aligns seamlessly with the evolving demands of the global workforce.

Benefits for national and regional higher education systems

[114] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Brandenburg, U., Berghoff, S., Taboadela, O., *The Erasmus impact study – Effects of mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalisation of higher education institutions – Executive summary*, Publications Office, 2014, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/75430

[115] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Erasmus+ higher education impact study – Final report*, Publications Office, 2018, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/162060

[116] LinkedIn Talent Solutions, *'The Future of Recruiting'*, 2023, https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/resources/future-of-recruiting?trk=oth-event-TalentConnect

[117] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, '*OECD Skills Outlook 2023: Skills for a Resilient Green and Digital Transition'*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1787/27452f29-en

At national and regional levels, a European degree presents a nuanced approach that balances the preservation of distinct characteristics inherent to national or regional education systems with a clear path towards transnational cooperation based on shared European values.

This collaborative educational framework would serve to attract talent while simultaneously giving local students opportunities for transnational education. In this way, it will act as a proactive measure against brain drain, promoting a healthy circulation of intellectual capital and helping prevent brain drain by raising the profile of all European education systems.

Brain circulation in the European Union

The limited internationalisation of local higher education institutions can incentivise young people to seek opportunities elsewhere.

A recent report by European Commission services[118] that surveyed 2 027 young Europeans (aged between 15 and 29) found that:

- Nearly 60% (1 191) had left their home region at some point in their lives. Most of them (77%) had obtained a third level education at a university.
- The lack of adequate study opportunities in their local higher education institutions was one of the three main factors that typically influenced their decision to leave their home region.
- Analysis of open-ended responses revealed five dominant themes in which this factor played an important role in respondents' decision to leave their home region:
    - Courses offered by local higher education institutions do not match student interests.
    - The quality and format of study programmes are perceived as unsatisfactory.
    - The reputation of the local higher education institutions does not match student expectations.
    - Desire to study in an international setting.
    - Perceived mismatch between the studies offered by the local higher education institutions and the job opportunities in the local labour market[119].

Based on interviews with stakeholders on the ground in the EU Member States, the report suggests that young people's motivation to stay in or return to their home regions can be encouraged by empowering them to participate in European mobility schemes and training opportunities, as well as by creating links between education, research, and the labour market through innovation and entrepreneurship.

The European degree would serve as a powerful tool to enhance the attractiveness of national and regional education systems, particularly those that are less internationalised. The simplification of procedures for establishing joint degree programmes further encourages transnational cooperation, making it more accessible and efficient. A recent survey showed that 9 out of 10 respondents –among higher education institutions and national authorities– believe that a European degree would allow for better cooperation between ministries and other educational authorities across the EU; facilitate brain circulation; and encourage international students to study in European institutions[120].

[118] European Commission. Preliminary data from the study *Youth for reviving (stagnating) EU territories* (in preparation – not yet published).
[119] The statistical considerations for this questionnaire may be lower than for others with a higher response rate.
[120] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Burneikaitė, G., Pocius, D., Potapova, E. et al., *The road towards a possible joint European degree – Identifying opportunities and investigating the impact and*

> *'The successful creation of the joint European degrees would have an important effect on the competitiveness and attractiveness of European higher education globally'.*
>
> HAMK (Häme University of Applied Sciences, Finland) – Call for Evidence.

The long-term spill-over effects of good practices from joint programmes would contribute positively to inspiring other national and regional systems. In essence, at the national and regional levels, a European degree emerges as a catalyst for global talent attraction, educational system enhancement, and sustained labour market improvements.

Benefits for Europe

At the European level, a European degree would play a pivotal role in fostering a strong sense of European identity by building on common values and shared educational experiences among students. A recent survey of students, higher education institutions, and national authorities, showed that 9 out of 10 respondents agree that a European degree would contribute to an increased sense of European citizenship, identity, and belonging; and that it would help disseminate European values across and beyond Europe, such as academic freedom, inclusiveness, solidarity, sustainability, entrepreneurship, innovation, democracy, and the rule of law[121].

This would not only contribute to a more cohesive European community of citizens, but also align with the broader goal of achieving the European Education Area and accelerating the Bologna Process[122]. By incorporating exiting Bologna tools in its criteria, the European degree would boost their full implementation, promoting compatibility across European higher education systems. In doing so, it would facilitate collaboration among institutions and educational systems and foster European competitiveness on a global scale.

> *'Overall, we believe that the concept of joint European degrees should be a means to strengthen the long-standing commitments stemming from the Bologna Process, such as automatic recognition, student-centred learning, mobility, internationalisation, and quality assurance'.*
>
> EURASHE (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education) – Call for Evidence.

Beyond the realm of education, European degree programmes will contribute substantially to the development of a mobile and highly skilled workforce at the European level, responding to the demands of an increasingly interconnected and dynamic global landscape.

2.2 Suitability of the criteria of a European degree and stakeholders' perspectives

feasibility of different approaches – Final report, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/945147

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

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

2.2.1 European policy experimentation in higher education under the Erasmus+ programme

The Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, adopted on 5 April 2022[123], invited the Commission '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'.

The Commission was mandated, among other things, to pilot in 2022 the development and implementation under Erasmus+ of European criteria for the award of a European degree label to 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.

Based on the results of this preparatory work, the Commission is to report to the European Council for further decision at each step towards a possible joint degree based on co-created European criteria, following the instruments of the Bologna Process.

In June 2022, the Commission launched 'European policy experimentation in higher education under the Erasmus+ programme' call for proposals for projects to actively pilot the concept and criteria of a European degree label while reflecting on ways to remove obstacles to the setting up of joint degree programmes, including by establishing a possible European degree as a type of qualification.

A set of criteria has been proposed for testing by the Commission services together with Member States (in the framework of the European Education Area Working Group on the Strategic Framework for Higher Education and the meeting with the Directors-General for Higher Education), higher education stakeholders and European Universities alliances. These European criteria for the award of a European degree label have been included in the technical annex of the Erasmus+ pilot call[124].

Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects were expected to:

1. Explore and test the relevance of the co-created European criteria for establishing a label which acknowledge the European and transnational experiences in a joint transnational programme leading to a higher education qualification at European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF) levels 6, 7, 8 and the feasibility of their use.

2. Explore and recommend possible optimisation of the proposed set of criteria in view of maximising the attractiveness and potential impact of such a European degree label.

3. Elaborate proposals, in cooperation with the relevant national, regional and/or institutional authorities, aiming to facilitate the development and implementation of joint degrees in Europe. This would include proposing an approach that could be commonly agreed on for the delivery of joint degrees based on co-created European criteria by European countries at all education levels. These proposals should consider the existing instruments developed by the Bologna Process, such as the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and reflect on the potential need for updating these tools.

Six proposals were selected[125]:

[123] Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (2022/C 160/01), OJ C 160, 13.4.2022, p. 1–8, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H0413(01)

[124] European Commission, *Call for proposals: European policy experimentation in higher education*, ERASMUS-EDU-2022-POL-EXP, p. 31-33, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2022/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2022-pol-exp-he_en.pdf

[125] Funding and Tenders Portal, *'Pilot a joint European degree label'*, ERASMUS-EDU-2022-POL-EXP-EUdegree, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/erasmus-edu-2022-pol-exp-

1. European degree: Advancing, Facilitation and Fostering International Collaboration in Higher Education (ED AFFICHE): This aims at proposing improvements to the proposed criteria, assessment procedure, design, and delivery of a future European degree label. It was developed by Una Europa, 4EU+, CHARM-EU, EC2U, EUCONEXUS, and Unite! The project conducted diverse surveys to relevant stakeholders to gather views on European degree criteria tailored to each target group[126].

2. Future-proof Criteria for Innovative European Education (FOCI): This aims to evaluate various programmes according to the proposed European degree label criteria. It was developed by YUFE, EPICURE, and ECIU. The project used methodology and expert group methodology to 'translate' the mandatory criteria into indicators to be applied to the evaluation of 13 programmes[127].

3. ETIKÉTA Label Content and Requirements (ETIKÉTA): This aims to promote the design and test of transnational cooperation instruments based on the proposed co-created criteria for the delivery of a European degree label. It was developed by ten partners under the ETIKÉTA consortium. The methodology of the project included desk research and comparative analysis of seven joint programmes existing within the consortium of the project[128].

4. Joint European degree Label in Engineering - Toward a European Framework for Engineering Education (JEDI): This aims to develop a prototype label for European joint degrees, co-created with 16 higher education institutions from three European Universities (EELISA, EUt+ and ENHANCE) from the perspective of engineering, technology, and science-oriented education. The project worked with diverse experts with knowledge about joint programmes in the field of engineering[129].

5. European Degree Label Institutional Laboratory (EDLab): This aims to test the implementation of European and international joint degree programmes and the European degree label with special emphasis on Spain, France, Italy, and Portugal. It was developed by ARQUS, ENLIGHT, EUTOPIA and SEA-EU. The project conducted two surveys, 30 in-depth interviews, and 22 focus groups, with a total of 115 interviewees[130].

6. EUROSUD Report of Quantitative & Qualitative Analysis (SMARTT): This aims at analysing, testing, and piloting the new European degree label criteria, improving the quality, and increasing the transferability of future developments of European degrees across Europe and beyond. It was developed by EUTOPIA, NEUROTECHEU, and UNITA. The project developed several methodologies including workshops with experts, interviews, focus groups, and surveys[131].

They bring together 63 partners from 23 countries (including 22 Member States) and more than 160 associated partners from 30 countries (including 23 Member States). Work started in spring 2023 and should be completed by end April 2024.

The following section synthesises the findings of the projects available at the time of the adoption of the Staff Working Document. Firstly, it examines the feedback received on the suitability of the

eudegree;callCode=null;freeTextSearchKeyword=policy%20experimentation;matchWholeText=true;typeCodes=1,0;statusCodes=31094502;programm=

[126] CHARM-EU, *European Degree: Advancing, Facilitation and Fostering International Collaboration in Higher Education (ED-AFFICHE)*, https://www.charm-eu.eu/ed-affiche/ed-affiche

[127] ECIU, 'ECIU, YUFE and EPICUR will lead an innovative approach to the European Degree', *ECIU News*, January 31, 2023, https://www.eciu.eu/news/eciu-yufe-and-epicur-will-lead-an-innovative-approach-to-the-european-degree

[128] FilmEU, *ETIKETA Pilot Project*, https://etiketa.filmeu.eu/

[129] ENHANCE, *ENHANCE Universities Join JEDI to Develop Joint European Degree Label*, https://enhanceuniversity.eu/enhance-universities-join-jedi-to-develop-joint-european-degree-label/

[130] NOVA University Lisbon, Edlab Project Kick-off – "European Degree Label Institutional Laboratory", *News*, March 13, 2023, https://www.unl.pt/en/news/nova/edlab-project-kick-european-degree-label-institutional-laboratory

[131] CIVIS, CIVIS gets SMARTT! EU selects CIVIS to pave the way for European joint degrees, *News*, February 2023, https://civis.eu/en/news/civis-gets-smartt-eu-selects-civis-to-pave-the-way-for-european-joint-degrees

proposed criteria for a European degree. The section then provides details on what the process of awarding a European degree label and a European degree as a type of qualification could look like and the roles of the different actors that would be involved in it. It is concluded with an elaboration on the necessity and feasibility of a legal status for alliances of higher education institutions, such as European Universities.

2.2.2 Proposed criteria for the European degree to be tested by Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects

As part of the study commissioned by the Commission to explore the possible pathways towards a possible European degree, a survey was carried out among relevant stakeholders (higher education institutions, national quality assurance agencies and students) to find out what they expect from the future European degree. In general, the main expectations of higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies are the strengthening of transnational cooperation, student and staff mobility, innovative teaching and learning, labour market relevance and sustainability[132].

Almost all (97.6%) institutions agreed that transnational cooperation (e.g., joint programmes, courses, modules) would be important to certify a European degree. Similarly high levels of support were expressed for embedded physical student mobility and staff mobility (virtual or in-person exchanges) - 92.8% and 90.3% respectively.

While higher education institutions considered the international dimension of future joint degree programmes to be most important, students expressed that labour market relevance (e.g., programme partnerships with industry and other organisations to offer internships) would be the main factor that would attract them to enrol in European joint degree programmes (68.8%). They also pointed to innovative teaching, learning and assessment methods and transnational cooperation between higher education institutions (65.2% and 62.7% respectively). Contrary to their institutions, students seem to be less attracted by embedded physical mobility (54.9%) and staff mobility (53.9%)[133].

This section presents the feedback from six European policy experimentation projects on the list of initial proposed criteria for creating a European degree. It presents each criterion as originally proposed, summarises the feedback from the projects on each of them and consolidates the suggestions for adaptation. It also incorporates the findings of the mid-term working meeting with the European policy experimentation projects held in Brussels in October 2023 (hereafter referred to as the 'mid-term meeting'). The aim of the criteria was to underpin both:

- a European degree as a label, to be awarded selectively to joint study programmes leading to a joint degree and meeting a pre-defined list of criteria agreed at the European level.

- a European degree a qualification based on common European criteria, in the sense that a joint programme would be accredited to award the qualification if it met a pre-defined list of criteria.

Proposed mandatory criteria in the context of the Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects

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

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

1. Higher education institutions involved in the programme delivery: the joint programme is jointly designed and delivered by at least 2 higher education institutions from at least 2 different EU Member States (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

The feedback reflected broad agreement among stakeholders while highlighting areas for clarification and expansion. There was 94.9% agreement among higher education institutions on this criterion, with suggestions to clarify whether the EU or the European Education Area (EEA) should be considered. Additionally, they recommended increasing the number of countries to three to add multicultural and multilingual value. There was a high level of agreement among stakeholders, including civil society at 97.4%, ministries at 96%, quality assurance agencies at 95%, the labour market at 90% and students at 88% (FOCI), although there are recommendations to include more partners and to specify that most programme activities should take place in Europe (ED AFFICHE).

Benchmarking with existing joint programmes shows that this criterion is 100% in line with existing practice (ETIKETA). In addition, feedback from the mid-term meeting supported the feasibility of joint programmes involving at least two higher education institutions from two EU Member States. The general feedback suggests that this criterion may need to be clarified in guidelines to allow for the participation of more higher education institutions, including non-EU Member States, and that it should emphasise the involvement of each partner in the design and delivery of the joint programme, without requiring each student to participate in activities at each participating higher education institution.

2. Transnational joint degree recognition:

    a. The joint programme leads to the award of a joint degree (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

The feedback was generally supportive, with some concerns about the difficulty of awarding joint degrees. There was 89.2% agreement among higher education institutions on this criterion. However, the results of the EDLab project also suggested that the consortium agreement should state that all partners contribute to the provision of teaching/learning activities. Additionally, the joint degree should be a single document issued by or on behalf of all partner institutions, regardless of where the students have studied or the mobility path they followed (EDLab). Agreement among other stakeholders was 90% for employers, 86.6% for civil society, 84% for ministries and 80% for quality assurance agencies (FOCI). ETIKETA showed 66.7% alignment with existing practices in joint programmes.

In addition, feedback from the mid-term meeting suggested that the guidelines should include a definition of ‘joint degree’ and how this criterion could be applied in cases where only one part of a consortium could award a joint degree, while other partners could still award their own. Similarly, the ED AFFICHE project advocated a precise definition of a joint degree and a greater emphasis on the added value it brings to students and their career prospects.

    b. Transnational joint co-supervision and co-evaluation of dissertations: dissertations are co-evaluated by supervisors or a committee with members from at least 2 different institutions located in 2 different countries (European Qualifications Frameworks 8).

There was 79.8% agreement among higher education institutions on this criterion, with proposals to include co-supervision in addition to co-evaluation, even though some expressed complexity from a legislative perspective and recommended making it optional (EDLab). Additionally, the results of the EDLab project suggested enhancing the criterion to include European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF) 7 (masters level) and specifying this criterion in a consortium agreement or other related consortium documents. There was a particularly high level of agreement among other stakeholders, with ministries and quality assurance agencies at 100%, students and civil society at 97.4% and the labour market at 90% (FOCI).

3. Transparency of the learning outcomes:

a. The joint programme is described in ECTS (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

In general, the feedback reflected robust agreement among stakeholders, while acknowledging some challenges. There was an agreement of 92.8% among higher education institutions on this criterion, with some noting the potential difficulty in measuring certain activities with ECTS (EDLab). Further, the results of the EDLab project suggested encouraging alignment with existing European Higher Education Area (EHEA) tools through the recommendation of the use of the ECTS Users Guide to ensure that curricular design is based on achieving intended learning outcomes.

The agreement across other stakeholders was high, with students at 96%, quality assurance agencies at 95%, civil society at 93.4%, ministries at 92%, and the labour market at 90% (FOCI). There is a 95.2% alignment with existing practices in joint programmes (ETIKETA). The JEDI project also emphasised that the evaluation of learning outcomes should be mandatory (currently it is mandatory in 61% of the JEDI sample). The feedback also suggested the need to make learning outcomes more transparent by making them more visible to candidates and employers (SMARTT).

The ED AFFICHE project recommended a more explicit and comprehensible explanation of criterion 3a (e.g. by adding indicators to assess it). The earlier study[134] had already identified curriculum flexibility and programme length as potential obstacles to the adaptation of joint programmes to existing national requirements.

b. Diploma supplement: a joint Diploma Supplement is issued to the student at the end of the joint study programme (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

The feedback showed a high level of agreement among stakeholders, highlighting the importance of a joint diploma supplement. There was 89.2% agreement among higher education institutions on this criterion. Some suggested that it should be issued on request rather than automatically. Others were concerned about difficulties with legal and technical barriers in some countries and pointed to the need for a European template for the Diploma Supplement (EDLab). In addition, the EDLab project suggested clarifying that a single joint diploma supplement is issued to all graduates using an agreed model and adapted to the joint nature of the programme.

Agreement among the remaining stakeholders was high, with civil society at 100%, ministries and students at 96%, and quality assurance agencies at 95%, although labour market agreement is at 66.6% (FOCI). There is a 78.9% alignment with existing practices in joint programmes (ETIKETA) and feedback collected during the mid-term meeting supported the importance of issuing a joint Diploma Supplement, with an open question on whether this should be done on request. Information on the case of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters shows that 61% of them issue a joint Diploma Supplement, indicating its feasibility and importance for the implementation of a European degree.

4. Quality assurance arrangements: internal and external quality assurance is conducted in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The programme, the study field or the institutions are accredited/evaluated by an agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). If external quality assurance is required at the programme level in the countries involved, the transnational programme should be accredited/evaluated preferably using the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

There was 87% agreement on this criterion among higher education institutions, with some concerns expressed about the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) being a barrier

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

for countries such as Italy and the potential limitation that the European Approach would bring to the label due to its scarce use. Furthermore, the results of the EDLab project recommended splitting criterion 4 into two to emphasise the institutional/study and programme levels.

The level of agreement by other stakeholders was high, with quality assurance agencies and civil society at 100%, ministries at 98%, the labour market at 85%, and students at 97.5% (FOCI). Alignment with existing practices in joint programmes is 76.3% (ETIKETA). The ED AFFICHE project highlighted the need for joint European programmes to be subject to evaluation at the European level as a strategy to increase their value.

The feedback collected during the mid-term meeting suggested that the guidelines should include a clarification of conditions and exceptions. The overall feedback emphasised that programmes, fields of study or institutions should be accredited/evaluated by an agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) using the ESG, and where external quality assurance at programme level is required, the European Approach should be used.

5. Joint arrangements 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 (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

84.2% of higher education institutions agreed with this criterion. Some suggested that the arrangements should be set in the consortium agreement and that each process could be considered separately, allowing for more flexibility. They also suggested that the term ‘arrangements’ is preferable to ‘policies’ and that breaking down the criteria into several smaller items would enable to better define expectations (EDLab). The results of the EDLab project also suggested splitting the criterion into two to ensure arrangements at the decision-making and programme management levels.

The agreement among other stakeholders was students at 90%, ministries at 84%, labour market and civil society at 80%, and quality assurance agencies at 75% (FOCI). There was a 92.1% alignment with existing practices in joint programmes (ETIKETA). The ED AFFICHE project recommended the creation of a guidance document for the criterion on how to regulate policies within consortium agreements, possibly with a template that could be used as this criterion was controversial among stakeholders.

The feedback collected during the mid-term meeting emphasised that criterion 5 was an existing practice within the European Approach and Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters, which already incorporated joint policies for joint programmes. In addition, it was suggested to reformulate it as: ‘HEIs involved have set a consortium agreement that defines joint arrangements for admission, selection, supervision, monitoring, assessment, and recognition procedures for the joint study programme. The joint programme and its arrangements are designed and delivered by engaging and consulting student representatives and other stakeholders.’

6. Transnational campus access to services: the joint programme provides enrolled students, regardless of their location, with seamless and free access to the participating higher education institution services such as e.g. Information technology (IT) services, shared infrastructure, and facilities, (online) library services, faculty development and support, academic guidance and psychological counselling, career advice/mentoring, alumni systems (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

There was 93.5% agreement among higher education institutions on this criterion, with some questions about the flexibility of the ‘mandatory’ services and the meaning of ‘seamless and free’, which could be better expressed as ‘offering the same conditions as other students’ or ‘students have access to services in all participating higher education institutions under the same conditions as all enrolled students’. This could imply the possibility of registering students in all partner institutions offering the programme (EDLab).

The agreement across the different stakeholders was 100% for students, 95% for ministries and quality assurance agencies, 86.6% for civil society and 80% for the labour market (FOCI). There was 86.8% alignment with existing practices in joint programmes.

The feedback collected during the mid-term meeting indicated that there would be practical barriers related to infrastructure and systems, as not all services can be provided 'regardless of location'. Therefore, a list of services, guidelines and examples was needed. In addition, the ED AFFICHE project recommended the inclusion of more specific elements such as non-negotiable services such as health and welfare support.

7. Flexible and embedded student mobility arrangements:

    a. The joint programme includes at least 1 period of student physical mobility at another partner institution of at least 30 ECTS (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

The feedback showed a consensus among stakeholders, with reflections on inclusivity and suggestions for improving mobility opportunities. There was 85.6% agreement among higher education institutions on this criterion, with some considering that 30 ECTS is a low requirement for European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF) 6. They also suggested considering exceptions for students who could not undertake physical mobility by including virtual and blended mobility and making it the result of several shorter mobility periods (EDLab). In addition, the results of the EDLab project also suggested splitting criterion into two according to the European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF) level.

Stakeholder agreement was 96% for students, 88% for ministries, 86.6% for civil society, 80% for the labour market and 65% for quality assurance agencies (FOCI). The ED AFFICHE project recommended specifying that the lack of physical attendance does not prevent a university from awarding a joint degree. Feedback suggested that one mobility period should be preferred to two (JEDI). Feedback from the mid-term meeting suggested adding examples of possible activities to the guidelines, such as teaching activities, international events, conferences, joint research projects and publications with researchers from partner institutions.

    b. Flexible PhD student mobility and transnational cooperation: 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 (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

The feedback revealed suggestions for improving mobility opportunities. There was a 73.4% agreement among higher education institutions on this criterion, with a recommendation to include other types of mobility to cater for doctoral students with family responsibilities and to make additional mobility opportunities optional rather than a minimum requirement. They proposed to clarify the wording regarding 'including secondments', which implies that secondments count as mobility (EDLab). Stakeholder agreement was 100% for students, 92% for ministries, 86.6% for civil society, 75% for the labour market and 53.4% for quality assurance agencies (FOCI).

Feedback from the mid-term meeting indicated that the guidelines should include examples of possible activities for doctoral students, such as teaching activities, international events, conferences, joint research projects and publications with researchers from partner institutions.

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 (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

The feedback revealed concerns about the clarity of the criterion. There was 64% agreement among higher education institutions with this criterion. In particular, the term 'exposure' was deemed vague. Furthermore, the need to include language classes in the criterion was mentioned and the development of guidance on how to proceed when there is mobility between countries that share the same language (EDLab). It was also recommended to simplify the criterion offering space to a wide range of 'exposures'.

Stakeholder agreement was 88% for students, 66.6% for the labour market, 60% for ministries, 53.4% for civil society and 30% for quality assurance agencies (FOCI). Most of the higher education institutions participating in ETIKETA supported the preference for 'exposure' to only two different official EU languages.

Feedback from the mid-term meeting indicated that excluding language courses in this criterion would make it more challenging and require more effort from applicants in terms of programme design and/or provision of opportunities outside the formal curriculum. The ED AFFICHE project recommended that criterion 8 might be merged with optional criterion 2.

The European policy experimentation projects also suggested the need to explain in the guidelines that exposure to EU official languages can take place actively and/or passively at any level, in teaching and/or learning activities, examinations, research activities, professional or civic engagement activities, and during mobility periods, including mobility to a country where another EU official language is predominantly used in daily life, including language classes.

9. Innovative learning approaches: the joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinary and/or intersectoral components using student-centred and/or challenged-based approaches (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

The feedback on criterion 9 showed a consensus on the need for clarity and flexibility. There was 72.7% agreement among higher education institutions on this criterion, with suggestions to avoid prescribing specific methodologies and recognition that the criterion is not easily quantifiable (EDLab). In addition, the results of the EDLab project suggested transforming the criterion into a category 'learning approaches', consisting of four criteria relating to student participation in the learning process and its assessment, intersectoral components or activities, dissertations and policies for assessment, recognition and internship regulations.

Agreement among stakeholders was 92% for students, 90% for the labour market, 84% for ministries, 73.4% for quality assurance agencies and 53.4% for civil society (FOCI). The ED AFFICHE project highlighted the need to introduce some indicators or guidelines for this criterion, as higher education institutions may feel that it will condition teaching.

The feedback from the mid-term meeting showed that the criterion is not clear, suggesting a need for refinement, such as changing 'innovative' to 'student-centred'. The focus on 'challenge-based' methods may inadvertently exclude the potential for other and new, emerging pedagogies.

10. Graduate outcomes monitoring: 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 with the survey content of EUROGRADUATE (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

Similar to some of the criteria above, the feedback on this criterion indicated the need for clearer terminology and the importance of a well-defined graduate tracking system. There was 65% agreement among higher education institutions on this criterion, with suggestions to replace the term 'graduate

outcomes' with 'tracking system' and to remove the wording 'if possible'. They also highlighted potential challenges related to the fact that the EUROGRADUATE system was not widely known, but it was advisable to include this recommendation (EDLab).

The level of agreement among stakeholders was 92% for students, 90% for quality assurance agencies, 86.6% for the labour market, 80% for ministries and 53.4% for civil society (FOCI). The benchmark with existing joint programmes showed an alignment of 84.2% (ETIKETA). The ED AFFICHE project proposed the development of a guide to monitoring graduate outcomes, highlighting those most relevant to the sustained success of joint programmes. The feedback from the mid-term meeting suggested replacing 'graduate outcomes' with 'graduate tracking' to avoid confusion and rewording as 'The joint programme has a graduate tracking system'.

11. Inclusiveness and sustainability:

    a. The joint programme commits to wide participation through socially and geographically inclusive admission through tailored measures for all categories of disadvantaged students (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

There was 87% agreement among higher education institutions on this criterion, with a call for clarification on the categories of 'disadvantaged' students and concerns about the need for sufficient funding for some specific degrees that may not be open to all (EDLab). They also suggested removing the term 'all categories' because it raised concerns about its feasibility and including the concepts of diversity and support measures.

Stakeholder agreement was 96% for students, 92% for ministries, 90% for the labour market, 85% for quality assurance agencies, and 73.4% for civil society (FOCI). The benchmark with existing joint programmes showed an alignment of 92.1% (ETIKETA). The feedback collected during the mid-term meeting suggests that the guidelines could include good practices, examples of categories of disadvantaged students (Erasmus+ categories) and specific procedures for students to report discrimination or other unfair treatment.

    b. Compliance with the European Charter for Researchers, Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action (MSCA) Green Charter: 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 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action (MSCA) Green Charter (European Qualifications Frameworks 8).

73.4% of higher education institutions agreed with this criterion (EDLab). Further, the EDLab project results suggested splitting the criterion into three. The level of agreement among stakeholders was 95% for students, 93.4% for quality assurance agencies, 88% for ministries, 86.6% for the labour market and 80% for civil society (FOCI). Benchmarking with existing joint programmes showed 88.8% alignment (ETIKETA). The feedback from the mid-term meeting suggested that compliance with the above-mentioned charters was feasible.

<u>Proposed optional criteria in the context of the Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects</u>

1. Alternative learning formats for transnational learning: 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) (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7).

Feedback on optional criterion 1 highlighted suggestions to merge it with criterion 7. There was 77.7% agreement among higher education institutions on this optional criterion, with suggestions to keep it optional or to merge it with criterion 7 as a complement to physical mobility. It is also suggested to

change the wording to: ‘In addition to physical mobility, the joint programme offers additional formats of transnational learning activities’ (EDLab). This criterion was 76.3% consistent with existing joint programmes (ETIKETA).

2. Language classes: the joint programme offers the possibility to take language classes to enhance the command of multiple European languages (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

Feedback on optional criterion 2 pointed to proposals to merge it with criterion 8. Feedback on criterion 2 showed 85.7% agreement among higher education institutions. They suggested to not impose it but to offer it when relevant. They also expressed that this could make reference to extracurricular activities, and it should not be considered the responsibility of a joint programme (EDLab). Agreement among stakeholders was 84% for students, 80% for ministries, 73.4% for the labour market and civil society, and 70% for quality assurance agencies (FOCI).

3. Cooperation with the labour market: the joint programme supports future labour market needs and/or includes cooperation with businesses and sectors in its curriculum (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

There were different levels of agreement between stakeholders on this criterion. There was 79.1% agreement among higher education institutions on this criterion, with the observation that the relevance of the criterion may depend on the field of study and should also cover the needs of careers in academia and basic research. However, they also mentioned this criterion is part of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and as such should be mandatory, at least for European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF) 6 and 7 (EDLab).

The level of agreement among other stakeholders was 95% for the labour market, 92% for ministries, 86.6% for civil society and 70% for quality assurance agencies and students (FOCI). There was 92.1% alignment with existing practices in joint programmes (ETIKETA). The ED AFFICHE project recommended that optional criteria be added to the list of mandatory criteria.

Participants in the mid-term meeting noted that alignment with labour market needs should be mandatory, but that it is difficult to assess in concrete terms. They also suggested that it should be strengthened through cooperation with business and/or industry and/or civil society and/or the public sector.

4. Work-based learning opportunities: the joint programme provides opportunities for international professional internships/work-based learning recognised through the award of ECTS (European Qualifications Frameworks 7, 8).

The feedback showed different perspectives on its relevance and implementation among different stakeholders. There was 78.4% agreement among higher education institutions with this criterion, with suggestions that it may not be relevant for all fields, or even unnecessary, and should remain optional. They also suggested that the term ‘international’ should be clarified to mean different from the country of origin or the countries in which the programme is offered. Further, they suggested including this optional criterion in the mandatory criterion 9 (EDLab).

The level of agreement among other stakeholders is 93.4% for the labour market, 84% for students, 80% for ministries, 73.4% for civil society and 70% for quality assurance agencies (FOCI). There is 47.3% alignment with existing practices in joint programmes (ETIKETA). Notably, 83.3% of higher education institutions participating in the JEDI project would include mandatory requirements for exposure to internships. The ED AFFICHE project recommended that optional criterion 4 be added to the list of mandatory criteria.

Participants in the mid-term meeting expressed different opinions, with some in favour of compulsory international placements, while others found it challenging, particularly depending on the level of employment in the field of study and the legal framework for traineeships.

5. Career development plan: the joint programme includes a career development plan devised with the candidate and/or exposure to the non-academic sector (such as internships, seminars, and networking) (European Qualifications Frameworks 8).

The feedback on optional criterion 5 showed different opinions on its implementation. There was 66.9% agreement among higher education institutions on this criterion, with the suggestion that such plans were usually offered at the institutional level rather than within the programme (EDLab). The ED AFFICHE project recommended that this criterion be consolidated with similar mandatory ones and made compulsory, as it underlines the capacity of the joint programme to provide career development services. The level of agreement between stakeholders varied, with ministries at 90%, civil society at 80%, the labour market at 73.4%, students at 66.6% and quality assurance agencies at 60% (FOCI).

6. Environmental and sustainability measures: the joint programme includes components and actions related to environmental sustainability and implements measures to minimise the environmental footprint of its activities (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

There was 70.5% agreement among higher education institutions on this criterion, with suggestions that these measures should be implemented at institutional rather than programme level and that quantification or evaluation may be difficult. They also pointed out that environmental sustainability should be a focus in all programmes and therefore it should not be a determining factor in awarding the European degree. In addition, there was a potential contradiction regarding the promotion of physical mobility (EDLab).

The agreement among stakeholders was 85% for the labour market and students, 80% for ministries, 65% for quality assurance agencies and 53.4% for civil society (FOCI). There is 86.8% alignment with existing practices in joint programmes (ETIKETA). The ED AFFICHE project recommended the development of a guide at the European level to facilitate a common understanding of the criterion. Participants in the mid-term meeting highlighted the importance of environmental sustainability, which could be further refined using environmental sustainability frameworks.

7. Digital skills development: 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 (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

The feedback showed different perspectives. There was 74.1% agreement among higher education institutions on this criterion, with recommendations to assess high-level and high-quality digital skills against clear indicators, and to emphasise the importance of digital skills for all programmes rather than as a distinctive feature of a European degree. They also highlighted the need for clarification of the terms ‘high level’, ‘as well as (digital) assessment of student (digital) skills’ and ‘high-quality digital education content’ (EDLab).

The consensus among stakeholders was 80% for civil society, 73.4% for the labour market, 76% for students and 50% for quality assurance agencies (FOCI). Alignment with existing practices in joint programmes is 92.1%. The ED AFFICHE project recommended that a guide be drawn up at the European level to guide on how to achieve this objective. Participants in the mid-term meeting highlighted the importance of refining the criterion on digital literacy with the possibility of using DigComp to assess digital literacy.

8. Democratic values and social engagement: 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 (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

Feedback showed mixed opinions, highlighting concerns about the allocation of ECTS. There was 57.9% agreement among higher education institutions on this criterion, with some concerns about the feasibility of awarding ECTS for activities promoting democratic values and societal engagement due to the complexity of organising and assessing these activities (EDLab). The EDLab project also suggested making this criterion mandatory.

Across all stakeholders there was 86.6% agreement for civil society, 85% for the labour market, 70% for students and 55% for quality assurance agencies (FOCI). There is 26.3% alignment with existing practices in joint programmes. Participants in the mid-term review event expressed divergent views, with some arguing that this criterion should be combined with traineeships and made mandatory, while others argued that the award of ECTS is particularly challenging for this type of activity. Some participants pointed out that the award of ECTS does not necessarily need to be integrated into curricula.

9. Programme promotion and visibility: The higher education institutions offering the joint study programme conduct joint promotion and awareness-raising activities to ensure visibility of the joint programme and provide the necessary information about it for students and other relevant stakeholders such as future employers (European Qualifications Frameworks 6, 7, 8).

There was a fairly high level of agreement (85.3%) on this criterion among higher education institutions (EDLab). The EDLab project proposed to make this optional criterion mandatory by including it in mandatory criteria 5 and/or 9 and splitting it into two, highlighting the importance of providing the necessary information for students and other relevant stakeholders such as future employers.

Across all stakeholders, the agreement was 84% for ministries, 80% for civil society, 75% for students, 66.6% for the labour market and 50% for quality assurance agencies (FOCI). There was 76.3% alignment with existing practices in joint programmes (ETIKETA). Some higher education institutions are in favour of increasing the visibility and awareness of the criterion, possibly moving it from optional to mandatory (SMARTT). The ED AFFICHE project recommended that the Commission should take the lead in promoting the concept of a European degree internationally. Participants in the mid-term meeting agreed that joint programmes by their nature carry out joint promotional activities, making this criterion potentially redundant.

Suggested additional criteria

While there was a general agreement among the projects that criteria should not be too numerous, some projects explored the added value of potential new ones in early phases of their work to strengthen the availability of opportunities for staff, inclusion of students in decision making processes and feedback mechanisms, openness to flexible units of learning such as micro-credentials and flexible learning pathways.

> *'The scope of the initiative needs to be expanded to include other models of higher education in addition to full programmes. This is crucial in a higher education that is increasingly moving towards more innovative and flexible models of educational provision (e.g. micro-credentials) and flexible learning pathways'.*
>
> FOCI consortium (composed of eight universities from seven countries: Belgium, Croatia, France, Greece, Lithuania, Poland, and the Netherlands) – Call for Evidence.

Feasibility of the tested criteria in the context of the Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects

Alongside the suitability of the criteria developed, there is also the question of their feasibility. This is closely correlated with the obstacles and challenges outlined in the previous section, which would need to be overcome in order to pave the way for European degrees to be awarded. Firstly, most of the higher education institutions consulted in the study that preceded the adoption of this document acknowledge that it would be either demanding or very demanding to award joint degrees to graduates of joint European programmes[135]. This view was shared by the national authorities, who admitted that the awarding of joint degrees is not fully permitted in all countries[136].

Similar serious difficulties exist in the area of quality assurance. Requiring a review by an agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) from another country or using the European Approach may not be feasible across Europe. The European Approach is not currently available in all countries and not all countries allow their higher education institutions to freely choose an agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education. Problems are more likely to arise in countries where the European Approach is not available, where it is not possible to choose an agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, and where there is no national agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education[137].

Table 2.1: Availability of the European Approach and the option to choose an agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)

	European Approach is available	**European Approach is partly available**	**European Approach is not available**
Can choose an agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) from another country.	Belgium-FL, Belgium-FR, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Romania, Finland	Germany, Cyprus	Latvia, Slovakia
Can choose an agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) from another country under certain conditions.	Denmark, Malta, the Netherlands	Estonia*, France*, Luxembourg, Portugal*	Czechia**, Greece**

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

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

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

	European Approach is available	European Approach is partly available	European Approach is not available
Cannot choose an agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) from another country.	-	Ireland*, Slovenia*	Croatia*, Sweden*
Information on the ability to choose an agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) from another country is not available.	-	-	Italy**

** National agency is registered with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).*
*** There is no national agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).*
Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Burneikaitė, G., Pocius, D., Potapova, E. et al., The road towards a possible joint European degree – Identifying opportunities and investigating the impact and feasibility of different approaches – Final report, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/945147

Other feasibility concerns relate to the description of a joint programme in ECTS credits and the commitment to provide students with seamless and free access to services such as Information Technology (IT) services, shared infrastructure and facilities, (online) library services, faculty development and support, academic and psychological counselling, career guidance and monitoring, and alumni systems. Stakeholders report that some national requirements on curriculum and programme length may hamper the definition of programmes in terms of ECTS credits. In addition, the coordination and interconnection of universities' digital infrastructures may hinder the establishment of transnational campuses.

Some of the criteria may require a greater effort on the part of the institutions to meet (in particular multilingualism and interdisciplinarity), but as they are now formulated, they still seem quite achievable. There is also a group of criteria that can be achieved quite easily, as they are already an integral part of joint degree programmes. These are the required number of participating higher education institutions, joint policies for the joint programmes, the issuing of a diploma supplement, embedded student mobility, and inclusiveness and sustainability.

Although sometimes challenging to meet, higher education institutions expressed their willingness to invest a significant amount of time in complying with the European degree criteria. More than half of the respondents to the survey indicated that they would be willing to spend more than six months developing a new programme in line with the co-created criteria[138]. 45% of the higher education

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

institutions surveyed would spend at least 10 working days adapting their programmes to the European degree as a qualification, while a third would do the same for the label[139].

> *'We intend the European degree as a seal of quality making our degrees more attractive on a global level. The set of common criteria associated with the European degree will serve as a guidance for the benefit of all Higher Education Institutions'.*
>
> UNITA (alliance of European research universities spanning France, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, and Ukraine) – Call for Evidence.

General perspectives

From a general perspective, most of the feedback collected suggests that the proposed criteria seemed to be fit for purpose, provided that they come with clearer definition and guidelines.

The projects proposed several recommendations for smoother implementation of the European degrees. First, restructuring the criteria to enhance clarity, drawing inspiration from the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (European Approach). Second, use only mandatory criteria to avoid confusion regarding the meaning of optional, additional, or voluntary criteria. Third, it was clear for all projects that the criteria should be accompanied by a glossary of terminology and extensive guidelines explaining all basic concepts and providing examples of ways to comply.

In addition, suggestions to expand the scope of the European degree to micro-credentials and to EQF level 5 programmes were also voiced and supported by most projects. It was suggested to work on an adapted list of criteria that could be applied to such learning experiences due to their differences with EQF levels 6, 7 and 8 joint programmes. Such an activity could take place in the framework of European degree policy labs, when designing guidelines for the implementation of the European degree.

A revised list of criteria incorporating all gathered input was produced in February 2024 and is presented here below and in Annex II of this Staff Working Document.

2.2.3 Revised list of criteria for a European degree

Taking into account all feedback collected from the Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects and facilitating direct exchanges between the projects and the European Commission, a list of revised criteria for the European was produced to serve as blueprint for the development of a European degree, as a label or as a qualification and for the development of guidelines for its implementation.

The criteria are divided in 3 different clusters: Transnational programme organisation and management, learning experience and European values.

Cluster 1: Transnational programme organisation and management

1. Higher education institutions involved:

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

The joint programme is offered by at least 2 higher education institutions from at least 2 different EU Member States. (EQF levels 6, 7 and 8)

While this criterion defines the fact that any European degree must involve several institutions from different countries, the opportunity to raise the minimum of 2 to 3 different institutions from 3 different countries and to expand the geographical scope beyond the EU was discussed by the different projects. Existing practices under Erasmus+ funding schemes (Erasmus Mundus, MSCA) and the mandate of European institutions defined the scope of the criteria without ruling out potential expansion should political decisions be taken to expand the scope and ambition of a European degree.

The future guidelines should precise that these are the minimum requirements. Beyond this minimum, there are no restrictions on the number of higher education institutions or the countries they are from, within or beyond the EU.

2. Transnational joint degree delivery:

The joint programme is jointly designed and jointly delivered by all the higher education institutions involved. (EQF levels 6, 7 and 8)

The joint nature of the programme is the very basis of a joint degree. Students should experience the programme as a single joint whole, not as separate parts provided by different partner institution and put together artificially to form a whole.

The future guidelines should define that compliance with such a criterion should be shown through agreement and alignment (specified in the consortium agreement or in other related joint documents) among the partners on the format and content of the programme, with jointly designed learning outcomes at programme level as a minimum and demonstrating that all partners contribute to teaching and/or the provision of other learning activities.

The joint programme leads to the award of a joint degree. (EQF levels 6, 7 and 8)

A joint degree is a basic element to reflect the joint nature of the programme it is also logical for a European degree to not be composed of several and multiple degrees as none of them alone could claim to be a European degree. It is also aligned with Bologna commitments to facilitate the delivery of joint degrees across the EHEA.

The future guidelines should define that joint degrees are understood as a single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme, in line with the definition adopted in the European approach for quality assurance of joint programmes.

A joint diploma supplement is issued to students. (EQF levels 6 and 7)

The diploma supplement is an important tool for recognition of qualifications. A joint diploma supplement is necessary to reflect the joint nature of the programme and that students can have one document to share instead of several ones covering only parts of the learning experience.

The guidelines to be developed should indicate that a joint diploma supplement clearly describe all parts of the degree programme and contain relevant information on the type and level of qualification awarded; the institutions that issued the qualification; the content of the course and the results gained, the institutions in which the student has earned the different parts of the degree and details of the national education systems.

The joint programme describes the learning outcomes and credits in line with the ECTS Users Guide. (EQF levels 6 and 7)

This criterion encourages alignment with existing EHEA tools and to ensure that curricular design is based on reaching intended learning outcomes.

3. Joint arrangements for the joint programme

The joint programme has joint policies, procedures and/or arrangements defining curriculum planning and delivery, as well as all organisational and administrative matters.
Students' representatives are part of the decision-making process to define the joint policies and procedures and/or arrangements. (EQF levels 6, 7 and 8)

A joint programme should have joint structures to ensure that joint policies, procedures and arrangements are agreed on, implemented and monitored.

The future guidelines should precise that these policies, procedures and arrangements should cover at least policies related to admission, selection, supervision, progression, monitoring, assessment, degree awarding and recognition as well as any other policy or arrangement that would be deemed necessary for a European degree programme.

The guidelines should precise that this may be done through joint committees and boards, and may be programme specific or, for example, set up at inter-institutional or alliance levels.
The guidelines should also provide guidance on the inclusion of student's representatives in the decision-making process with examples of good practices.

4. Quality assurance arrangements

Internal and external Quality Assurance is conducted in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The higher education institutions, the study field or the programme are evaluated by an EQAR registered agency. (EQF levels 6, 7 and 8)

This criterion promotes alignment with existing EHEA tools while respecting the diversity of accreditation and quality assurance systems and the competence of the Member States.

The future guidelines will support accreditation and evaluation agencies to integrate an evaluation of compliance with the criteria of a European degree within their existing processes and procedures.

5. Graduate-tracking

The joint programme monitors graduates through a graduate tracking system. (EQF levels 6, 7 and 8)

Monitoring graduates' outcomes is important for quality assurance purposes, to assess the relevance of a programme, for promotion of the programme, build an alumni network among other things.

The guidelines will precise that such a system can be at programme level or at institutional level as long as it is adapted to the characteristics of such a transnational programme, making use of existing tools wherever possible.

<u>Cluster 2: Learning experience</u>

6. Student-centred learning

The joint programme is designed and continuously enhanced and delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in the learning process. Assessment of students reflects this approach. (EQF levels 6, 7 and 8)

This criterion builds on the ESG (1.3 - Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment) to stress the importance of implementing student-centred learning, teaching and assessment.

The guidelines should link this criterion with compliance with the ESG and indicates a set of indicators that can be used as well as provide examples of good practices.

7. Interdisciplinarity

The joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinarity components. (EQF levels 6, 7 and 8)

This criterion promotes the inclusion of some element of inter-disciplinarity in the curricula. This does not make it compulsory for every programme to be fully inter-disciplinary but to allow for an inter-disciplinary dimension in the curricula (through one or several courses, modules, etc)

The guidelines will further define these guidance in full respect of academic freedom and diversity of fields and disciplines.

8. Labour market relevance

The joint programme aligns with labour market requirements by incorporating intersectoral components or activities and the development of transversal skills. (EQF levels 6, 7 and 8)

This criterion encompasses elements such as cooperation with other sectors (businesses, industries, civil society, the public sector, etc.), traineeships and any other activity that can be used to for students to develop transversal skills and ensure the labour market relevance of the programme.

The guidelines will provide further guidance on indicators and good practices.

9. Digital skills

The joint programme includes components and actions related to the development of advanced digital skills of students, tailored to the capacities and circumstances of the joint programme, ensuring alignment with its scope and scholarly focus. (EQF levels 6, 7 and 8)

Digital skills are skills that are relevant in all fields and disciplines. This criterion ensures that students are prepared to embrace the digital transition by incorporating components and actions for the development of digital skills. This can be achieved through different means.
The guidelines will provide indicators and examples of components and actions to comply with such a criteria, keeping in mind the need for a flexible and proportionate approach, aligned with the scope and the focus of each programme.

10. Transnational campus – access to services

The programme has joint policies for students and staff to have access to relevant services in all participating higher education institutions in equivalent conditions as all enrolled students and local staff. (EQF levels 6, 7 and 8)

All students of a joint programme should have equal access to services of participation institutions regardless of the fact they are physically present in the institution or not. The criterion also stress the importance for staff of joint programmes to have access to services of the different institutions.

The guidelines will provide additional guidance on the kind of services that are deemed relevant in such contexts as well as examples of series of services that can be provided.

11. Flexible and embedded student mobility

The joint programme offers deep intercultural experience, including a minimum of 1 period of student physical mobility (that can be split in several stays) at another or several partner institution(s) representing overall at least 60 ECTS at EQF 6 level and 30 ECTS at EQF 7 level.
The joint programme has a policy offering alternatives for students who are unable to travel.
(EQF levels 6 and 7)

Mobility is at the core of the vast majority of joint programme. It is also one fundamental aspect of European integration and a characteristic of the european higher education area. This criterion ensures that students are provided with opportunities to be mobile between the institutions offering the joint programme for a minimum of 60 ECTS at Bachelor's level and 30 ECTS at Master's level.

The guideline will precise that such minimum requirements do not prevent the offering of more mobility opportunities and that they do not necessarily entail the completion of rigid blocks of mobility but allow for the stacking of several smaller periods of mobility.

The joint programme offers deep intercultural experience, including a total of at least 6 months of physical mobility at another or several partner institution(s).
The joint programme has a policy offering alternatives for students who are unable to travel.
(EQF level 8)

This criterion reflects the previous one, taking into account the need to distinguish Doctoral level from other levels.

12. Co-evaluation and co-supervision for dissertations

Dissertations are supervised by at least 2 supervisors and co-evaluated by co-supervisors or a committee with members from at least 2 different institutions located in 2 different countries. (EQF level 8)

Co-evaluation and co-supervision ensures a true joint doctoral experience. It is an important element promoted by the MSCA action.

The guidelines will provide indicators and further details on how compliance with such a criteria can be assessed.

<u>Cluster 3: European values</u>

13. Democratic values

The joint programme's joint policies promote and adhere to democratic values. (EQF levels 6, 7 and 8)

This criterion is proposed as a minimum requirement due to the important role of education in strengthening common European values and democratic citizenship.

The guidelines will support the assessment of compliance respect for democracy reflected in the joint programme's policies and procedures. Several reference documents can be used as points of reference for this purpose such as the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture developed by the Council of Europe, the Erasmus+ Charter for Higher Education and the European Charter for Fundamental rights as examples.

14. Multilingualism

During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different EU languages. (EQF levels 6, 7 and 8)

Multilingualism is one of the core values of the European project and is highly valued by employers and students. This criterion promotes an exposure to multilingualism as part of the programme.

The guidelines will define how this exposure can take place (language classes, courses or modules taught in a different language than the rest of the curricula, etc.)

15. Inclusiveness

The joint programme commits to wide participation by fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion and by adopting tailored measures to support students and staff with less opportunities. (EQF levels 6, 7 and 8)

This criterion stressed the importance for European degree programmes to be an inclusive opportunity for all, which is a core concern of students. Target measures to support inclusion of disadvantaged students but also staff will support inclusive policies fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The guideline will indicate indicators and guidance to measure this criterion. Such arrangements should be reflected in the admission policies and processes and detailed in detailed in the consortium agreement or in other related joint document(s).

The joint programme commits to respect the principles of the European Charter for Researchers. (EQF level 8)

These well-established principles are considered key to ensure inclusive practices in doctoral programmes.

The guidelines will indicate that clear reference should be made in the consortium agreement or in other related joint documents to the commitment to respect the principles mentioned, and processes and policies are place to ensure this alignment.

16. Green transition

The joint programme has policies and actions related to environmental sustainability and implements measures to minimise the environmental footprint of its activities. (EQF levels 6, 7 and 8)

This criterion expresses the commitment to promote environmental sustainability. The criterion is open enough to cover a wide range of activities.

The guidelines will describe what kind of measures can reflect such commitment, keeping in mind the necessity to respect the diversity of contexts and programmes.

MSCA Green Charter promotes the sustainable implementation of research activities. This is in line with the goals of the European Green Deal, which aims to make Europe's economy sustainable.

The guidelines will refer to the fact that such commitment should be reflected in the joint policies and arrangements and that students and staff should be informed about these principles.

2.2.4 Award process and actors

Stakeholder feedback from available pilot project outputs on the added value of a European degree as a label or a type of qualification

Stakeholders concurred that a label alone has no legal value, and therefore may not achieve national recognition or regulatory simplification, limiting its added value. In contrast, European degrees are perceived as more influential due to their regulatory clarity and wider understanding among stakeholders. There was a common understanding that a European degree would be more impactful than a label.

> *'As long as the Common European Degree is only a supplement to the individual degrees of the universities (be it a single, double or joint degree), it has little value'.*
>
> Bielefeld University (Germany) – Call for Evidence.

While there is overall agreement on the degree being the ultimate objective, questions about the feasibility and timeline for realising this goal were expressed. The introduction of a label faces minimal legal hurdles, whereas progress towards a European degree will require changes in regulatory frameworks at the national and institutional levels, as well as political commitment and advocacy. The European policy experimentation projects highlighted possible difficulties with national accreditation systems, and the consulted quality assurance agencies expressed scepticism regarding this pathway.

Acknowledging these challenges, many European policy experimentation projects also agreed that the introduction of the European degree as a label could support systems to move towards degrees fully integrated into national legislation. The label could act as a catalyst by demonstrating the potential of joint degrees. This phased approach does not imply postponing the European degree until all countries have made the necessary legislative changes. Instead, the two options could coexist: the label could be introduced while countries begin to incorporate the European degree into their national legislation. In addition, the label could remain an alternative in scenarios where a European degree would be more challenging, such as in regulated professions.

While the introduction of a European degree would require changes to legislation in some countries, the European policy experimentation projects unanimously recognised the importance of respecting national competencies in education. The awarding of accredited joint degrees aims to enhance the attractiveness of European education, but it is essential that this initiative does not undermine or compete with existing national qualifications systems and standard educational offerings. This balance ensures that the enhancement brought about by the European degree complements, rather than conflicts with, the established educational frameworks within individual countries.

Award process and actors

In addition, one of the main questions discussed by the pilots for the implementation of the European degree is who would carry out the assessment of whether the programme meets the European criteria and decide whether a European degree (in whatever form) can be awarded. There is a broad consensus

that the European degree should integrate rather than duplicate existing processes. In order to minimise costs and maximise benefits, the integration of application and evaluation procedures into existing accreditation/evaluation procedures is considered to be the most effective.

When assessing whether a programme meets the criteria for awarding a European degree, the most common recommendation from the European policy experimentation projects is that the awarding process should look like an accreditation/quality assurance process, even in the case of a label and certainly in the case of a degree. Many favour an approach that would involve the use of national accreditation and quality assurance agencies registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). In this scenario, one agency could review the criteria for the European degree and its decision would be accepted in all participating countries without the need for separate review by their quality assurance agencies.

Any agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education would be eligible to verify the compliance of programmes or institutions with the European criteria, fully integrating this process into existing procedures for programme accreditation and quality assurance. Higher education institutions that can self-accredit their own programmes could also award European degrees, provided they can demonstrate that they have the appropriate processes in place to ensure compliance with the European criteria.

The pilots also emphasised the need for a fair and transparent process across countries, and suggested more detailed descriptions of the criteria and a set of indicators for better readability and measurability. The development of a comprehensive toolkit or guidance document that provides definitions and clarifies the meaning of each criterion would be an invaluable resource. Such a resource could serve as a guide for evaluators, defining the evaluation methodology and indicators and providing examples of good practice.

As the pilots progressed, a third option emerged: the introduction of the European degree as a degree offered by alliances of higher education institutions with a legal entity. Under this option, alliances of higher education institutions that would have chosen to establish a legal entity could be accredited to deliver joint educational provisions, including a European degree. National legislation would need to allow such accreditation of new legal entities. This option was not explored in depth by all six pilots, but some did gather preliminary views on it revealing diverse perspectives.

An overview of each option is presented below.

Entry point 1: a European label.

A label is given to joint degree programmes meeting the European criteria. While the label will provide a powerful branding tool, it will not solve the obstacles encountered by higher education institutions to establish joint degree programmes.

Entry point 2: a European degree.

A degree is awarded jointly by several universities from different countries (e.g. a European universities alliance). The European degree is integrated as a new type of qualification into national legislation. This offers significant simplification both for higher education institutions and for students by removing disparities between national rules and equipping EU universities with a common and clear framework to create joint degree programmes. As any degree, it would be accredited following national legislation and National Qualification Frameworks by the competent authorities at institutional, regional, or national levels**.**

A European degree could also be awarded by a European legal entity established by several higher education institutions from different countries (e.g. a European universities alliance with a legal status). Same as entry point 2a but with a legal status. This path would offer the simplest way with the highest efficiency for universities in terms of associated costs and necessary resources.

These more advanced and institutionalised forms of cooperation have been experimented with under the second topic of the 2022 call for proposals on 'European policy experimentation in higher education under the Erasmus+ programme', which invited proposals to explore the feasibility of a possible European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions. The preliminary results of the selected projects are presented in the upcoming section.

2.2.5 A possible European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions

Transnational cooperation between higher education institutions has a widely recognised and positive impact on academic and research excellence and innovation in the higher education sector, and thus on the cohesion and competitiveness of Member States and the European Union as a whole. Nonetheless, the pursuit of international cooperation between higher education institutions is often not straightforward.

In 2020, the European University Association conducted a survey[140] among 219 higher education institutions from across 34 European systems. Even then, just two years after the launch of the European Universities Initiative, 59% of respondents identified administrative obstacles to cooperation due to different institutional structures and processes as one of the most significant barriers to deeper strategic cooperation.

One of the barriers is related to the lack of a legal status for alliances of higher education institutions. They see a strong need for this in order to be able to share financial, human, digital and physical resources, infrastructures and services, as well as joint activities, including educational activities, more efficiently.

These challenges have not gone unnoticed. The Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation[141] invited the Commission to 'support the Member States and higher education institutions in testing the use of existing European instruments from 2022 onwards as a step on the way to facilitating deeper, long-term and flexible transnational

[140] European Universities Association, *Position Paper – The future of the European Universities Initiative: The sector's perspective*, April 2020, p. 1, https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/eua%20council%20position%20on%20future%20of%20eui.pdf

[141] Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (2022/C 160/01), OJ C 160, 13.4.2022, p. 1–8, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H0413(01)

cooperation and in examining the need for and feasibility of institutionalised cooperation instruments, such as a possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions'.

In the same recommendation, the European Council further elaborated on the objectives that such instruments – to be used on a voluntary basis - could strive for, highlighting, among others, 'the sharing of capacities and data and the exchange of staff, where appropriate, and the implementation of joint programmes, with the aim of awarding joint degrees at the level of alliances, including a joint degree based on co-created European criteria'.

As a result, in June 2022, the European Commission launched a European policy experimentation in higher education under the Erasmus+ programme[142], to pilot a joint European degree label and test institutionalised EU cooperation instruments, such as a possible European legal status for alliances. At the end of January 2023, 10 European policy experimentation projects were selected, four of which committed to testing institutionalised EU cooperation instruments, such as a possible European legal status for alliances:

1. European Status for a ECIU University (ESEU).

2. Blueprint for a legal entity for cross-border university alliances (Leg-UniGR).

3. UNITA as a model for institutionalised university cooperation: from the European Grouping of Economic Interest to the European Grouping of Academic Interest (EGAI).

4. EUt+ Status and structure experience (STYX).

Out of these four projects, two are focussing on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)[143], one on a European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG)[144], and the fourth project is providing a comprehensive analysis of different existing European legal instruments in the light of different use cases identified, while comparing them to existing national-level solutions.

The European policy experimentation projects form the basis of the following findings.

Existing alliances of higher education institutions with a legal status

European Universities alliances, supported under Erasmus+, consist of partner higher education institutions pursuing a joint long-term vision. The rich diversity of the higher education landscape in Europe is also reflected in the different models for cooperation that the European Universities alliances have set up. Depending on the strategic vision of the alliance, different levels of integration and cooperation are envisaged.

Currently, out of 50 European Universities alliances, at least 12 alliances have already set up a legal entity: 4EU+, Circle U, ECIU, EU-CONEXUS, EUNICE, EUniWell, FILMEU, UNA EUROPA, UNITA, EUTOPIA, E^3UDRES^2, YUFE. To date, despite having partner institutions from different countries, most of them have chosen one of the legal instruments available under the national legislation of certain Member States, i.e. non-profit association under Belgian law, international non-profit association under Belgian law, foundation under Dutch law, registered association under German law, and registered association under Austrian law.

[142] European Commission, Call for proposals: European policy experimentation in higher education. ERASMUS-EDU-2022-POL-EXP, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2022/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2022-pol-exp-he_en.pdf.
[143] Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC), OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 19–24.
[144] Council Regulation (EEC) No 2137/85 of 25 July 1985 on the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG), OJ L 199, 31.7.1985, p. 1–9.

In all these cases, the alliances reported administrative and operational advantages as the decisive factors for setting up a legal entity with a legal identity[145]. In addition, of the 40 European Universities alliances surveyed that started their operations in 2019 and 2020, 11 have reported that they are in the process of developing a legal entity for their alliance. This means that more than 20 European Universities clearly see the added value of a legal status for their alliance. Others have indicated to await progress and results of the Erasmus+ pilot projects, while nevertheless showing strong interest in the topic.

Other alliances of European higher education institutions, beyond the European Universities alliances, have also made significant strides in establishing a legal status to formalise their cooperation, for example through a non-profit association under Luxembourg law and a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation.

An overview of some of the alliances with an established legal status can be found in Table 2.

Table 2.2: Overview of alliances of higher education institutions with an established legal status

Type of legal status	Alliance(s)
Not-for-profit organisation under German law.	4EU+, EUniWell
Not-for-profit organisation under Belgian law.	Circle U, EU-Conexus, EUNICE, Film-EU, Una Europa, EUTOPIA, YUFE
Foundation under Dutch law.	ECIU
Not-for-profit organisation under Luxembourg law.	Université de la Grande Région[146]
Not-for-profit organisation under Austrian law.	E^3UDRES^2
European Economic Interest Grouping.	UNITA
European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation.	Eucor, European Campus of Studies and Research, La Agrupación Europea de Cooperación Territorial Galicia-Norte de Portugal (GNP-AECT)

All of the four European policy experimentation projects selected in the context of the Erasmus+ policy experimentation in higher education testing institutionalised EU cooperation instruments, such as a possible European legal status for alliances, aim at a relatively high level of operational and institutional integration. Some of the projects pointed to greater visibility in their region and in Europe as a driver for the formalisation of their legal status, while others aim at the full merger of their institutions in the long term to offer European degrees and seamless mobility of students and staff members.

[145] European Commission. Preliminary data from the study *Outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative* (in preparation – not yet published).
[146] Note that Université de la Grande Région, as part of the Erasmus+ pilot projects, is looking into a change of legal status, from a not-for-profit organisation under Luxembourg law into a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation.

Following consultations with some of these alliances and European policy experimentation projects, it is concluded that these instruments address to some extent the operational and administrative dimension of transnational cooperation. However, they were not primarily designed for cooperation in the higher education sector and therefore did not provide the opportunity for significant advances in higher education cooperation, such as the development of a joint education offer.

Available national and EU legal instruments

National and EU legal frameworks offer a wide variety of legal forms that could theoretically be applied to higher education institutions. Nevertheless, many of them have limitations that effectively hinder the achievement of the seamless transnational cooperation sought by higher education alliances. For this reason, for this Staff Working Document, the selection of available legal instruments concentrates only on those that are used or planned to be used in the higher education sector, with a focus on facilitating deeper cooperation in higher education.

It then presents an analysis of their suitability to the needs of the alliances of higher education institutions identified in the context of the Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects.

National instruments

1. Consortia and other public groupings

In most EU Member States, consortia are defined as a cooperation between legal entities governed by a civil law contract. They usually do not give the consortium a separate legal personality[147]. Their purpose is to improve and/or extend the cooperation of an association of institutions in order to achieve mutually beneficial objectives. Depending on the applicable legislation, consortia and other public groupings may benefit from tax exemptions for activities of general interest, and ease of establishment.

Examples of national alliances in higher education using consortia are to be found in Spain[148] and in Italy[149].

2. International non-profit association under Belgian law (AISBL/IVZW)

This is a Belgian legal instrument that allows cooperation between natural or legal persons pursuing an objective of international utility for non-profit purposes. The association can be set up even if none of the founding members is resident in Belgium, but the head office must be in Belgium and the association must obtain a Royal decree.

Three European Universities alliances have made use of this instrument – Circle U, EU-Conexus, EUTOPIA, EUNICE and YUFE.

3. Non-profit association under Belgian law (ASBL/VZW)

This is a Belgian instrument designed for a group of legal or natural persons who pursue a non-profit purpose. It must consist of at least two members, one of which must be established in Belgium. The association does not require a Royal decree but has a strictly prescribed organisational structure.

The UNA Europa and FILMEU European Universities alliance have made use of this legal instrument.

[147] In some Member States consortia and other public groupings have a legal personality limited to the territory of the Member State in which they are established.
[148] Campus Iberus, https://www.campusiberus.es/?lang=en
[149] CNIT - National Inter-University Consortium for Telecommunications, https://www.cnit.it/en/

4. Non-profit association under Austrian law

The E[3]UDRES[2] European University is making use of this legal instrument.

5. Registered association under German law

This is a German legal entity established for non-profit purposes. It must have at least seven members, one of whom must be established in Germany. The association must also have a general secretariat established in Germany. The incorporation procedure is relatively simple, and it offers the flexibility of a management structure.

The 4EU+ and the EUniWell alliances are making use of this legal instrument.

6. Foundation under Dutch law

A foundation is a legal entity under Dutch law. The purpose of a foundation can be defined relatively flexibly by the founders, but must have primarily social objectives and its income must benefit the organisation itself. The only statutory body is a board. Other management structures are characterised in the founding documents.

The ECIU alliance has made use of this legal instrument.

7. Non-profit association under Luxembourg law

This is a Luxembourg legal instrument that allows the creation of a non-profit association. A minimum of three members is required for the formation of an association. The registered office of the association can be transferred without the association losing its legal personality. The incorporation procedure is fairly simple. The two governing bodies required by law are a board of directors and a general assembly.

UniGR, has made use of this instrument, although currently they are in process of setting up a European legal status, in the form of a European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). This is being done in the framework of the Erasmus+ pilot call for testing institutionalised EU cooperation instruments, such as a possible European legal status for university alliances.

<u>EU legal instruments</u>

1. European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)

The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is embedded in EU law through a European regulation[150]. It is a legal entity established on the territory of the European Union to facilitate and promote, in particular, territorial cooperation with a view to strengthening the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU. It allows regional, local and other public authorities from at least two different Member States to set up cooperation groupings and to provide joint services.

Beyond the areas defined in the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Regulation, the law of a Member State where the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation has its registered office applies to the functioning of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation. The establishment of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation requires the consent of the Member States. It is governed by the Regulation, a convention (an agreement between its Members) and the statutes adopted on the

[150] Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 amending Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32013R1302

basis of and in accordance with the convention, and must have at least two organs: an assembly and a director.

The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation has been used by several alliances of universities[151] and is being further experimented by the projects selected in the context of the Erasmus+ policy experimentation in higher education.

2. European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG)

The European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG) is a legal entity directly incorporated into Union law[152]. The purpose of a European Economic Interest Grouping is to facilitate or develop the economic activities of its members and to improve or increase the results of those activities, but not to make profits for itself. A European Economic Interest Grouping must be formed by at least two companies, firms, legal persons or natural persons from two different Member States.

The grouping must have at least two organs: a college of members and the manager or managers of the European Economic Interest Grouping. A contract for the formation of a European Economic Interest Grouping may provide for other organs and define their powers. The European Economic Interest Grouping and its organs cannot exercise any power of management or control over the activities of its members - the members retain their legal and economic independence.

UNITA, one of the European Universities piloting a legal status for university alliances, has already created and European Economic Interest Grouping and will use this legal status for several use cases, with an economic angle, for example concerning digital infrastructure and micro-credentials.

2.2.6 The preliminary findings of the policy experimentation projects funded under the Erasmus+ programme

Needs of alliances of higher education institutions in relation to institutionalised EU cooperation instruments, such as a possible European legal status for alliances

In the context of the Erasmus+ policy experimentation in higher education, higher education institutions have identified several needs related to deeper cooperation across Europe in higher education, linked to a possible legal status for alliances:

1. Simplified provision of joint educational activities by the alliance

Some alliances of higher education institutions, including also European Universities alliances selected under Erasmus+, aspire to facilitate the provision of joint educational activities by the alliance, and to be able to offer new learning opportunities, and to award quality assured and recognised educational qualifications. This would currently not be possible, as alliances are not recognised as higher education institutions. Also, at the level of the different partner higher education institutions, this is extremely difficult in most cases, taking into account the multiple accreditation and quality assurance processes, which place a heavy burden on alliances when offering new joint educational offers.

2. Joint resource management

Some alliances of higher education institutions, including also European Universities alliances selected under Erasmus+, wish to pool and share physical infrastructure, as well as common interoperable digital infrastructure and solutions, allowing unrestricted access to all services and education. This would also include owning, sharing, receiving and managing data as a single entity, and acquiring and exercising

[151] European Campus of Studies and Research, Eucor – The European Campus, The Agrupacion Europea de Cooperation Territorial Galicia – Norte de Portugal EGTC, Lake Constance Arts & Sciences Association.
[152] Council Regulation (EEC) No 2137/85 of 25 July 1985 on the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A31985R2137

intellectual property rights if agreed upon by the alliance, as well as the development of joint purchasing power.

3. Acquisition of funding from the public and private sectors

Several alliances of higher education institutions, including also European Universities alliances selected under Erasmus+, in all their diversity, desire flexible access to public and private funding from a variety of sources. This encompasses eligibility to apply for national, regional and European funding sources across Europe, attracting private and corporate funding, or generating private income from continuous education. Alliances need to manage and distribute funding between themselves and other stakeholders.

4. Reliable counterparty for the eco-system stakeholders of the alliance

Several alliances of higher education institutions, including also European Universities alliances selected under Erasmus+, see the added value of a European legal status in being a legal reliable counterparty concerning interactions with the alliance's ecosystem stakeholders, i.e. contract signing for traineeships, joint information technology (IT) infrastructure, privately paid scholarships and private funding contributions, promotion of intersectoral mobility of academic and industry staff etc. Also, it can help to improve access to the ecosystems of all partner universities (e.g. innovation, industry and civil society actors, policymakers, and mayors).

5. International attractiveness, increased visibility and representation

Several alliances of higher education institutions, including also European Universities alliances selected under Erasmus+, are seeking an EU legal instrument that reflects the European dimension of their cooperation, and which provides European added value and a neutral approach to alliances. This would enable joint representation to supranational, national, EU and international policy makers, administrations and organisations, cooperation with third country higher education institutions and the wider ecosystem of entities (e.g., business, civil society, research centres), and offer a common identity and marketing label.

6. Management of students

Several alliances of higher education institutions, including also European Universities alliances selected under Erasmus+, wish to cooperate seamlessly when it comes to the management of students active in the joint educational offer of the alliance, including aspects linked to mobilities and enrolment procedures.

7. Recruitment of staff

Several alliances of higher education institutions, including also European Universities alliances selected under Erasmus+, aim to recruit staff at European level through simple, flexible recruitment procedures, under certain and clear legal rules regarding the fiscal implications and social security of employees.

Preliminary finding of the Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects: fitness of existing legal instruments

The four related Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects have a wide approach, testing different institutionalised EU cooperation instruments, such as a possible European legal status for alliances. Below is an overview of the available and implementable legal forms that have been piloted and the current status of the projects.

Table 2.3: Legal forms piloted by the Erasmus+ projects

Legal form	Project	Status of the project
European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).	Leg-UniGR	Last steps before launch set-up procedure of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation.
	STYX	Analysis of European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation instrument ongoing, in the context of wider toolbox of legal instruments.
European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG).	EGAI	European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG) is set up and will now be tested with use cases (e.g. micro-credentials, IT infrastructure).
The ESEU project is analysing the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), the European Company (SE), the European Cooperative Society (ECS), and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)/ Knowledge Innovation Communities (KICs). The preliminary conclusion is to maintain the existing legal entity of ECIU under Dutch law, and to provide recommendations for possible future EU action as the current instruments all have some limitations.		

Source: Overview of Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects

The Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects have emphasised the diversity of alliance models, and the need for any legal instrument to be flexible, i.e. a toolbox to facilitate deeper transnational cooperation. The projects emphasised that any proposed solution should be voluntary and not replace national-level structures of the partner institutions.

According to the results of the Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects none of the existing legal instruments – neither those available at national, nor those available at EU level, fully correspond to the needs voiced by alliances of higher education institutions. The solutions at hand offer only partial answers to some of the challenges identified.

All projects see the added value of an (improved) European level legal tool compared to a national level legal tool, also when it comes to increased visibility and representation, as well as equal treatment of all partner institutions. The key drawback identified so far, seems to be that the existing legal tools are limited when it comes to the provision of joint educational activities.

Although several European Universities have been able to use the available legal mechanisms to set up an entity in a particular EU Member State or at European level (see noted above), they have managed to overcome only some of the operational and administrative obstacles. For those entities established at national level, the European dimension of their cooperation is not reflected, nor are some differences in national legislation addressed.

National legal entities could be perceived as unduly favouring some members of the alliances that are located in the country of the applicable legislation. And last but not least, none of the available legal mechanisms seem to be fully able to cover the needs of alliances when it comes to simplified provision of educational activities by the alliance, as alliances are not recognised as higher education institutions.

Some of the alliances point to the fact that more flexible, profit-oriented existing legal statuses are subject to the restrictions imposed on higher education institutions by national legislation, while public law entities are seen as too rigid in their operation and too complex to set up. As a result, they limit the

potential scope of the alliance's activities and its ability to expand in the future and are not fully suited to its needs.

However, the review of the different legal instruments by the Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects has shown that the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Regulation at European level may have the potential to respond to the specific needs of higher education institutions in the future, if further changes to the European legislation are made. Its main advantages include: a common regulation laid down in EU law; the establishment of a grouping from different EU Member States without the need for a prior international agreement to be signed and ratified by national parliaments; flexible organisation; a strong commitment on the part of the members; a legal basis for joint management of resources; and the increased visibility of the alliance.

Notwithstanding the fact that a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation can deepen interinstitutional cooperation between universities, there are still gaps that hinder the full achievement of the objectives of alliances of higher education institutions, such as: complex establishment procedure which include the need for national support; heterogeneous implementation of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Regulation; issues with private participation (including private universities); limited guidance and practice in the higher education sector, as the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation is not facilitating the provision of joint educational activities.

Overall, given the great diversity of alliances of higher education institutions, as well as the different characteristics of the existing legal instruments, none of them can fully facilitate the achievement of the mission of the alliances as a whole.

The need to navigate through many complicated legal systems and sets of obligations stemming from heterogeneous national legislation is the most significant challenge to the further institutionalisation of higher education alliances and networks. As long as there are no tailor-made legal solutions for cooperation between higher education institutions, this barrier is unlikely to disappear.

Chapter 3: Breaking down barriers for a European degree – the obstacles to overcome

Although the Bologna Process has contributed to a significant progress in facilitating transnational cooperation between higher education institutions, many challenges persist[153].

> *'Currently, the challenges are related to a lack of a unified framework for joint programmes and the legal disparities between the countries in EHEA'.*
>
> European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) – Call for Evidence.

The insights derived from the reports of the six Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects allow these barriers to be grouped into four main areas: accreditation and quality assurance, programme and curricula structure, governance structure, and student enrolment and admission.

These reports mostly draw on expert consultations conducted to identify legal barriers, and to propose preliminary solutions that can be further investigated. However, these findings might be incomplete due to potential gaps in expert knowledge, and the incomplete representation of all EU Member States in the European policy experimentation projects. Therefore, to complement the information, especially for

[153] Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture , Eurydice, *The European Higher Education Area in 2020: Bologna process implementation report*, European Union Publications Office, *2020*, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c90aaf32-4fce-11eb-b59f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

countries not represented in the European policy experimentation projects, findings of relevant studies completed in the period 2017-2023 have also been considered[154].

3.1 Challenges related to Accreditation and quality assurance

Obstacles related to quality assurance and recognition are considered to be some of the most difficult to overcome and often overshadow challenges identified in other areas. The heterogeneity of accreditation and quality assurance criteria, procedures and timeframes across European countries creates significant hurdles for higher education institutions seeking to offer joint programmes and joint degrees. These complications arise from restrictive national legislation, high accreditation costs, and differing interpretations of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

The main reported obstacles in the context of the Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects were:

1. Accreditation timelines and procedures: each country has unique timelines and requirements for programme accreditation, making it difficult to coordinate joint initiatives. For example, countries such as Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, Spain and the Netherlands require programmes to meet local market needs, and often a country-specific macro-efficiency test is required. In addition, the accreditation process starts early in Belgium (Flanders) and France, while in Italy the deadlines for submitting curricula often conflict with the January examination period. In Spain, legal experts face challenges in finalising consortium agreements within the tight timeframe for accreditation.

2. Restrictions on joint degree creation: in some countries, additional hurdles are created by restrictions on the types of degrees eligible for joint programmes. Germany and Lithuania, for example, only allow joint degrees at the bachelor and master levels. Poland limits joint degrees to certain categories of universities. In Romania, although allowed by law, the organisation and accreditation of joint degree programmes is not feasible in practice until the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) publishes its 'Methodology for the accreditation of joint programmes'.

3. Challenges in interdisciplinary degree creation: interdisciplinary programmes encounter specific challenges, as many countries require them to focus primarily on a single discipline or allocate a substantial proportion of courses to one area. For instance, in Czechia, more than 50% of an interdisciplinary degree's content must be focused on a single discipline. This type of restriction is also found in Belgium (Flanders), France, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Sweden, limiting the flexibility of these programmes.

4. Accreditation procedure for programme changes: in countries such as Spain, Croatia, Italy and Cyprus, any change in the composition of the consortium or in the core curriculum necessitates a new accreditation procedure. In Finland, the need for re-accreditation in such cases remains unclear.

5. Financial implications of accreditation: the cost of accreditation procedures is a significant financial barrier, especially when multiple accreditations are required. In Estonia, Latvia and the

[154] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, *Implementing joint degrees in the Erasmus Mundus action of the Erasmus+ programme*, Publications Office, 2020, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/896549; European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Burneikaitė, G., Pocius, D., Potapova, E. et al., *The road towards a possible joint European degree – Identifying opportunities and investigating the impact and feasibility of different approaches – Final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/945147; European Commission, *Awarding Joint Degrees. State of play report for the 2023 Erasmus Mundus Annual Conference, Boosting the potential of Joint Degrees in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes*, 2023, https://erasmus-networks.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/Joint-Degrees-and-Erasmus-Mundus.pdf; Frontex, *Single Accreditation of Joint Programmes – Turning the Bologna Guideline into Reality Conference Report*, 2017, https://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Training/EJMBSM-Conference-report-2017.pdf

Netherlands, the financial burden of these procedures falls on higher education institutions, adding to the challenges of setting up joint programmes.

6. Barriers to application of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes: the practical application is limited in several countries, with Greece and Spain facing notable barriers. In Belgium (Flanders) it does not apply to joint doctoral programmes, and in the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Slovenia and Slovakia it is not considered feasible.

Potential solutions

The first common recommendation to facilitate the accreditation of joint programmes proposes that national authorities should clarify how their rules and legislation apply to the accreditation and quality assurance of joint programmes in order to ensure a common understanding among stakeholders. Where possible, specific quality assurance and accreditation rules and derogations for joint programmes and joint degree programmes should be established: they should be in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and involving an agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

Another proposed arrangement, which would require minimal legislative changes in Member States, is to allow alliances, including European Universities alliances, to choose a jurisdiction and to manage joint programmes/award joint degrees on the basis of that legal framework. The disadvantage of this option is that it may lead to most alliances choosing a few countries where it is easiest/cheapest to set up joint degrees.

Participants also stressed that Member States should fully implement existing European frameworks, such as the European Higher Education Area principles, the Bologna Process tools, and the European Approach to Quality Assurance Framework. Additionally, proposals are made for more synergies in quality assurance and accreditation practices across EU countries.

3.2 Challenges related to programme and curricula structure and diploma templates

The European Union holds only supplementary competence in the field of higher education. This means that the legal and institutional frameworks in the Member States differ greatly from one country or region to another, which on the one hand reflects the great diversity of the European academic landscape, and on the other hand poses significant regulatory obstacles.

The results of the Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects revealed that European higher education institutions grapple with the challenge of aligning academic years, grading scales, and credit workloads in the pursuit of joint programmes and joint degrees. Recognising blended or online learning can be contentious in some regions, while the form of final exams varies widely. Additionally, restrictive national legislation regarding language use and proficiency and the percentage of foreign teachers can disrupt programme development. These issues highlight the need for greater flexibility in the structural elements of joint programmes.

The main challenges identified are:

1. Differences in academic years: the variation in the duration of academic years across European countries complicates the alignment of joint degree curricula. This inconsistency poses challenges in synchronising academic schedules and programme structures.

2. Grading scales and workload: European universities face challenges in student evaluation due to different grading scales, workload per ECTS and credit transfer methods. While the standard allocation for bachelor degrees is generally 180 ECTS, Greece and Poland deviate from this norm and offer programmes with up to 360 ECTS. In addition, countries such as Czechia, Italy, Hungary, and Austria have specific grading scale requirements which further complicate the evaluation

process. In France, for example, ECTS is not used at the doctoral level. Furthermore, some countries have set national restrictions, such as minimum ECTS thresholds for the completion of the second cycle, adding another layer of complexity to the compatibility of educational standards across Europe.

3. The recognition of blended/online learning varies, with some countries lacking clear legislation on online mobility. For instance, Czechia and Sweden do not have explicit policies, while Italy and Poland limit the percentage of distance learning allowed in programmes. In Italy, online final exams are generally prohibited, and in Lithuania joint programmes often require physical academic mobility.

4. Final exam forms: the requirement for national or state examinations is not universally applied, leading to differences in assessment methods. Austria regulates the procedure for final examinations, Czechia mandates a thesis defence and a public state examination, and Finland stipulates the length of the thesis. Italy regulates the number of final exams, and there are diverse requirements for theses, including length and the number of experts on the evaluation committee.

5. Minimum duration requirements: some countries impose minimum semester requirements to be spent at the home or partner institution, which affects the mobility aspect of joint programmes. For example, Austria has minimum credit requirements at partner institutions for joint degrees. Similar restrictions exist in Belgium (Flanders), Germany, Estonia, Ireland, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Finland.

6. Postponement of studies and de-enrolment: the rules vary on taking a break from studies for reasons such as pregnancy or illness without being de-enrolled. Countries such as Belgium (Flanders), Czechia, France, Hungary, Poland, Finland, and Sweden, specific rules apply. In Finland and Sweden, universities are generally prohibited from de-enrolling students.

7. Language proficiency and foreign teachers: legislation imposing language requirements on foreign teachers and limiting their number in study programme has an impact on the development of education across Europe. Countries enforce various rules, such as language requirements for teaching, language proficiency tests and limits on the proportion of foreign teachers. For example, Belgium (Flanders) sets quotas on foreign language programmes, Czechia varies fees for non-native language programmes, and Denmark and Lithuania restrict teaching languages. Finland requires national language equivalents for programmes, while France requires part of the teaching to be in French, affecting diploma types. Italy restricts the nationality of teachers. These diverse regulations create a complex landscape for programme development in Europe.

8. Regulations on graduation diplomas and rules: the format and content of degree certificates, including paper type, size, logos, language use, and signature requirements, are strictly regulated in many countries, such as Belgium, Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Finland, and Sweden. These rules detail the required information, logo placement and signature format in such detail that a joint award is a very difficult, if not impossible, task.

9. Regulated professions: almost all countries have regulated professions, each with its own requirements and list of regulated professions. This diversity makes it challenging to set up joint programmes in these fields. Countries facing this challenge, as reported by the Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects, include Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Finland, and Sweden.

10. Intellectual property rights legislation: differences in intellectual property rights legislation, where in some countries, such as Belgium (Flanders) and Sweden, students or researchers own their work, while in others, such as Czechia, the institution owns it, affect the development of course material.

Potential olutions

The preliminary outcomes of the European policy experimentation projects provide evidence that, if the Bologna Process instruments had been fully applied, some discrepancies in legislation might have disappeared. However, the Bologna Process in itself does not remove all country-specific obstacles stemming from curricular regulations.

The recommendations from the European policy experimentation projects advocate greater flexibility in national rules on joint programme structure and curriculum and joint degree templates. They indicate that joint programmes could be allowed to set their own academic calendars, distinct from those of traditional degree programmes. In addition, the focus of legislation should shift to learning outcomes, allowing for the integration of online and blended learning methods.

In situations where national legislation cannot be universally adapted, higher education institutions suggest that exceptions be made specifically for joint programmes. This could be the case for laws aimed at protecting the national language by limiting the language of instruction. Similarly, there are calls for national grading scales and examination formats to take account of joint programmes. Some reports also recommend the adoption of a standard European grading conversion table to reduce discrepancies and facilitate smoother cooperation between partner universities.

In general, European policy experimentation projects reflect the need to fully implement the recommendations of the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, and to give consortia of higher education institutions the flexibility to agree details of joint programme structures, curriculum design and diploma templates in cooperation agreements.

For the regulated professions, legal experts cooperating with the European policy experimentation projects suggested working on the compatibility of European requirements for degree programmes leading to regulated professions and involving professionals in the design of programmes or their evaluation. With regard to intellectual property rights, the European policy experimentation projects recommended concluding an agreement on property rights in order to avoid individual agreements with teaching staff or students.

3.3 Challenges related to governance structure

The establishment of joint programmes and joint degrees necessitates clear governance structures, but restrictive legislation in some European countries complicates this aspect. Many European countries require consortium agreements, including Belgium, Belgium (Flanders), Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Netherlands Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Sweden.

The regulatory frameworks for consortium agreements can be intricate and time-consuming, and divergent rules on the composition and responsibilities of programme bodies/institutions add further layers of complexity. For instance, Croatia requires consortium agreements to include information on enrolment conditions, examination and evaluation methods for students, while Lithuania expects them to encompass student admission conditions, study procedures, assessment principles and crediting of student achievements. Ensuring compatibility between governance structures across borders is therefore essential for efficient and successful joint programmes and joint degrees.

Potential solutions

A potential solution suggested by some would be to establish a unified set of minimum requirements for consortium agreements throughout Europe with a proposed template. This would allow each consortium to include additional details about their partnership, provided they meet the minimum standards.

This approach would streamline administrative processes while maintaining the flexibility to address specific partnership needs. Another, more ambitious solution, to the above impediments is to grant legal status to alliances of higher education institutions on a voluntary basis (discussed in more detail below).

3.4 Challenges related to student enrolment and admission

Student mobility is a central element of most joint programmes and joint degrees, but legislative challenges in this area persist. The obligation for students to enrol in multiple universities, varying tuition fee structures, and inconsistent recognition of previous education can hinder accessibility and affordability. Stringent language proficiency requirements, and restrictive legislation on student selection, can also limit the inclusivity and diversity of joint programmes. Streamlining enrolment and admission processes is crucial for attracting a diverse student body and ensuring equitable access to these educational opportunities.

The main obstacles identified are:

1. Restrictions on student enrolment: the mandate for students to enrol simultaneously at several universities poses financial and administrative challenges. In Finland, students must be enrolled in a Finnish university at the time of graduation, while in France students must be enrolled in all universities awarding the degree. In other countries, such as Czechia and the Netherlands, enrolment is closely tied to higher education institution funding, leading higher education institutions to favour students enrolled with them.

2. Tuition fees: differences in tuition fee structures across Europe affect the accessibility and affordability of joint degree programmes. Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, for example, require non-EU students to pay tuition fees, while forbidding them for EU students. In Czechia, students pay fees for programmes taught in languages other than Czech. In France, fees are set at national level, with exceptions possible under specific agreements. In Italy, if the coordinating university is Italian, tuition fees are calculated on the basis of the student's income conditions.

3. Restrictive legislation on student selection: strict regulations on student selection in some countries limit the diversity of the student body and complicate the admission process. In Flanders, it is not possible to limit the number of students admitted to first cycle programmes for those holding a secondary education diploma. Cyprus has different rules for distance learning/online programmes and face-to-face programmes, and separate rules for EU and non-EU citizens. Denmark, Hungary, and Sweden have detailed rules to ensure equal treatment in selection. Italy applies quotas that differentiate between non-EU and EU students.

Potential solutions

The pilot project reports suggest that national systems could introduce a rule whereby enrolment at one university in a joint programme implies enrolment at all participating universities. Alternatively, official enrolment could be limited to a single institution, with registration required only at partner institutions, clarifying which legislation and institutional rules apply.

For tuition fee management, the simplification of public funding for joint programmes is recommended to lessen dependence on student registration and tuition fees while ensuring that students continue to benefit from the same conditions and policies regarding tuition fees as if they enrolled in local programmes.

3.5 Types of overarching solutions to overcome the barriers

In the course of the work, one of the pilot projects (ED-AFFICHE) tried to move from country-specific obstacles and obstacle-specific solutions to more general approaches that could possibly be further explored by the European Commission and implemented by the Member States. This made it possible to propose six possible strategies for addressing the legal and administrative challenges to transnational cooperation between higher education institutions resulting from national or regional legal or administrative frameworks. Some of the proposed solutions are overarching and could address several or all of the reported obstacles in a given country at the same time while a combination of different approaches could be used in another national or regional.

Tailor-made legislation

The most straightforward way of tackling barriers is an article-by-article approach to amending one or more legal texts. This approach requires an extensive and thorough mapping of existing barriers and a careful process of modifying legal acts that pose undue difficulties. Although it is a viable way to address the remaining challenges, it requires a high degree of coordination with other Member States. If Member States amend their legislation independently and without sufficient coordination, there is a risk that similar barriers will remain despite the changes.

Sandbox

The first of the overarching solutions is a ‘sandbox’. A sandbox is a test environment in which, in this case, joint programmes are given room to experiment. A competent authority declares that certain rules do not apply to joint programmes in order to allow them to be set up and implemented. The idea of a sandbox has already been tested in the EU. For example, Flemish legislation stipulates that international joint or double degree programmes that have gone through a European selection process (e.g. Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters) are not considered as new programmes and do not require initial accreditation.

As the national or regional authorities create the conditions for these experimental spaces, this allows them to define the limits of inapplicability of legal provisions and to retain full control over the process. Nevertheless, like an article-by-article approach, sandboxes require a high degree of cooperation between Member States. This follows from the fact that they can be effective as long as all Member States of higher education institutions participating in a consortium provide for the same exemptions in their legislation. Otherwise, their impact remains limited. The long-term consolidation of sandboxes leads to a process of deregulation.

Default legislation

The technique of default legislation is widely used in private civil law. Instead of providing for exceptions to binding rules, it renders the legislation non-compulsory, i.e. a default rule applies only if

the parties to the consortium agreement have not agreed a specific, tailor-made rule for their joint programme. For instance, Spain has recently adopted this strategy to grant flexibility to European Universities alliances. Again, this technique requires sufficient coordination between Member States. It can only be effective if the consortium partners are allowed to deviate from the same set of rules.

Choice of legislation

The choice of legislation refers to the choice of the legal framework applicable to a joint degree programme. It makes it possible either to choose a single law governing all aspects of cooperation between higher education institutions, or to decide to apply different legal provisions to different parts of a consortium agreement.

This overarching solution provides a high level of legal certainty and alleviates the main challenge for higher education institutions, which is to navigate through incompatible legal frameworks governing the functioning of institutions in different Member States. Any discrepancies could be resolved by reference to one or more legal acts agreed between the partners in a consortium agreement. However, this strategy would require a clear position of all Member States on the possibility of applying foreign law to certain parts of the consortium agreement. Otherwise, this solution may have far-reaching negative consequences, including the invalidation of the degrees awarded.

Shift of competence

The last overarching solution put forward by the ED-AFFICHE project was to shift the competences for coordinating transnational education from the Member States to the European Union. However, it was pointed out that such a solution would require treaty changes and that it would be desirable to preserve the principle of subsidiarity and to arrive at a workable legal framework for the European degree while respecting the full competence of the Member States.

The Technical Support Instrument

Finding the right solution for the right system and implement it can be challenging. Through the Technical Support Instrument (TSI), DG REFORM supports EU Member States with modernizing their higher education systems to attain national objectives, in line with the relevant EU priorities on enhanced quality, inclusiveness and digitalisation. This support aims at -inter alia- consolidating the legal and administrative frameworks, developing policies, streamlining practices, designing, and implementing strategies for performance-based funding, and improving the governance models and quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions. Thus, it also contributes to innovation across Member States, helping them promote knowledge exchange and foster cooperation between universities, research, industry, and businesses, with a view to address skills shortages and mismatches on the labour market.

Examples of reforms supported by TSI and its predecessor, the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) include the following:

- Latvia developed a new academic career model as a cornerstone of modernising its higher education, as well as a roadmap for implementing the model, bringing together international expertise and national priorities.
- Portugal transformed access and completion policies in higher education for greater social inclusion.
- Ireland introduced a new testing system to assess the cost implications of different policy decisions when designing higher education programmes, considering the socio-economic and macroeconomic impact of policymaking in higher education.

- Hungary adapted its higher education regulatory, quality assurance and institutional support frameworks to deliver online and hybrid study programmes.
- Spain developed a roadmap for policy reform to foster cooperation between universities, research, and businesses.
- Croatia built the evidence-base for the development of the E-Universities project funded under the Recovery and Resilience Facility.
- Italy developed a better understanding of the barriers to and opportunities for knowledge exchange.
- Slovakia identified policy options to strengthen the quality and attractiveness of its higher education system and developed an action plan to improve its governance and funding."

Chapter 4: A fit-for-purpose European quality assurance system

This section first introduces quality assurance in higher education at the European level, setting it in the context of the 49-country European Higher Education Area cooperation in higher education, known as the Bologna Process. It then provides an overview of key developments supporting the consistent application of Bologna tools across the European Union, including the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (European Approach).

The section then introduces the key challenges to quality assurance in European higher education, in particular the uneven take-up of the ESG by Member States and the low take-up of the European Approach to evaluate the quality of joint programmes.

This chapter is underpinned by a literature review and initial results of a study commissioned to ICF in preparation for this higher education package which included: extensive desk research; and analysis of quality assurance activities in EU Member States; interviews with key stakeholders[155]; and an online workshop with 34 experts from across the European Union.

4.1 Quality assurance in higher education

The 2015 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) User Guide defined quality assurance in education as being:

'the process or set of processes adopted nationally and institutionally to ensure the quality of educational programmes and qualifications awarded. Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose. Quality assurance is often referred to in the context of a continuous improvement cycle (i.e. assurance and enhancement activities)'.[156]

Quality assurance aims for accountability and enhancement, which in turn creates trust in the higher education institution's performance[157]. A quality assurance system should provide information to assure the higher education institution and the public of the quality of the higher education institution's activities (accountability), as well as advice and recommendations on how it might improve what it is doing (enhancement).

Quality assurance can be undertaken both internally and externally.

[155] At both national and European level, including government authorities, quality assurance or accreditation agencies, higher education sector representatives, and experts.
[156] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *ECTS users' guide 2015*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/87192
[157] Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). (2015). Brussels, Belgium, https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

Internal quality assurance is where a higher education institution reviews its internal processes and programmes as a means to identify areas for improvement. Internal quality assurance relies on the experiences of students and staff in the higher education programmes offered by the institutions, and on students' study progress and outcomes after graduation[158]. The internal quality assurance process provides input for the external quality assurance process.

According to Eurydice, the principle of institutional autonomy implies that the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself, laying the foundation for the accountability of the university system within national quality frameworks[159]. This means that higher education institutions can choose those approaches and arrangements which better suit their own profile, needs and objectives, giving way to substantial variation by institution, or by type of institutions, within EU Member States in terms of structures and responsibilities.

External quality assurance refers to evaluations by quality assurance agencies. All EU Member States have at least one quality assurance agency[160], except Luxembourg[161]. There has been a trend towards a one agency model, as a result of the merging of different entities that were previously involved in quality assurance in some countries.

There are institutional, programme and combined approaches to quality assurance.

At the programme level, quality assurance focuses on the evaluation of a particular programme, whether it is at a departmental/disciplinary level (such as an undergraduate programme in Geography, or a Master of Business Administration), or at a joint programme level where the programme takes place across a range of higher education institutions.

Institutional quality assurance focuses on an entire institution and can cover everything from academic programmes, to research, administration, and student and staff services (library, laboratories, recruitment and appraisal, wellbeing, etc.)[162]. Institutional quality assurance involves an external quality review process to assess and ensure that higher education institutions meet acceptable levels of quality. In those systems where institutional accreditation is mandatory, it determines an institution's entry to and operations within a higher education system. In systems where it is voluntary, it can be considered as a quality benchmark that the institution meets certain educational standards[163].

Some systems that rely on institutional quality assurance use a system of self-accreditation whereby higher education institutions that meet certain criteria through the quality assurance processes are authorised to establish study programmes and self-accredit their courses without having to seek external accreditation for each new programme[164].

In the EU, most countries follow a combined approach that includes both institutional and programme approaches.

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[158] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Benchmarking Higher Education System Performance, Higher Education, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1787/be5514d7-en

[159] Eurydice, France: 11- Quality assurance, https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/france/quality-assurance-higher-education

[160] Eurydice, *National Education Systems*, https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/

[161] Since there is no agency responsible for quality assurance in Luxembourg, the Ministry of Higher Education and Research receives support from foreign agencies and experts.

[162] While it can save resources for all disciplinary areas in an institution to be covered by a single institutional accreditation, there have been concerns about 'what if' an institution fails to be accredited, and whether some institutions are 'too big to fail', see https://www.scienceguide.nl/2020/11/komt-er-een-einde-aan-opleidingsaccreditatie-door-de-nvao/

[163] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Benchmarking Higher Education System Performance*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2019, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/benchmarking-higher-education-system-performance_be5514d7-en

[164] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Benchmarking Higher Education System Performance*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2019, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/benchmarking-higher-education-system-performance_be5514d7-en

Quality assurance in higher education fundamentally 'assures' all stakeholders that the 'quality' of higher education institutions and their staff, management processes, teaching, research, and other activities meet pre-defined 'standards'. Furthermore, by meeting quality requirements higher education institutions can demonstrate that they are delivering 'value for money'. If successful, quality assurance can also result in accreditation which gives a quality statement that can be 'recognised' by others – hence there is a powerful linkage between quality assurance and recognition.

4.1.1 The need for agile quality assurance frameworks

Quality assurance is an essential enabler of transparency which, for example, can confirm to stakeholders that a programme or an institution meets formally stated criteria, such as those set by national frameworks, and can lead to higher education institutions or their programmes receiving accreditation by professional statutory and regulatory structures. Quality assurance can demonstrate that students are provided with a high-quality teaching and learning environment and curricula (for example, which meet national subject benchmark statements), leading to qualifications that are externally recognised by employers or other higher education systems and institutions.

Quality assurance depends on what is being assessed and assured, but in all cases quality assurance systems need to be dynamic[165].

> *'A robust quality assurance and future-proof quality assurance systems are very relevant for the European higher education area. In particular a system that allows flexibility and trust in experimenting with new formats'.*
>
> EuroTeQ Engineering University (European Universities alliance with members in Denmark, Czechia, Estonia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain) – Call for Evidence.

As teaching and learning activities evolve, new criteria could be considered, for example: internationalisation; widening access, equality and inclusion; flexible pathways and the recognition of prior learning; preventing student dropouts; employability; academic integrity; lifelong learning and micro-credentials; and addressing the green and digital transitions.

4.1.2 The importance of quality assurance for joint programmes

Quality assurance of higher education institutions and their programmes is the responsibility of Member States. Most quality assurance systems have been developed to evaluate them, and the principles of institutional autonomy also mean that higher education institutions themselves can set their internal quality assurance benchmarks that respond to national quality assurance criteria. This imposes challenges at the European level where there has been an increasing demand for joint programmes that involve consortia of higher education institutions from different countries.

Joint programmes are understood as an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions leading to double/multiple degrees or a joint degree.

- While it is difficult to estimate the exact number of joint programmes in the European Union, some reports[166] suggest that the number could be above 3 000.
- The six policy experimentation projects testing the feasibility of a European degree label have mapped about 1 000 joint programmes in Europe offered among 140 higher education institutions.

[165] ICF study in finalisation.
[166] Bologna Follow Up Group, *Background report on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*, 2014, https://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/72/9/European_Approach_QA_of_Joint_Programmes_Background_Report_613729.pdf

Joint programmes must operate within the legal frameworks of several national or sub-national systems, which can involve different institutional practices and approaches to accreditation and quality assurance, which can multiply the administrative overhead as more partners and countries are involved. Since this is an inevitable result of the autonomy of higher education institutions and the sovereignty of national higher education systems, any simplification of processes must result from cooperation and commitment at national and sub-national levels.

> *'A European Quality Assurance and Recognition mechanism in higher education is essential as it will enable University Alliances to develop long-term fit for purpose joint degree programmes with strong quality assurance processes and procedures which will ultimately facilitate new student-centred collaborative joint degree programmes and microcredentials which are recognised across the Union'.*
>
> RUN-EU (European Universities alliance with members in Austria, Belgium, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands) – Call for Evidence.

In spite of the growing importance and numbers of transnational joint programmes in Europe, differing quality assurance procedures have an impact on cooperation between higher education institutions in different Member States.

4.2 Transnational cooperation in quality assurance

The Bologna Process was launched in 1998-1999[167] as crucial step forward in overcoming the segmentation of the European higher education sector. The process was formalised in 1999, when the Ministers of the then 29 participating countries agreed on a common vision to create a European Higher Education Area[168] (EHEA), a higher education space built on common values and using common tools to ensure more comparable, more compatible, and more coherent higher education systems in Europe. Currently, the European Higher Education Area involves 49 countries[169] and the European Commission.

Promoting cooperation in quality assurance is one of the key commitments of the Bologna Process, along with automatic recognition, and central elements are: the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG); the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (European Approach); the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR); and, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). These are detailed below.

4.2.1 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) comprise standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance in higher education. The guidelines were first adopted by Ministers of the European Higher Education Area in 2005[170], and were

[167] European University Association (EUA), Bologna Process, https://eua.eu/issues/10:bologna-process.html

[168] European Agency for Higher Education and Accreditation (EHEA), A Common Vision, https://www.ehea.info/pid34248/history.html

[169] The membership of Russia and Belarus is currently suspended due to the unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine. See the Statement by Members and Consultative Members of the Bologna Follow Up Group on Consequences of the Russian Federation Invasion of Ukraine: https://ehea.info/Upload/STATEMENT%20BY%20MEMBERS%20AND%20CONSULTATIVE%20MEMBERS%20OF%20THE%20BOLOGNA%20FOLLOW%20UP%20GROUP%20ON%20CONSEQUENCES%20OF%20THE%20RUSSIAN%20INVASION%20OF%20UKRAINE.pdf

[170] https://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/ENQA/05/3/ENQA-Bergen-Report_579053.pdf

revised in 2015[171]. Taking the twin approaches of enhancement and accountability, the ESG focus on three key quality assurance components:

Summary of ESG standards[172]

Part 1: Internal quality assurance

Higher education institutions should have:

Quality assurance policies that are part of their strategic management and are publicly available, as well as processes for the design and approval of programmes to ensure they meet their objectives and clearly communicate the learning outcomes and qualifications.

Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment; clear regulations on student admission, progression, recognition, and certification; fair and transparent staff recruitment and development processes; and appropriate funding for learning and reaching activities.

Information management systems that allow the collection, analysis, and use of information for effective programme management; publicly available, clear, accessible, and updated information on their activities and programmes; ongoing monitoring and periodic review of their programmes; and cyclical external quality assurance in line with the ESG.

Part 2: External quality assurance

External quality assurance should:

Address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance (part 1); be fit-for-purpose and involve stakeholders in its design and continuous improvement; be reliable, pre-defined, consistently implemented, published and followed up by external experts that include students.

Base its outcomes and judgements on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently; lead to full reports (including decisions) that are published, clear, and accessible to all; and have clearly defined complaints and appeals processes.

Part 3: Quality assurance agencies

Quality assurance agencies should:

Undertake external quality assurance (part 2) on a regular basis with clear and explicit goals and the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work; have an established legal basis and be recognised as quality assurance agencies by the competent public authorities; be independent and autonomous, with full responsibility for their operations and outcomes; and have adequate resources.

Regularly publish reports on the findings of their activities; have processes for their own internal quality assurance to ensure their professionalism and the quality and integrity of their activities; and undergo an external review at least every five years to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

4.2.2 European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes addresses transnational joint programmes which are one of the key characteristics of the European Higher Education Area. Joint programmes enhance the mobility of students and higher education staff, providing them with a rich European learning experience, and with a transnational curriculum that is both excellent in content and

[171] https://www.ehea.info/page-standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance
[172] https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

fully 'joined up' across partner institutions[173]. Ministers across the European Higher Education Area have continuously encouraged the development of more joint programmes[174].

As part of this effort, in their 2012 Bucharest Ministerial Communiqué[175], the Ministers agreed to review the rules and practices for joint programmes and degrees at national levels, and to identify ways of overcoming barriers facing them. In 2015, the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (European Approach), was approved at the Ministerial Conference in Yerevan[176] 'to ease external quality assurance of these programmes: it defines standards that are based on the agreed tools of the European Higher Education Area, without applying additional national criteria'[177].

The European Approach aims to bring together quality assurance into a holistic approach, properly reflecting the jointness of joint programmes. It:

- Recognises that while countries have a diversity of approaches to external quality assurance, it represents a 'common denominator' across them.
- Relates only to joint programmes[178] coordinated and offered jointly by higher education institutions from two or more countries; it does not address the quality assurance of programmes delivered jointly by different institutions from a single country.
- Entails a single review (led by an agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) for a programme no matter how many countries and institutions are involved.
- Delivers a review on whether the programme meets the criteria:
    - Positive (valid for six years).
    - Positive if specific recommendations are met.
    - Negative (with a right of appeal against the decision).

Those are important distinctions, because they acknowledge that the European Approach does not interfere with national agencies and their own approaches to higher education outside joint programmes.

The European Approach is not restricted to higher education institutions within the European Higher Education Area. Institutions that are not in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and that are involved in a joint programme can investigate whether their national agency would accept the European Approach and recognise the decision of an agency registered with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education.

[173] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *Background Information*, https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/background/

[174] As explained in the first chapter of this Staff Working Document, every Bologna Communiqué adopted since 1998 has encouraged joint programmes and joint degrees as a key element in supporting the internationalisation of higher education institutions.

[175] Bucharest Ministerial Communiqué, *Making the Most of Our Potential: Consolidating the European Higher Education Area*, European Higher Education Area Ministerial Conference Bucharest, 2012, https://www.ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/Bucharest_Communique_2012_610673.pdf

[176] Yerevan Ministerial Communiqué, European Higher Education Area Ministerial Conference Yerevan, 2015, https://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/70/7/YerevanCommuniqueFinal_613707.pdf

[177] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*, https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/

[178] Joint programmes have 'an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions from EHEA countries and leading to double/multiple degrees or a joint degree'. See European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *Definitions*, https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/definitions/

The European Approach had been developed and tested by a range of national quality assurance agencies and other key stakeholders, with the particular understanding that the valuable transnational 'jointness' of joint programmes was not clearly reflected in national quality assurance processes.

While the European Approach clearly reflects the jointness of a programme, minimises the workload involved in accreditation through a single process, is attractive for employers who can clearly see the added European value in the programme, its implementation and use still remains uneven.

4.2.3 European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) was founded in 2008 as 'an independent organisation in charge of establishing and managing a register of quality assurance agencies'[179]. It currently lists 57 agencies in 31 countries[180] that work in line with the agreed ESG framework to ensure the quality of higher education institutions and study programmes.

In 2018, the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education launched the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR), which provides access to the reports and decisions of agencies registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education. Currently, there are 93 769 reports available covering 3 895 higher education institutions[181]. The data can be downloaded and visualised online, and an Applications Programming Interface (API) allows the data to be integrated into other applications.

4.2.4 European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was established in the year 2000 with a role to promote higher education quality assurance at the European level[182]. It is the European Higher Education Area's designated stakeholder organisation for quality assurance agencies. The current membership includes 58 full members spanning 56 countries[183].

To become a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, an agency must be based in the European Higher Education Area and provide an external review report that they are compliant with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (parts 2 and 3).

An affiliate organisation can be 'organisations worldwide that have an interest in quality assurance of higher education but that cannot, or do not want to, be members of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education'. Currently there are 47 affiliate members[184]. Four Russian members are currently suspended following Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine[185].

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[179] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *Close-up*, https://www.eqar.eu/about/close-up/#history

[180] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *Registered agencies*, https://www.eqar.eu/register/agencies/

[181] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *Database of External Quality Assurance Results*, https://www.eqar.eu/qa-results/search/

[182] ENQA was first established as the 'European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education'. In 2004, it became the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, but kept its originally acronym. See European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), https://www.enqa.eu/about-enqa/

[183] European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), *Member and Affiliate Database*, https://www.enqa.eu/membership-database/

[184] European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), *Affiliate*, https://www.enqa.eu/membership-database/status/affiliate/

[185] European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), *Statement agreed by the ENQA Board*, Brussels, March 8, 2022, https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/ENQA-Board-statement-on-invasion-of-Ukraine.pdf

4.2.5 The E4 Group

The E4 Group entails cooperation between four organisations: the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European University Association (EUA) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) [186].

The E4 Group developed the key principles of the European Approach and are the founding members of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

4.3 Important developments at EU level

In March 2006, the European Parliament and European Council made a recommendation on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education[187], recommending that Member States:

'encourage all higher education institutions active within their territory to introduce or develop rigorous internal quality assurance systems, in accordance with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area adopted in Bergen in the context of the Bologna Process.'

To facilitate information and transparency, quality assurance agencies across Member States would be encouraged to join a 'European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies'. Higher education institutions in a Member State should be able to 'choose among quality assurance or accreditation agencies in the European Register an agency which meets their needs and profile, provided that this is compatible with their national legislation or permitted by their national authorities'.

17 years on from the Recommendation, this provision is the only one fully implemented across all 27 EU Member States (and it is the only one that did not require any change in national legislation). Moving to a mainly institutionally based quality assurance system has taken place only in nine EU Member States[188]. In 13 Member States there is a mix of programme and institutional quality assurance[189], of which two (Hungary and the Netherlands) are planning to move towards institutional approaches.

The use of the European Approach has also been modest (Figure 4.1).

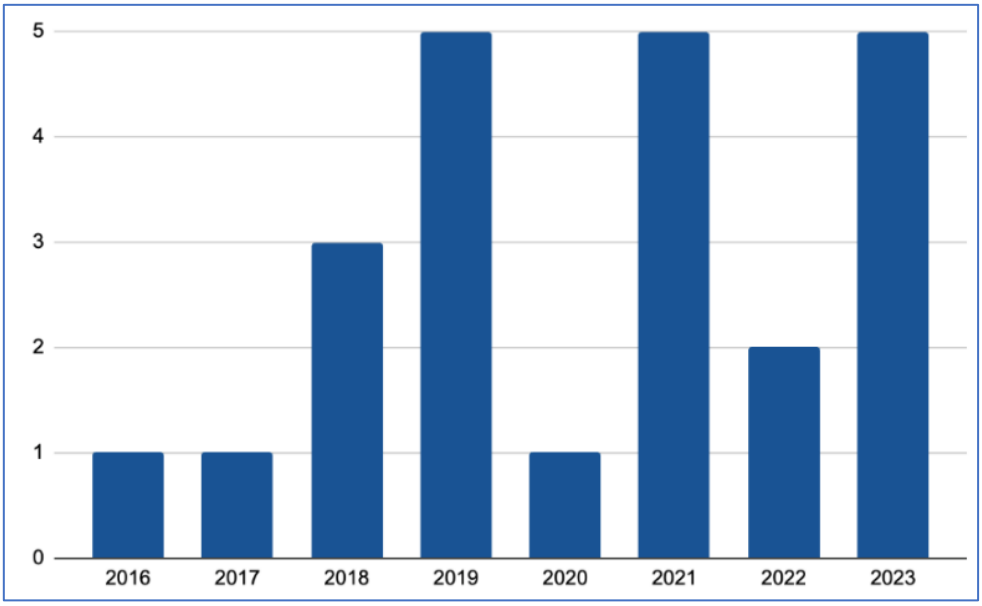
[186] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *EQAR's Founders: the E4 Group*, https://www.eqar.eu/e4-group/

[187] Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 February 2006 on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education (OJ L 64 04.03.2006, p. 60). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:064:0060:0062:EN:PDF

[188] Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, France, Malta, Austria, Slovakia, and Finland.

[189] Belgium (French community), Czechia, Germany, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, and Romania.

Figure 4.1: Joint programmes that have used the European Approach (2016-2023)



Source: based on data from the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education: https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/european-approach-cases/

Since 2006 the higher education landscape has significantly changed. A key development was the political commitment of the 27 Member States to building the European Education Area (EEA)[190] by 2025. The idea emerged from the November 2017 Social Summit of EU leaders in Gothenburg (Sweden). A Communication from the European Commission on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture[191] proposed a vision to develop a joined-up education space for the EU with a focus on investing in young people with new skills and competencies, modernising and improving education systems, excellent teaching and teachers, and a new agenda for higher education.

Following on the European Council's call of December 2017[192] to encourage the emergence of 'European Universities', the first call of the European Universities Initiative was launched in 2018 to create European Universities alliances – inter-university campuses that pool their expertise, platforms, and resources to develop and deliver joint curricula and flexible learning pathways for students. To date, 50 European Universities alliances have been funded involving more than 430 higher education institutions[193] and leading to the creation of almost 160 joint programmes[194].

The European strategy for universities calls for 60 European Universities, involving 500 higher education institutions, by mid-2024. The alliances have taken transnational cooperation in developing joint programmes to a new level. Their activities go beyond the prevailing joint masters programmes to date (typified by Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters programmes[195]), towards bachelor offers, blended joint programmes, programmes involving microcredits, programmes involving business, and more

[190] Communication from the Commission on A European education area by 2025, COM (2017) 673, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/a-european-education-area-by-2025.html

[191] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture, 14.11.2017, COM (2017) 673, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/AUTO/?uri=celex:52017DC0673

[192] European Council meeting (14 December 2017) Conclusions, EUCO 19/1/17 REV 1. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf

[193] European Commission, *European Education Area: European Universities alliances and their partners,* https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative/map

[194] European Commission. Preliminary data from the study *Outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative* (in preparation – not yet published).

[195] European Commission, *European Education and Culture Executive Agency: Erasmus Mundus Catalogue* https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/scholarships/erasmus-mundus-catalogue_en

sophisticated mobilities for students and staff. This has encouraged the use of the European Approach, reflected in more joint programmes relying on it since the launch of the European Universities Initiative.

The November 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad[196] aimed to improve and facilitate procedures for automatic mutual recognition in the EU, linking it to quality assurance, which 'has a key role to play in improving transparency, thus helping to build mutual trust'.

It recommended that Member States 'ensure the full implementation of the Bologna Process instruments for higher education in the Union' and encouraged them to carry out external quality assurance through independent agencies that are registered on the European Quality Assurance Register. Member States were asked to develop national guidance to support higher education institutions in producing and effectively implementing transparent criteria for recognition that are applied throughout each higher education institution.

In May 2021 the Council Conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education[197] emphasised that European Universities alliances could be pivotal in achieving a 'seamless balanced mobility of students, mobility of teachers, staff and brain circulation'. The European Council suggested that the alliances could be developed as 'testbeds' for the interoperability of higher education institutions in delivering brain circulation and the free flow of knowledge. The alliances should be encouraged to 'become more innovative and entrepreneurial, such as, for example, HEInnovate[198] and InvestEU[199], and promote collaboration with Horizon Europe[200], to provide synergies and avoid duplication of efforts.

The January 2022 Commission Communication on a European strategy for universities[201] had a specific focus to better link research, teaching and learning, inviting 'closer cooperation between countries and actors of the higher education sector within the European Education Area, the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area (Bologna process)'.

Such integration requires stronger transnational cooperation in higher education institutional transformation and 'support for fundamental academic values and scientific freedom, developing academic careers, innovative and interdisciplinary learning, teaching and research, as well as the interconnectedness between these, knowledge circulation, international cooperation with partners beyond the EU and the contribution to the United Nation's SDG's'. To support such developments the European Commission committed to establishing a Higher Education Sector Observatory,

The 5 April 2022 Council Recommendation on Building Bridges for Effective European Higher Education Cooperation[202] instrumentalises the European strategy for universities. Article 7 of the

[196] Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (OJ C, C/444, 10.12.2018, p. 1). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)

[197] Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education, 17 May 2021, 8658/21, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8658-2021-INIT/en/pdf

[198] HEInnovate, *Is your Higher Education Institution prepared for future challenges?* https://www.heinnovate.eu/en

[199] 'The InvestEU Programme gives an additional boost to investment, innovation and job creation in Europe over the period 2021-27. It aims at triggering a new wave – more than EUR 372 billion - in investments using an EU budget guarantee', see https://investeu.europa.eu/index_en

[200] European Commission, *Horizon Europe*, https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en

[201] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European strategy for universities, 18.1.2022 Com (2022) 16. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2022:16:FIN

[202] Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (2022/C 160/01), OJ C 160, 13.4.2022. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H0413(01)

Recommendation has re-emphasised the value of quality assurance in higher education, particularly as there has been increased mobility across countries and more collaboration in teaching and learning.

Article 7 The goal is to strengthen mutual trust through external quality assurance and accreditation of joint educational offers.

Member States are encouraged to:

- Move further towards the use of institutional-based external quality assurance to support the development of a genuine institutional quality culture that leads to a greater accountability and compatibility of systems across Europe.
- Consider the possibility of allowing for self-accreditation of programmes based on institutional quality assurance, to underpin the self-responsibility of higher education institutions.
- Where countries rely on programme-based external quality assurance, enable the full implementation of the European Approach, ensuring that the external evaluation of joint transnational programmes is carried out by one single agency registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education and that the outcomes are automatically accepted in all other higher education systems without adding further national requirements.

> *'Regarding the development of a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System, Stockholm University would like to emphasise the importance of the higher education institutions own responsibility for quality assurance. Therefore, we value the possibility to allow for self-accreditation of programmes based on the institutions quality assurance procedures'.*
>
> Stockholm University (Sweden) – Call for Evidence.

The 6 April 2022 Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe[203] focus on higher education institutions simplifying administrative procedures to widen the mutual recognition of academic qualifications and to 'unlock' the full potential of the European Universities alliances. The Conclusions emphasise the importance of implementing the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, in recognising the value of transnational cooperation in teaching and learning, and enhancing the employability of learners.

The Conclusions invite Member States and the European Commission to explore common criteria for a potential European label for joint programmes, and to facilitate a European quality assurance approach for joint programmes in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

In May 2023, and responding to the European Commission report (above) on the implementation of automatic recognition, the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union called for further action in its Council conclusions on further steps to make automatic mutual recognition in education and training a reality[204].

The Conclusions strongly emphasise that 'Quality assurance plays a key role in accelerating trust building by highlighting methods and improving transparency', but note that there has been uneven application of automatic recognition tools, in the use of the Diploma Supplement, and in recognising

[203] Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe, 6 April 2022, 7936/22, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7936-2022-INIT/en/pdf
[204] Council conclusions on further steps to make automatic mutual recognition in education and training a reality, 16 May 2023, 9307/23, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9307-2023-INIT/en/pdf

learning periods abroad. This is even though 'within the Erasmus+ programme, higher education institutions have committed to fully and automatically recognising the credits obtained during a mobility period, recognition is still far from being the norm'.

These developments at the EU level, particularly the European Universities Initiative, have given new momentum to the Bologna Process. The use of the European Approach, for instance, has increased overall –albeit moderately– since the launch of the first call for European Universities alliances in 2018. The European Universities alliances have also been exploring how they can implement the European Approach. For example:

The Circle-U alliance has published 'Quality assurance guidelines and rules to develop joint learning activities and programmes'[205]. Inspired by the European Approach it explicitly addresses 'teaching activities that are not yet implemented in the institutions (joint programmes and courses, blended learning and of course in the context of academic chairs', and also for micro-credentials.

The Una Europa alliance (at the 2021 European University Association Quality Assurance Forum) presented a trust-based approach to joint programme quality assurance, emphasising the importance of subsidiarity for partners, and agreeing core quality practices. Transparency is essential in this process, and 'the partners share information on their internal quality assurance methods in a "knowledge base"'[206].

Furthermore, the Erasmus+ EuniQ[207] project has made recommendations[208] on the development of a quality assurance framework for European Universities alliances and a roadmap for its implementation. The proposed framework adjusts some criteria of the European Approach to cope with the complexities of European Universities alliances and is meant to be flexible to cope with future developments.

According to the proposed framework, European Universities alliances should be able to choose one, two or more agencies registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) for the coordination of the quality assurance evaluation, which should:

- Respect the internal quality assurance arrangements, diversity, academic freedom and autonomy of the alliances and their constituent higher education institutions.
- Respect the mission and strategy determined by the alliances, focusing on their implementation and not on the choices they made.
- Focus on the joint provision of the alliance and not assess the individual institutions, their programmes or courses.

[205] Circle U., *Quality assurance guidelines and rules to develop joint learning activities and programmes*, https://www.circle-u.eu/resources/quality-assurance/d1.8_circle-u-quality-assurance-policy.pdf

[206] Una Europa, *Quality Assurance in the context of a European University: a lean and trust-based approach for joint programmes*, https://una-europa.imgix.net/resources/7.18-Publication-quality assurance-in-context-of-European-University.pdf

[207] European University Association (EUA), *EuniQ: Developing a European Approach for Comprehensive QA of (European) University Networks*, https://eua.eu/resources/projects/811-euniq.html

[208] EUniQ, *Resonance group paper: European Universities, legal frameworks and the ESG. Some recommendations*, https://ehea.info/Upload/EUNIQ%20Policy%20paper%202%20Eur.%20Uni.%2C%20legal%20frameworks%20and%20the%20ESG-final.pdf; EuniQ, *European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities*, https://www.nvao.net/nl/attachments/view/european%20framework%20for%20the%20comprehensive%20quality%20assurance%20of%20european%20universities

4.4 Challenges to quality assurance

4.4.1 Uneven implementation of the ESG

Despite the progress made in the past two decades, there is still uneven implementation of the ESG recommendations, while, at EU level, implementation of the quality assurance provisions of the 2022 Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation is at an early stage.

The 2018 Bologna Progress Report on Quality Assurance[209] highlighted the advantages of an institutional approach to external quality assurance. It gives higher education institutions more autonomy to develop their own internal procedures (fine-tuned to their particular needs), which contribute to creating a quality culture when they are applied across the institution. It also encourages higher education institutions to create specialised central quality units that can take on the administrative load from academic teaching and research staff, and can also provide support and training to them. Furthermore, the workload of quality assurance agencies is reduced, as they review institutions rather than a large number of programmes.

In spite of the clear advantages of institutional quality assurance, more motivation and support are needed for it to be adopted and further stimulate transnational cooperation. Positive examples of a move from programme to institutional quality assurance include:

- In Latvia, an Erasmus+ project has created a roadmap for the institutional accreditation of higher education institutions by 2024[210].

- The Netherlands is planning a move from programme level to a form of institutional level accreditation (new programmes will be centrally accredited while institutions would handle reaccreditation) by 2024[211].

All EU countries, except Czechia, Italy, Malta, and Slovakia, have implemented the ESG fully at system level[212]. A 2021 review[213] of quality assurance frameworks of the 49 European Higher Education Area (EHEA) countries for the European University Association concluded that the ESG and the European Approach brought a common understanding to a diverse set of external quality assurance activities at country and regional levels. For example, quality assurance can involve external review of a joint programme, it can involve self-accreditation, and can be at the institutional level. The validity of accreditation ranges mostly from 5 to 8 years, with some only for 1 to 3 years[214].

[209] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Study to evaluate the progress on quality assurance systems in the area of higher education in the Member States and on cooperation activities at European level – Final report*, Publications Office, 2018, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/352582

[210] Ministry of Education and Science Republic of Latvia, *Project for the implementation of cyclical assessment of higher education institutions in Latvia*, 2024, https://www.izm.gov.lv/en/projects/project-implementation-cyclical-assessment-higher-education-institutions-latvia

[211] Wittenborg University of Applied Sciences, *Shift from Programme Accreditation to Institutional Accreditation for Dutch Universities*, November 13, 2020, https://www.wittenborg.eu/shift-programme-accreditation-institutional-accreditation-dutch-universities.htm

[212] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *Country information*, https://www.eqar.eu/kb/country-information/

[213] European University Association (EUA), *Gauging external quality assurance frameworks in the European Higher Education Area*, July 12, 2021, https://eua.eu/resources/expert-voices/237:gauging-external-quality-assurance-frameworks-in-the-european-higher-education-area.html

[214] European University Association (EUA), *Gauging external quality assurance frameworks in the European Higher Education Area*, July 12, 2021, https://eua.eu/resources/expert-voices/237:gauging-external-quality-assurance-frameworks-in-the-european-higher-education-area.html

Positive developments include:

- Austria in 2021 promoted the use of the European Approach to accredit and evaluate joint programmes through the establishment of a peer learning network[215] involving other European agencies, and by widening institutional accreditation to involve University of Applied Sciences through the Fachhochschul-Akkreditierungsverordnung decree.
- Romanian universities can now offer joint programmes with other higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area and 'upon completion of integrated study programs, the study documents issued, including joint or double degrees, are legally recognized by the Romanian state'[216].
- The Hungarian Accreditation Committee (MAB) recommended legislative changes to facilitate the quality assurance of the CHARM-EU European Universities alliance[217].

The Bologna Progress Report on quality assurance in 2018[218] indicated that at that time, of 1 551 higher education institutions in 41 countries surveyed, 71% responded that their compliance with quality assurance laws and regulations was their main focus.

At the country level, a recent study[219] noted that:

- 16 EU higher education systems used quality assurance to enhance practice: Belgium (Flemish Community), Belgium (French Community), Denmark, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Malta, Austria, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden.
- Some countries were reported to have achieved full implementation of all the recommendations (Belgium, Latvia, Austria, Romania, and Finland), with Luxembourg and Hungary also being rated positively in all the recommendations for which data were available for those countries.
- All but four Member States have internal and external quality assurance systems that are aligned with the ESG, evidenced by the registration within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education of the agencies performing external quality assurance.
- Lower degrees of implementation were reported in relation to higher education institutions being able to choose quality assurance agencies (registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) from other Member States, the promotion of cooperation between agencies, independence of assessments and in ensuring public access to the assessments performed by quality assurance agencies listed in the register.
- There has tended to be greater progress in relation to recommendations that do not explicitly require international cooperation than in relation to those that refer more directly to this type of cooperation. Implementation of the recommendation on higher education institutions being able to choose among quality assurance or accreditation agencies in the European register has been limited.

[215] Parliament Österreich, Parlamentskorrespondenz NR. 1027 VOM 28.09.2022, https://www.parlament.gv.at/aktuelles/pk/jahr_2022/pk1027#XXVII_III_00750

[216] National Centre for the Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas (CNRED), *Education System in Romania*, https://cnred.edu.ro/en/education-system-in-romania/

[217] Hungarian Accreditation Committee, *Report for the Year 2020 until September 2021*, 2021, https://www.mab.hu/wp-content/uploads/MAB-Annual-Report-2021_v2..pdf

[218] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Study to evaluate the progress on quality assurance systems in the area of higher education in the Member States and on cooperation activities at European level – Final report*, Publications Office, 2018, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/352582

[219] ICF study in finalisation.

4.4.2 Uneven Implementation of the European Approach

The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) reports that the extent to which the European Approach has been implemented across higher education systems in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) varies substantially (EU Member States are highlighted in bold) [220]:

- European Approach available to all higher education institutions: **Belgium (Flemish Community)**, **Belgium (French Community)**, United Kingdom (Wales), **Denmark**, United Kingdom (England), **Spain**, **Croatia**, Liechtenstein, **Lithuania**, **Hungary**, **Malta**, Moldova, **Netherlands**, United Kingdom (Northern Ireland), **Poland**, **Romania**, Switzerland, United Kingdom (Scotland), **Finland**, **Austria**, Armenia.

- European Approach available to some higher education institutions or only under specific conditions: Bosnia and Herzegovina, **Germany**, **Estonia**, **Greece**, **Cyprus**, **France**, **Luxembourg**, Norway, **Portugal**, **Slovenia**, **Ireland**, Kazakhstan, Georgia.

- European Approach not available to higher education institutions: Andorra, Azerbaijan, **Bulgaria**, **Czechia**, Montenegro, **Italy**, Iceland, **Latvia**, North Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, **Slovakia**, **Sweden**, Turkey, Ukraine, Holy See.

Such differences, where only 11 of the 27 Member States allow the full implementation of the European Approach, need to be overcome to achieve the aim that all joint programmes are assessed through a single European procedure.

> *‘Despite the European Approach there is no common course of action concerning the accreditation of joint study programmes in the EHEA. The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes was adopted in 2015, yet not all EHEA member states are ready for its thorough application. The national legislations still do not allow in every member state the use of a Joint Degree’.*
>
> St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences (Germany) – Call for Evidence.

Achieving full implementation of the European Approach can depend on the administrative procedures concerning joint programmes. In Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, and Romania they are defined in law. In Italy, the law does not allow joint programmes. Some Member States will only attest to the programme parts delivered by their own higher education institution (as in Poland), whereas, in Cyprus and Portugal, a full programme can be reviewed. Slovenia has a separate national framework for joint programmes where a foreign partner is not accredited by an agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education reports that 28 joint programmes have undergone a formal review using the European Approach to date[221]. Among them, there are three first-cycle programmes, a positive development because unlike the second-cycle Masters and doctoral levels there has been very limited European funding to build joint bachelor programmes, whereas for masters and doctoral levels funding has been available through Erasmus+ (particularly Erasmus Mundus and capacity building projects) and Marie Sklodowska-Curie Actions.

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[220] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *National implementation of the European Approach*, https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/national-implementation/

[221] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *Joint programmes that used the European Approach*, February 2024: https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/european-approach-cases/

While the total number is modest, the range of countries involved indicates that the European Approach has potential applicability in higher education across the world. The countries using the European Approach to date (number of institutions involved – as of January 2024) are:

> Albania (1); Austria (5); Belgium (Flemish Community) (3); Belgium (French Community) (2); Bosnia and Herzegovina (1); Croatia (2); Czech Republic (2); Denmark (2); Estonia (1); Finland (2); France (14); Germany (12); Greece (1); Hungary (1); Ireland (2); Israel (1); Italy (5); Kosovo (1); Lithuania (1); Malta (1); Netherlands (8); North Macedonia (1); Norway (4); Poland (3); Portugal (3); Romania (2); Slovakia (1); Slovenia (2); South Africa (1); Spain (14); Sudan (1); Sweden (3); Uganda (1); United Kingdom (England) (1); United States (1).

Even though the European Approach has not been extensively used, a July 2023 report[222] from the Erasmus+-funded 'Quality Assurance Fit for the Future' (QA-FIT[223]) project indicated that joint programmes are actually widely developed, with 60% of the respondents stating that their higher education institution offered them, with larger institutions offering more than 30 joint programmes. Respondents, which represented higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area, also advised against any further quality assurance developments adding to their workload, and that the processes should not cover governance or strategic management aspects.

Those who are considering developing a joint programme involving partners from multiple countries and institutions need to consider whether to apply for accreditation through the European Approach. Should some of the partners then develop another programme they would need to go through the European Approach process again (programme-level quality assurance). This can be a disincentive. It would be more efficient if the partner institutions were accredited through the European Approach (institutional-level quality assurance) because the quality assurance administrative overhead for a new joint programme would be nearly zero.

The 'full accreditation' as in the European Approach is viewed as a competitive advantage – in effect a label of approval at the European level for six years and can be used in programme promotion and publicity. The ability of a process to adapt to the specific disciplinary sectors being evaluated we regarded as being important, and a single evaluation (self-assessment and visit) involving all partner institutions across countries can result in a deeper understanding of issues such as diversity, inclusion, pedagogies, innovative teaching and learning, widening participation, and assessment.

A study investigated the experience of cross-border quality assurance for the accreditation of engineering education in Belgium (with a partnership of French and Belgian agencies). An initial challenge was that the French agency was not familiar with the Belgian approach and as a result, its 'accreditation standards were reformulated to pay more attention to 'what' (the outcomes) than to 'how' (the specific strategies and practices)'[224]. This resonates with the recommendations for quality assurance coming from the European Universities alliances. It was found to be important that an agency not familiar with the other country systems should avoid making comparisons or recommendations based on their own national approach.

In September 2023, as part of QA-FIT, the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education reported[225] the results of a survey of ministries, higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies and students. Respondents were positive about the role that quality assurance has played in building

[222] European University Association (EUA), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, *Quality assurance fit for the future*, 2023, https://eua.eu/resources/publications/1072:quality-assurance-fit-for-the-future.html

[223] European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), Quality Assurance Fit for the Future (QA-FIT), https://www.enqa.eu/projects/quality-assurance-fit-for-the-future-qa-fit/

[224] Teresa Sánchez-Chaparro, Bernard Remaud, Víctor Gómez-Frías, Caty Duykaerts & Anne-Marie Jolly, *Benefits and challenges of cross-border quality assurance in higher education. A case study in engineering education in Europe*, Quality in Higher Education, 2022, 28:3, 308-325, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13538322.2021.2004984

[225] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, Melinda Szabo, Blazhe Todorovski, *Quality Assurance Fit for the Future: Analysis of Ministry Survey Responses*, 2023, https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2023/09/QA-FIT_Survey_to_Ministries_FinalPaper.pdf

trust and transparency across countries at the European Higher Education Area level, whereas students reported positive impacts for their careers. Importantly, the survey showed how joint programmes at the European level have a positive social dimension by building on European values.

However, there was less positivity about the European Approach to the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. Most responses indicated that the European Approach was not permitted in their national frameworks, but there was a clear majority of responses that accepted the relevance of the European Approach being applicable for the European Universities alliances joint programmes.

Stakeholder interviews and other research for the ICF study reported some of the obstacles for achieving full implementation. For some, a change to national legislation is required to overcome differences in methodologies, language, timelines, and application deadlines. For others, the main deterrent is the cost (particularly in terms of human resources required) of moving to full implementation. In some cases, the European Approach is not sufficiently well-known across higher education systems such as in Belgium's French-speaking community (although in Belgium's Flemish community the European Approach is mandatory for all new joint programmes).

> *'The complexity of current [quality assurance] rules and guidelines can be a barrier to effective implementation and compliance. Simplifying these rules would not only make them more accessible to [higher education institutions] but also streamline the [quality assurance] processes, making them more efficient and less burdensome for institutions'.*
>
> European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) – Call for Evidence.

The 2018 Progress Report had noted that about one-third of the higher education institutions responding to a survey were not aware of the European Approach; where they were aware, they often confused the European Approach and the ESG. A further problem, reported by the QA-FIT project, is that information about the European Approach may not be available in the local language[226]. It is to be expected that this confusion is reducing through significant events such as the annual Quality Assurance Forum held by the European University Association[227].

To widen the awareness of the European Approach, guides have been produced for different stakeholder groups.

The ImpEA project[228] provides a training toolkit covering the principles and practice of the European Approach.

AQU Catalunya[229] published its own guide for higher education institutions and its own officials in implementing the European Approach.

The Dutch National Agencies Erasmus+[230] coordinated a project leading to the publication in 2020 of 'Joint Programmes from A to Z: A reference guide for practitioners'[231]. This takes readers through a full journey from

[226] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, Melinda Szabo, Blazhe Todorovski, *Quality Assurance Fit for the Future: Analysis of Ministry Survey Responses*, 2023, https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2023/09/QA-FIT_Survey_to_Ministries_FinalPaper.pdf

[227] European University Association (EUA), 2023 European Quality Assurance Forum, https://eua.eu/events/124-2023-european-quality-assurance-forum.html

[228] Facilitating implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes – ImpEA Project, *European Approach Online Toolkit*, https://impea.eu/

[229] AQU Catalunya, *Guide to ex-ante accreditation of joint programmes using the European Approach*, Barcelona, 2022, https://www.aqu.cat/es/doc/Universitats/Guide-to-ex-ante-accreditation-of-joint-programmes-using-the-European-Approach

[230] Dutch National Agencies Erasmus+, https://www.erasmusplus.nl/english

[231] European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, European Students' Union, European University Association (EUA), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, *Key Considerations for Cross-Border Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, Brussels, 2017, https://impea.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Joint-Programmes-from-A-to-Z-Report-2020.pdf

considering participating in a joint programme to resourcing, delivering and sustaining it, with overall messages encouraging them to check the provisions and definitions of the European Approach.

The E4 Group and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education published a guide for stakeholders engaging in 'cross-border' quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area[232]. The document includes a roadmap in the form of guiding questions that stakeholders should consider before, during, and after the quality assurance procedure. It encourages institutions to consider first the rationale for engaging in cross-border quality assurance and what added value would result. It makes a strong recommendation that the European Approach should be used for joint programmes.

4.4.3 Need for better links between quality assurance and recognition

Robust quality assurance leads to accountability, transparency, improvement, and trust in the higher education sector – essential elements for the automatic mutual recognition of higher education qualifications between EU Member States.

However, recognition procedures vary significantly between EU Member States, types of higher education institutions, and education levels[233], and are often complicated, lengthy, and expensive. This creates frictions for students to move and make use of their higher education qualifications in the European Union, and for higher education institutions to engage in deeper transnational cooperation.

> *'ESU sees automatic recognition as a pillar for free movement of persons and an enabler for credit or degree mobility, and as such supports the objectives of mobility, such as internationalisation and intercultural understanding'.*
>
> European Students' Union (ESU) – Call for Evidence.

The only legally binding text in the recognition area is the 1997 Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention)[234]. Signed by 55 countries, it aims to ensure that qualifications are recognised in other countries and that the process of recognition is not burdensome and is fairly assessed in a reasonable time. The Convention argues that recognition should take place by default and 'can only be refused if the qualification is substantially different from that of the host country', and where clear evidence is provided that this is the case. The Bologna Process monitors progress in this area.

There are no legally binding commitments at the EU level. In line with the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (§ 165 TFEU), the European Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action. Consistent with this, academic recognition of foreign qualifications is the exclusive responsibility of EU Member States.

Despite EU efforts to encourage automatic mutual recognition (see the *Important developments at EU level* section), a recent study showed the uneven application of automatic mutual recognition recommendations (see Figure 4.2)[235].

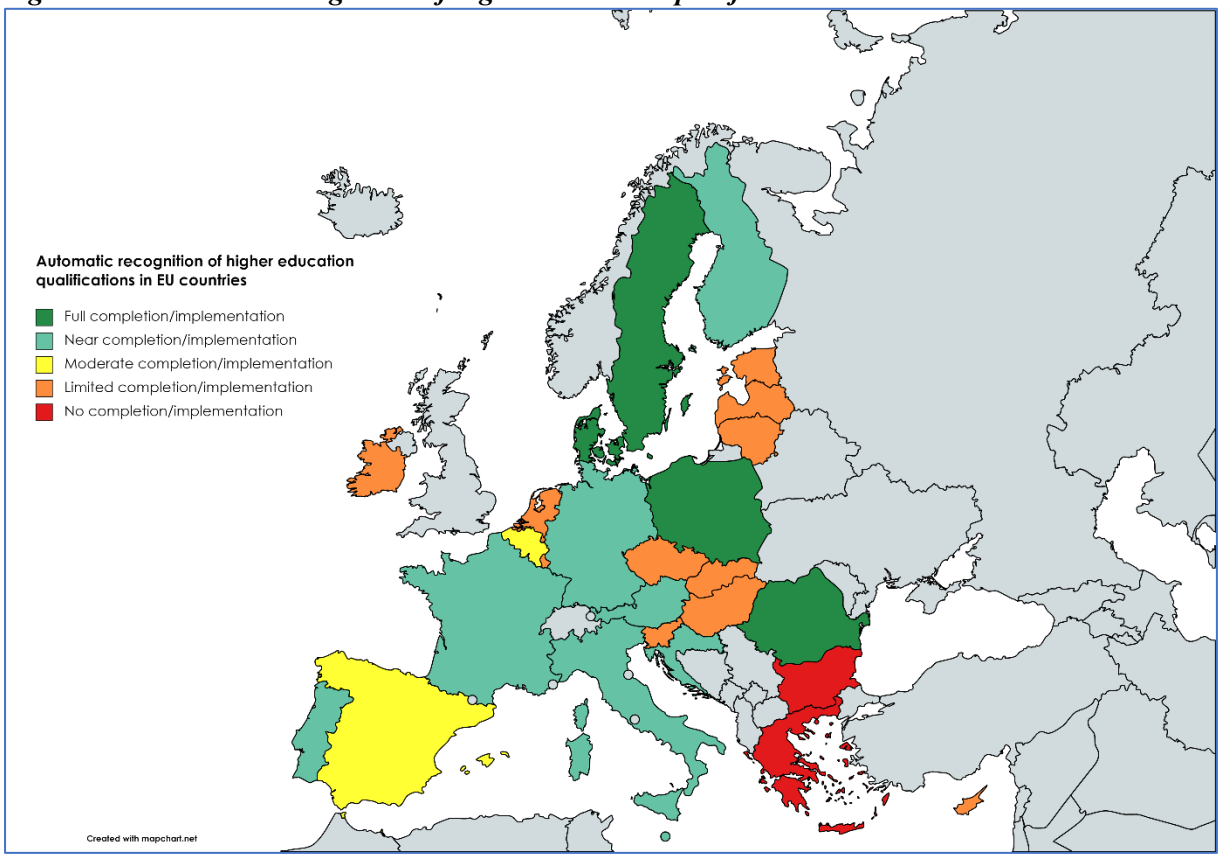
[232] European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, European Students' Union, European University Association (EUA), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, *Key Considerations for Cross-Border Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, Brussels, 2017, https://impea.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Joint-Programmes-from-A-to-Z-Report-2020.pdf

[233] ICF study in finalisation.

[234] Council of Europe, Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (ETS No. 165), https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=165

[235] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Implementation of the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training*

Figure 4.2: Automatic recognition of higher education qualifications in EU Member States



Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Implementation of the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-03/Evaluation%20Report%20-%20Implementation%20of%20the%202018%20CR%20on%20promoting%20automatic%20mutual%20recognition.pdf

Furthermore, the February 2023 Report from the European Commission to the European Council[236] showed that rather than recognition being automatic, one-third of higher education institutions checked the quality assurance arrangements of the sending institution when deciding on recognition. The report also showed a need for stronger guidance and clarity about implementing automatic recognition.

4.4.4 Remaining Obstacles to European-level quality assurance

There remain a wide range of barriers to the wider adoption of European quality assurance tools. Implementation of the quality assurance provisions of the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation is at an early stage. Explicit references to the inclusion of ECTS and micro-credentials in quality assurance or the quality assurance of micro-credentials also remain limited to a minority of systems.

qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad – Executive summary, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/086152

[236] Report from the Commission to the Council on the implementation of 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, 23.2.2023, COM(2023) 91, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2023%3A91%3AFIN

A recent study[237] identified that joint programmes often need to: undergo multiple accreditation and re-accreditation procedures; navigate differing online teaching programme requirements; deal with different accreditation durations; and determine whether institutional, programme, or self-accreditation is to be used. The study cited early (2022) qualitative feedback from the European Universities alliances that even where the European Approach is available, it is not always evenly applied. Lastly, the differences between national higher education systems themselves were making it difficult to build trust that all joint programme institutions have the same level of quality, even where institutional quality assurance is applied.

> *'The initiative to establish a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System represents a pivotal step towards enhancing the coherence, trust, and transparency of higher education across the European Union'.*
>
> YouthProAktiv (Non-governmental organisation) – Call for Evidence.

The ICF study[238] cited throughout this chapter further emphasised the prevailing barriers, noting that some national legislations remain restrictive, and that the cost-benefits of the European Approach are not widely appreciated. Coordinating resources, scheduling the quality assurance process, and sharing resources for the quality assurance process, can be difficult across countries.

Some quality assurance systems may require reports from other country agencies to be checked, there may be uneven resources available (some agencies may be subsidised, others not, to undertake quality assurance. There can be a 'fear of failure' where 'an assessment that is not complementary may raise questions for students about the value of their qualification in the country of study'. Finally, different languages in the documentation of the different national systems can require translation and add to administrative burden.

Besides the challenge in securing compliance with the ESG, and significantly increasing the use of the European Approach, EU-wide quality assurance processes also need to 'move with the times' and reflect the changing social, political, environmental and economic landscape, for example: the green and digital transition, employability, gender balance, academic integrity and fundamental academic and European values, synergies between education, research, innovation and service to society, and programmes (leading to full degree or micro-credentials) enhancing skills and competencies of students and lifelong learners on key societal priorities.

> *'We strongly support the Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as a framework that fosters trust between higher education systems and a foundation to gain automatic recognition throughout Europe. Nonetheless, the quality assurance system should be flexible enough to allow for a quick response to changes'.*
>
> Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF), Directorate for Higher Education – Call for Evidence

Higher education systems may address these aspects in different ways, for example by incorporating specific objectives in their regular external quality assurance or through focused or thematic quality reviews at system level. Such an approach should be carried out in full alignment with the ESG.

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

[238] ICF study in finalisation.

Chapter 5: European framework for flexible and attractive academic careers

Effective and innovative transnational cooperation in higher education requires the commitment of high-quality academic staff who can engage in deep long-term partnerships with peers from other institutions. Their efforts must therefore be appropriately rewarded and valued in their career advancement. This chapter explores the importance of ensuring that academic careers in European higher education are attractive, flexible, and sustainable across the European Union, ensuring parity of esteem between the different roles that academic staff play in their institutions – from research and teaching and learning to engagement in knowledge transfer, leadership, open science practices, civil society, and transnational cooperation.

The content of this chapter relies on desk research and the outcomes of a study commissioned to Ecorys in the preparation of this higher education package[239]. The study included an extensive literature review; five online consultation events with higher education stakeholders[240]; an online survey to gather input on the challenges and the current situation in higher education institutions[241]; and focus groups to discuss the results from the previous activities[242].

The chapter first sets the stage by exploring the different types of higher education institutions that exist in Europe, each with a different structure, priorities and practices that influence the career paths of their academic staff. It then frames the main challenges that influence the careers of academic staff, ranging across transnational cooperation, teaching and learning, career developments and working conditions, and academic freedom, diversity, and gender equality. The last section summarises the key findings and advances possible solutions.

5.1. Background

To achieve flexible and attractive academic careers in higher education across the European Union, and thereby contribute to achieving the European Education Area[243] by 2025, the January 2022 Commission Communication on a European strategy for universities[244], identified career-related barriers to the development of deep transnational cooperation in teaching and learning. They include the lack of parity of esteem between different academic career paths, the rigidity of academic careers, and the working conditions of academic staff.

To tackle these challenges, the European Commission committed to actions in close cooperation with stakeholders and Member States, including the development of a European framework for attractive and sustainable careers in higher education in synergy with the research career framework developed under the European Research Area (ERA): to provide better support for innovative teaching and

[239] Carried out in 2023 to assess the current situation regarding academic staff in higher education in Europe.
[240] The stakeholders included national authorities, employers, academic staff, social partners, and actors involved in transnational cooperation (including European Universities alliances and Erasmus Mundus Programmes).

[241] 864 responses were received from universities (650); other higher education institutions (polytechnics, business schools, etc.) (91); teaching and learning support staff at a higher education institution (47); national and regional ministries and government bodies responsible for higher education (24); national and regional teaching and learning organisations (9); employer organisations (7); organisations and social partners at EU level (2); and other respondents (34).

[242] The focus groups were organised by theme: flexible pathways, intersectoral and transnational mobility; workload, wellbeing, and time management; and career structures and appraisal mechanisms.
[243] European Commission, European Education Area: European Education Area, https://education.ec.europa.eu/
[244] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European strategy for universities, 18.1.2022 Com(2022) 16, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2022%3A16%3AFIN

learning approaches through training and career development for higher education academic staff; and to strengthen, promote and protect university autonomy and academic freedom.

The Council Recommendation on Building Bridges for Effective European Higher Education Cooperation, published in April 2022, encouraged Member States to support higher education institutions in valorising and recognising in their career assessments the time spent by academic staff on developing innovative pedagogies and new research practices through transnational cooperation.

In its May 2021 Conclusions on Deepening the European Research Area: Providing researchers with attractive and sustainable careers and working conditions and making brain circulation a reality[245], the Council had already called on the European Commission to design a framework for seamless and ambitious transnational cooperation between European higher education institutions for both academic and research careers. The Conclusions acknowledged that academic career development and progression in higher education was dominantly focused on research, rather than providing a balanced career path.

Notably, it was highlighted that to diversify research careers, there is a need to explore more diverse reward and assessment mechanisms that take into account not only research outputs, but also open collaboration, societal engagement, teaching and skills, impact, services to society, open science practices, mobility, management and leadership skills, entrepreneurship, and collaboration with industry.

Building on this, the Council Recommendation of 18 December 2023 on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe proposed concrete steps to make research careers in Europe more attractive and sustainable[246]. The Recommendation acknowledges the need to have a common understanding of 'researcher' at Union level and of the activities they perform in different sectors; to safeguard academic freedom and freedom of research; to address persisting gender inequalities; to support early-career researchers, attractive working conditions, and stable contracts; to have transparent, merit-based recruitment and promotions systems; to ensure adequate social protection for researchers; to encourage researchers' mobility and training so they can have better career opportunities; and to establish performance evaluations that recognise diverse research outputs, activities, and practices with an equal esteem and reward of the different career paths.

Notably, the Recommendation introduces a new European Charter for Researchers. The Charter consists of a set of principles underpinning the development of attractive research careers across Europe. The Charter details the rights and responsibilities of researchers, employers, funders, and policymakers across four pillars: 'Ethics, Integrity, Gender and Open Science'; 'Researchers Assessment, Recruitment and Progression'; 'Working Conditions and Practices'; and 'Research Careers and Talent Development'.

As will be explained below, the needs identified for research careers resonate with those for other academic career paths. However, a key factor that impedes the development of wider career paths for academic staff is the primacy of research over other academic roles that permeate the higher education sector. It is thus essential to ensure synergies between the proposal for a European framework for academic careers and the recently adopted European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe.

[245] Council conclusions on Deepening the European Research Area: Providing with attractive and sustainable careers and working conditions and making brain circulation a reality, 28 May 2021, 9138/21, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/49980/st09138-en21.pdf

[246] Council Recommendation of 18 December 2023 on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe (OJ C 2023/1640, 29.12.2023), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C_202301640

5.2. The diversity of European higher education

The framework for academic careers needs to be sensitive to the diversity of European higher education, which involves much more than 'universities'; furthermore, not all higher education institutions undertake research, and not all undertake teaching and learning[247]:

'Europe is home to close to 5 000 higher education institutions, 17.5 million tertiary education students, 1.35 million people teaching in tertiary education and 1.17 million researchers. Be it research universities, institutes of technology, schools of arts or higher vocational education and training institutions – the different types of higher education institutions are all hallmarks of our European way of life'[248].

The Eurydice network[249] notes that there is a wide range of higher education institutions in Europe such as public and private higher education institutions, traditional universities, universities of applied sciences, university colleges, business schools, specialised higher schools, polytechnics, non-university level public institutions of higher education, tertiary professional schools, and specialised research universities. Across this diversity of institutions, some are more research-focused, some are more focused on applied sciences, some may be focused on specific thematic areas such as agriculture, law or cultural services, and others can be more focused on teaching and learning.

The importance of fully recognising the role of teaching and learning has grown as technology advancements have provided means to empower both students and teachers to undertake innovative and independent teaching and learning learning through through the use of online resources, research engines, and more recently, advanced digital technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Extended Reality. Innovative transnational teaching and learning is the hallmark of forward-looking educational approaches, reflected in European Universities alliances[250], the teaching programmes of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)[251], and the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programmes[252]. The use of advanced digital technologies in teaching and learning helps equip both students and teachers with digital skills, supporting the closing of the digital skills gap in Europe and reaching the Digital Decade targets of 80% of adults with at least basic digital skills and 20 million ICT specialists in Europe, with more gender convergence, by 2030[253].

> *'In order for Europe to be able to compete for skilled labour and innovations in the future, it is important that universities and other [higher education] institutions are attractive workplaces for research and education professionals'.*
>
> Trade Union of Education in Finland (OAJ) – Call for Evidence.

In short, teaching and learning are being rapidly disrupted by new technologies, pedagogies, methodologies and tools. At the same time, it is increasingly expected that higher education teaching

[247] More information about higher education institutions is provided by the European Tertiary Education Register (ETER), https://www.eter-project.com/
[248] European Commission, European Education Area: Higher education initiatives, https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/about-higher-education
[249] Eurydice, *National Education Systems*, https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems
[250] European Education Area, The European Universities alliances in action, https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative/about
[251] European Institute of Technology (EIT), *Education*, https://eit.europa.eu/tags/education
[252] European Commission, *Erasmus+: Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (students)*, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/opportunities/opportunities-for-individuals/students/erasmus-mundus-joint-masters-scholarships
[253] Decision (EU) 2022/2481 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030

and learning will produce graduates with the competencies and skills needed by society and the economy, with developments such as graduate tracking initiatives providing a robust understanding of the career trajectories of former students[254].

All such activities underline not just the importance of teaching and learning, but also the need for academics to be able to move between teaching, research, business, and transnational activities so that they acquire the skills and competencies to deliver what students require to thrive in a fast-changing world. There is a need for diverse academic career pathways to be effectively recognised and rewarded.

Higher education workload is often divided into research, teaching, and administration. However, assessment systems usually have a quantitative approach focused on publications, rather than a qualitative one focusing on the variety of activities performed[255].. Furthermore, the global influence of research metrics such as the QS World Rankings[256] reinforces a focus on research among higher education institutions, particularly as there is a very public race to be perceived as one of the 'world's top universities' and ranking high in research can attract high calibre research staff, and funding. In this respect, the Council Recommendation of 18 December 2023 on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe recommends assessment and reward systems that recognise a diversity of outputs, activities and practices. This includes among others teaching, academia-industry cooperation, and interaction with society.

It can also be noted that while research leave (sabbatical) can relieve academics of teaching and learning and administration so they can focus exclusively on research,there is not always an equivalent teaching and learning leave, where an academic is relieved of research and administration. Moreover, while it is possible to combine a higher education career with external mobility (such as transnational cooperation or industry secondments), it can be difficult to return to pure research after another activity. Also in this respect, the new framework for research careers recommends Member States to address such issues.

Some issues relate both to teaching and learning and research in areas such as gender balance, the inclusiveness of recruitment practices, types of contracts (particularly the use of short-term contracts and precarious employment situations), academic freedom and institutional autonomy, the ways in which higher education is financed, and the ways in which higher education institutions are 'structured'.

The European University Association argues that the vision for Europe's universities calls for a fundamental reform of academic careers[257]. This requires achieving parity between different career paths and between research and teaching; incentives for activities with different forms of impact, such as innovation and mentoring; ensuring less precarious and more attractive career conditions to retain talent; and more flexibility in academic careers to switch to other sectors and from other sectors to academia[258].

The Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN) emphasises that making careers in academia more attractive and sustainable requires a three-step approach[259]: valuing the diverse

[254] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Towards a European graduate tracking mechanism – Recommendations of the expert group – October 2018 - October 2020*, Publications Office, 2021, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/970793

[255] The EURAXESS profiles of researchers does not mention teaching at all (https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/europe/career-development/training-researchers/research-profiles-descriptors) and nor does the ERA research policy agenda 2022-2024 (https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf)

[256] QS World university Rankings, https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings

[257] European University Association (EUA), Thomas Ekman Jørgensen, Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik, *Pathways to the future: A follow up to "Universities without walls – a vision for 2030",* 2021, https://eua.eu/resources/publications/983:pathways-to-the-future.html

[258] European University Association (EUA), Thomas Ekman Jørgensen, Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik, *Pathways to the future: A follow up to "Universities without walls – a vision for 2030",* 2021, https://eua.eu/resources/publications/983:pathways-to-the-future.html

[259] Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN), *Three steps to make careers in academia more attractive and sustainable,* 2024, https://yerun.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Three-steps-to-make-careers-in-academia-more-attractive-and-sustainable-.pdf

contributions of academic staff by developing national-level approaches that encourage more comprehensive recognition systems and diverse career paths; creating support systems for the continuous skills development of academic staff (e.g., through an EU-level funding programme targeting educational excellence); and empowering universities through sustainable and diversified funding, strengthening their institutional autonomy and allowing them to channel resources according to their needs, invest in skills, and build career paths between academia and other sectors.

Academic careers therefore need to be 'attractive', allowing higher education institutions to attract and retain the best global talent and avoid a brain drain to other sectors or geographies; 'flexible', enabling mobility between teaching, administration, business development, research, and other areas; and 'sustainable', by offering staff clear mid- and long-term options to grow and develop their careers.

5.3 Challenges and factors influencing academic careers

The literature on academic careers is strongly biased towards research careers and little is written about the need to treat all academic activities equitably. Nevertheless, there are important similarities in the barriers and challenges facing researchers and those in teaching and learning.

Institutional structures are closely tied to management approaches and quality assurance processes, and the traditional model of higher education governance[260] is being challenged by the demands of competitiveness over many scales and around an expanding range of economic and social factors[261].

Furthermore, the nature of managerialism in higher education can cause quality assurance to lose its meaning and become a ritual for compliance only[262]. For example, the evaluation of quality in determining higher education rankings (which predominantly focus on research) does not always provide a realistic picture across all elements of higher education activities. What is measured largely determines the outcomes[263]. For instance, Bielefeld University improved from position 250 to 166 in one year in the Times Higher Education rankings. However, analysis showed that most of the improvement was due to the participation of a single scholar in a well-cited global health study (with over a hundred co-authors)[264].

In its 'Universities without walls – A vision for 2030', the European University Association (EUA) calls for a broader set of evaluation practices (beyond traditional bibliometric indicators)[265] to evaluate the wide range of activities in higher education. For example, Slovenia emphasises the importance of gender equality in academic (research) careers, gender balance in decision-making, and the integration of the gender dimension in research and innovation content[266].

Austria has been implementing a broad reform agenda to provide strategic funding, diversify higher education institutions, and promote an allocation of students that improves the quality of

[260] Bongaerts, J.C., The Humboldtian Model of Higher Education and its Significance for the European University on Responsible Consumption and Production, *Berg Huettenmaenn Monatsh* 167, 500–507, 2022, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00501-022-01280-w

[261] Jessop, B., Varieties of academic capitalism and entrepreneurial universities. *High Educ* 73, 853–870, 2017, https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10734-017-0120-6.pdf

[262] Davis, Annemarie, Managerialism and the risky business of quality assurance in universities, *Quality Assurance in Education*, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 317-328, 2017, https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/QAE-06-2016-0027/full/html

[263] Hence the Commission does not rank higher education institutions, but 'invites' them to evaluate their quality relative to best practice through tools such as HEInnovate, https://www.heinnovate.eu/en

[264] Brankovic, J., *The Absurdity of University Rankings*, London School of Economics blog, March 22 2021, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2021/03/22/the-absurdity-of-university-rankings/

[265] European University Association (EUA), *Universities without walls: A vision for 2030*, 2021, https://www.eua.eu/downloads/publications/universities%20without%20walls%20%20a%20vision%20for%202030.pdf

[266] Slovenian presidency of the Council of the European Union, Ljubljana Declaration on Gender Equality in Research and Innovation, 2021, https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MIZS/Dokumenti/PSEU/Ljubljana-Declaration-on-Gender-Equality-in-Research-and-Innovation-_endorsed_final.pdf

interdisciplinary curricula or trans-disciplinary research platforms[267]. The Springboard initiative in Ireland[268] helps expand higher education teaching and learning to provide new skills to both unemployed and employed people.

Types of academic staff and career structures are highly heterogeneous and varied across countries[269]. Differences exist in activities (teaching, research), contract status (indefinite, fixed term), and career pathways. National strategies set out policy frameworks supported by specific measures on issues such as gender distribution, allocation of indefinite/temporary contracts, mobility, careers, and training.

Furthermore, there is an emphasis on early-stage researchers (post-doctoral levels specifically) for whom teaching is a minor activity. There are differences in remuneration packages (salaries, social security, pension) in career pathways in terms of interdisciplinary, intersectoral, and international mobility. The age structure of some higher education systems also limits the number of new appointments, reducing the regular inflow of new staff with new knowledge, skills and competencies, and also blocking the promotion of younger academic staff. In some countries, the share of older academic staff (aged 50 and over) in 2017 was above 40% (Spain 43.3%, Italy 44.6%, Greece 48.9%, Finland 48.9%, Slovenia 51.7%)[270].

There are differences in legal definitions of the academic profession. The quality of higher education is evaluated differently across countries by external bodies[271]. Evaluations typically consider topics such as teaching, research and training opportunities. On the other hand, human resource management (recruitment, performance appraisal, promotion) is often overlooked (although data are collected on employment, contractual arrangements, and salaries).

The European University Association notes the need to raise awareness on the precarity of academic careers in Europe and the need to recognise academics for the full range of their activities, including teaching; innovation with business, the public sector and civil society; and engagement in open science practices[272].

The COVID-19 pandemic had a particular impact on accelerating the development of online and blended teaching and learning. In its review of the impact of COVID-19, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) noted that female academics were more affected than males, for example in having their work-life balance deteriorate (74% vs. 63%). In terms of mobility, 12 out of the 27 jurisdictions answering the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) survey suspended or cancelled international mobility programmes for students or academic staff. As digital technology becomes further integrated into higher education, academic contracts may

[267] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Supporting entrepreneurship and innovation in higher education in Austria*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a06af4bd-2255-11ea-af81-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

[268] Higher Education Authority, *Springboard+*, https://hea.ie/skills-engagement/springboard/

[269] European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Crosier, D., Kocanova, D., Birch, P., Davykovskaia, O., Parveva, T., *Eurydice Brief. Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Academic staff, 2017*, https://www.eurydice.si/publikacije/Eurydice-Brief_Modernisation-of-Higher-Education-in-Europe_Academic-Staff-2017-EN.pdf

[270] European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Crosier, D., Kocanova, D., Birch, P., Davykovskaia, O., Parveva, T., *Eurydice Brief. Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Academic staff, 2017*, https://www.eurydice.si/publikacije/Eurydice-Brief_Modernisation-of-Higher-Education-in-Europe_Academic-Staff-2017-EN.pdf

[271] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *Agencies*, https://www.eqar.eu/register/agencies/

[272] European University Association (EUA), *Briefing from Europe's universities to the EU Council Presidency Trio: France, Czech Republic, Sweden*, 2021, https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/trio%20briefing.pdf

need to be revised to welcome new workload models, more training and professional development, and new career assessment mechanisms[273].

Approaches to supporting the development of academic careers will likely need to address multiple stakeholder perspectives: employers who value quality of education and competencies and skills; institutional leaders that drive and value organisational modernisation; staff who value continuous professional development and reference points for practice; government that provides the appropriate framework for higher education institutions to flourish; students who value teaching and learning is up to date[274].

Overall, the literature review identified a range of factors influencing academic careers:

- Human Resource Policies: recruitment processes, contract conditions, and remuneration.
- Appraisal and promotion systems and reward mechanisms.
- Flexible career development paths.
- Achieving a gender balance.
- The importance of teaching and learning as well as research (parity of esteem).
- Academic freedom.
- Workload pressures.
- Inclusion and equity.
- Financing models in higher education.
- Institutional structures.
- Lack of data and resources on academic careers.

The influence of these factors was further explored with higher education stakeholders through an online survey and focus groups conducted by Ecorys, which yielded additional data and insights.

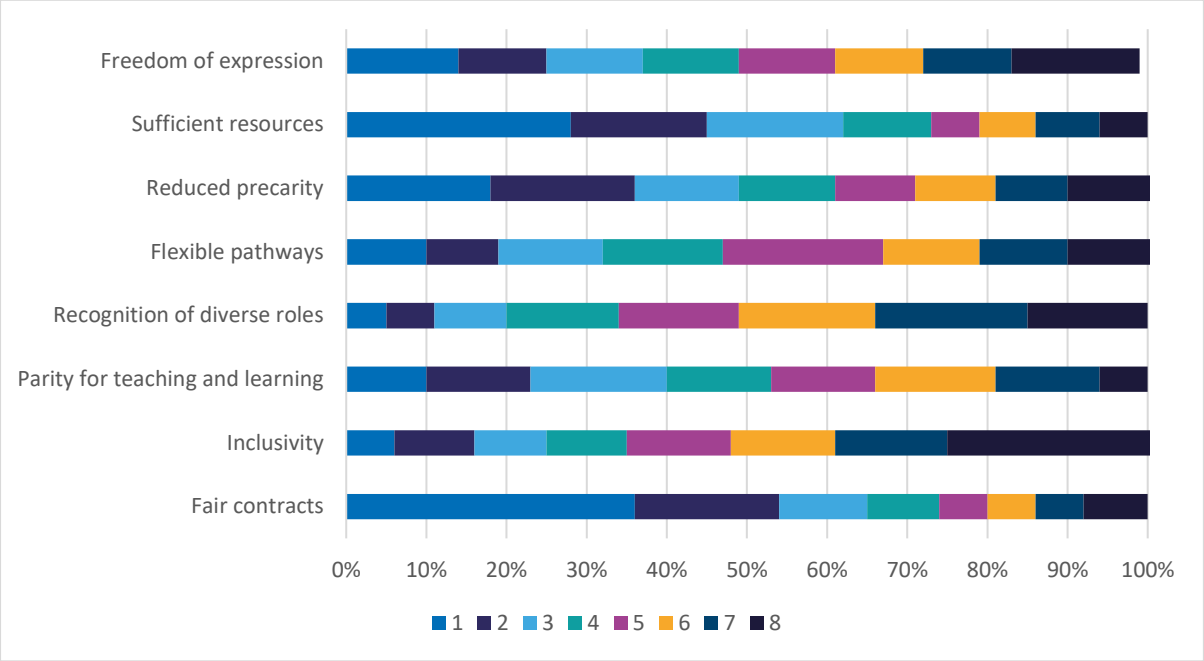
Figure 5.1 reflects the importance that respondents attach to different factors for their academic careers. There is a clear view from respondents that fair and attractive contract conditions need the most attention, followed by adequate long-term resourcing for staff and the minimisation of precarious and short-term contracts.

Other aspects in the list (academic freedom, inclusivity, flexible career pathways, community engagement) are not to be regarded as being unimportant, but rather that there are clear areas for EU action to be considered. There was, however, a lower prioritisation of equally valuing research and teaching and learning, which could indicate that research has become culturally prioritised throughout higher education.

[273] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *The State of Higher Education: One Year into the COVID-19 Pandemic*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2021, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/the-state-of-higher-education_83c41957-en

[274] Alsowaidi, S. S., Hasna, M. O., Unveiling the Interests of Stakeholders in Institutional Accreditation, *International Research in Higher Education* 8(2):44, 2023, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312476986_Stakeholders_in_Higher_Education_Quality_Assurance_Richness_in_Diversity

Figure 5.1: Opinions on the importance of different factors for academic careers



Respondents rated each aspect on a 1-8 scale, with 1 being the most and 8 the least important.

Source: Ecorys, based on research carried out in 2023 to assess the current situation regarding academic staff in higher education in Europe.

The subsections below explore in more detail the influences that the identified factors have on different aspects of academic careers, grouped into four thematic areas: transnational cooperation; innovative and effective teaching; working conditions; and the respect for academic freedom, diversity, and gender equality.

5.3.1 Engagement in deep transnational cooperation

Developing joint programmes and engaging in deep transnational cooperation such as European alliances of higher education institutions requires specific skills and a high level of commitment from academic staff. Member States have acknowledged transnational cooperation as a key dimension of higher education to support Union values, strengthen the resilience of European society and economy, and build a sustainable future[275]. Nonetheless, there is a clear perception among higher education stakeholders that the time and energy that academic staff and other staff devote to developing and strengthening transnational cooperation are not properly valorised and recognised in their careers.

> *'The effort put into creating joint programs and degrees is still not valued or recognized for career and promotion purposes. Participation in these initiatives is essential for complementing promotion and career development, particularly with regard to research'.*
>
> Universidade Lusófona (Portugal) – Call for Evidence.

[275] Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (2022/C 160/01), OJ C 160, 13.4.2022. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H0413(01)
[275] Funding & tender opportunities (europa.eu)

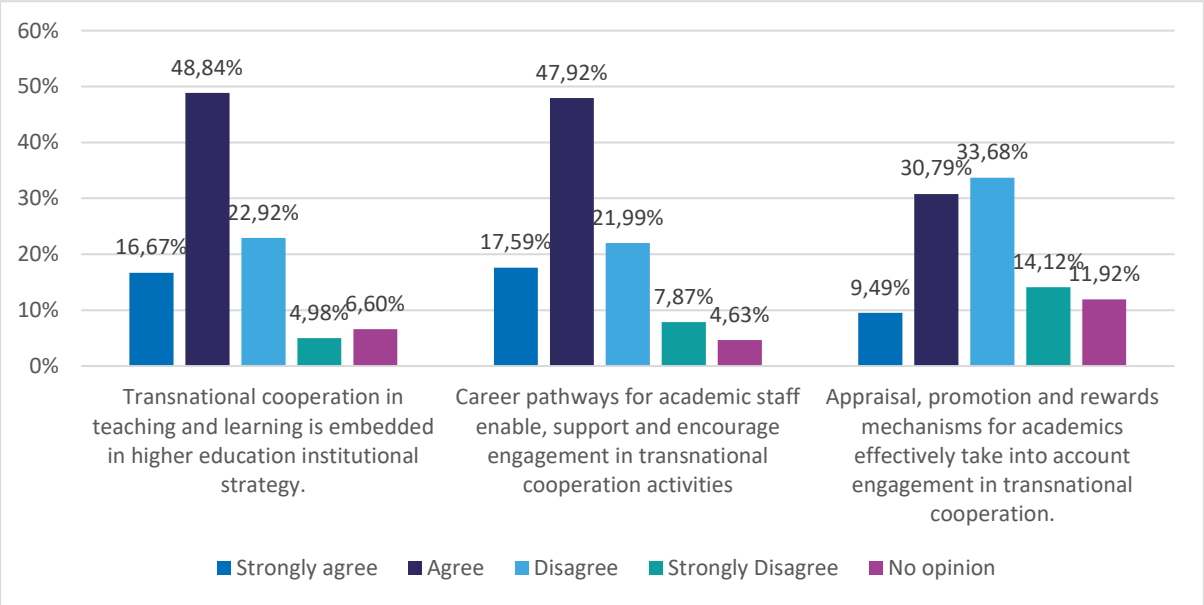
A survey conducted in 2020 by the European University Association[276] revealed that 96% of responding higher education institutions identify internationalisation as part of their institutional strategy[277], with the top priority being enhancing the quality of learning and teaching, followed by attracting students from abroad, and developing strategic partnerships with selected higher education institutions abroad.

Moreover, 87% of respondents had participated or had plans to participate in the European Universities Initiative – one of the deepest forms of transnational cooperation in higher education – with only 13% stating that their institution had no plans to participate. However, challenges to participation were identified, notably the 'amount of extra work on top of usual business' (80% of respondents), and 'getting and sustaining commitment of academic staff' (72%). Among those institutions that did not take part in the initiative, the lack of resources was among the main reasons for not participating[278].

The research conducted by Ecorys in preparation for this proposal painted a similar picture: two-thirds (65.5%) of respondents agree that transnational cooperation in teaching and learning is part of the higher education institutional strategy (Figure 5.2) and that career pathways for academic staff effectively enable, support, and encourage engagement in transnational cooperation activities.

However, only 40% agree that appraisal, promotion, and rewards mechanisms effectively take into account engagement in transnational cooperation. This highlights the existing disparity between the importance that higher education institutions attach to international cooperation and the institutional mechanisms in place to reward and recognise the academic staff that engages in it.

Figure 5.2: Integration of transnational cooperation into institutional and human resource strategies



Source: Ecorys, based on research carried out in 2023 to assess the current situation regarding academic staff in higher education in Europe.

Furthermore, as shown in Figure 5.3, most surveyed universities (61%) agree that it is *essential* or *very important* to have more opportunities for transnational cooperation to develop innovative forms of

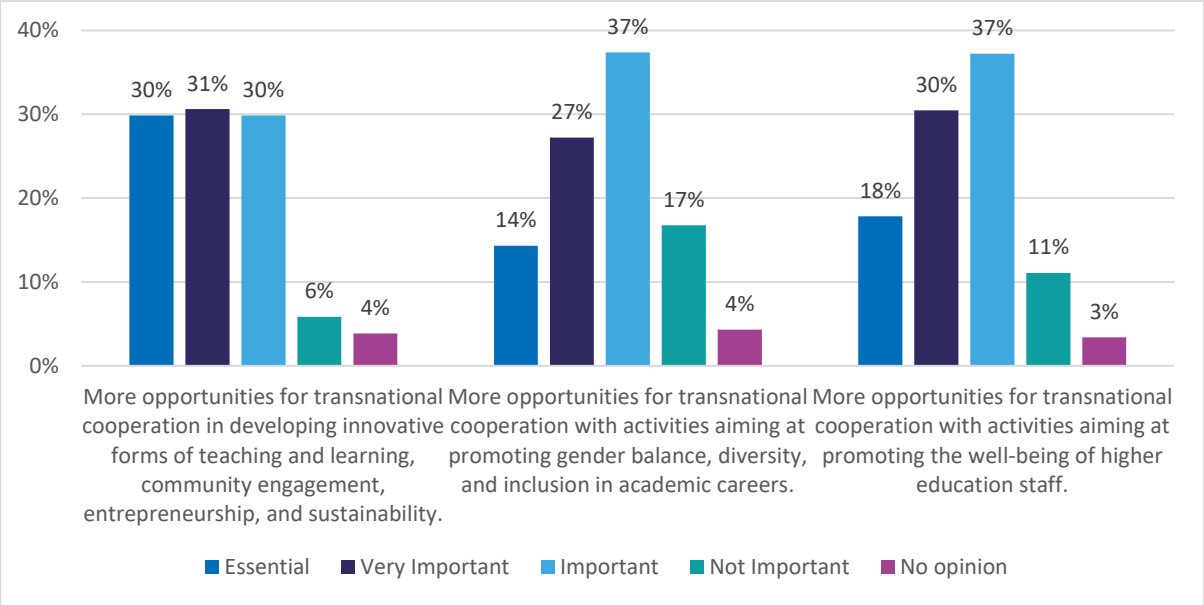
[276] European University Association (EUA), Claeys-Kulik, A-L., Jørgensen, T. E., Stöber, H. et al, *International strategic institutional partnerships and the European Universities Initiative: Results of the EUA survey, 2020*, https://eua.eu/resources/publications/925:international-strategic-institutional-partnerships-and-the-european-universities-initiative.html

[277] 53% of respondents indicated that internationalisation is part of the general strategy of their institutions, whereas 43% stated that they have a specific internationalisation strategy in place.

[278] 43% indicated the lack of non-financial resources (such as staff or infrastructure) and 38% the lack of financial resources for co-funding.

teaching and learning, whereas most respondents agree that increasing opportunities for transnational cooperation is relevant to promote gender balance, diversity, inclusion, and well-being in academic careers.

Figure 5.3. The importance of having more opportunities for transnational cooperation



Source: Ecorys, based on research carried out in 2023 to assess the current situation regarding academic staff in higher education in Europe.

An additional challenge is further promoting opportunities for European and international mobility for academic staff. Encouraging staff mobility in higher education is essential so they can share experiences with peers and professionals from other sectors, develop innovative pedagogies, and inform curricula design with insights from the world of work. Stimulating innovative teaching and learning approaches and fostering closer connections with the job market have been priorities of the Erasmus+ programme (reflected in each of its work programmes: 2024[279], 2023[280], 2022[281], and 2021[282]).

> *'Our prior research shows that academic staff mobility largely supports academics' motivation, job satisfaction and well-being (...) (W)e highly welcome proposals to remove structural barriers related to participation in transnational cooperation including staff mobility, particularly with regard to the recognition of additional workload and reward of the outcomes in the context of career assessment and development'.*
>
> Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) – Call for Evidence.

[279] European Commission, 2024 annual work programme "Erasmus+": the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport, C(2023)6157, 18 September 2023, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/2024-annual-work-programme
[280] European Commission, 2023 annual work programme "Erasmus+": the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport, C(2022)6002, 25 August 2022, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/2023-annual-work-programme-erasmus-the-union-programme-for-education-training-youth-and-sport
[281] European Commission, 2022 annual work programme "Erasmus+": the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport, C(2021) 7862, 8 November 2021, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/2022-annual-work-programme-erasmus-the-union-programme-for-education-training-youth-and-sport
[282] European Commission, 2021 annual work programme "Erasmus+": the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport, C(2021) 1939, 25 March 2021, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/2021-annual-work-programme-erasmus-the-union-programme-for-education-training-youth-and-sport

However, a report on the resourcing of higher education systems in 24 responding Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) jurisdictions highlight that only half of the sampled countries have dedicated national programmes for funding and supporting staff mobility[283].

Moreover, the internationalisation of academic staff is uneven across European countries and types of institutions. Data from the European Tertiary Education Register (ETER) covering more than 1 500 European higher education institutions, shows that north-western and research-oriented higher education institutions attract the largest proportions of foreign academic staff[284].

The lack of support and recognition for transnational cooperation activities may hinder the overall ambition to strengthen the European dimension of higher education and might be an issue for the full roll out and sustainability of the European Universities initiative.

5.3.2 Innovative, effective, and attractive teaching

Career pathways: appraisal, recognition, promotion and reward mechanisms

There is diversity in how governments and higher education institutions define and structure 'academic careers'. A Eurydice report from 2017 stated that 'academic staff can be differentiated by several features: their main activities (teaching and research; teaching only or research only)'. Ten countries have ten or more categories of academic staff (for example, junior, intermediate, senior, duties, qualification requirements, employment status, etc.); 22 countries have between six and nine categories; and seven have five categories[285].

Each national system differs from each other despite having commonalities, and it is unlikely that approaches towards teaching careers are any less diverse, which makes it difficult to speak of a singular or uniform career structure in higher education institutions. Some institutions have a stronger focus on arranging teaching and research along conventional disciplinary silos: even where an institution reforms its disciplinary silos into ones that are focused on multi-disciplinarity, the assessment systems often force the assessment of such activities back into disciplinary silos.

Higher education educators need to employ multiple teaching strategies, by being experts, moderators, companions in group or problem-solving settings, and facilitators of self-directed learning[286]. There is a need for these educators to have diverse skills and be able to adapt to the heterogeneous roles that are demanded of them. Higher education teachers should have opportunities for training, collaboration, and feedback[287].

> *'Cutting-edge innovation in higher education requires further training for the professionals while the ever-changing student body and the different societal challenges existent require a constant adaptation to learners needs.*
>
> Lifelong Learning Platform – Call for Evidence.

[283] OECD (2024), "The state of academic careers in OECD countries: An evidence review", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 91, p. 71, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/ea9d3108-en.
[284] European Tertiary Education Register, *Internationalisation of Academic Staff in European Higher Education*, 2019, https://www.eter-project.com/uploads/analytical-reports/ETER_AnalyticalReport_01_final.pdf
[285] European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, Crosier, D., Birch, P., Davydovskaia, O. et al., *Modernisation of higher education in Europe – Academic staff – 2017*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2017, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/9642
[286] Cendon, E., Lifelong Learning at Universities: Future Perspectives for Teaching and Learning, *Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research, 7*(2), pp. 81-87, 2018, https://naerjournal.ua.es/article/view/v7n2-1
[287] European Training Foundation, Stanley, J., *Listening to vocational teachers and principals – Results of the ETF's international survey 2018*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2816/151700

Among the suggestions for enhancing the culture of higher education are the development of career tracks of lecturers prioritising teaching (at least on parity with research), pedagogical training for all teaching positions, the investigation of the option of having specific professor positions with competencies from industry and business, and compulsory international cooperation (of study programmes)[288]. However, there are few large-scale professional development programmes for academics on teaching skills, and the provision of continuing professional development varies across countries. As a result, it becomes difficult to create a heterogeneously skilled higher education workforce that can adapt to research, teaching, and more[289].

> *'Initial and continuous professional development of staff in teaching is both a right and an obligation of academic staff (...) Professional development should be supported by national authorities and higher education institutions through accessible opportunities for staff, as well as giving adequate time to pursue professional development'.*
>
> European Students' Union (ESU) – Call for Evidence

The 2021 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development report on Excellence and Equity for All emphasises the significance of giving educators ample training and resources to increase their self-confidence and assist them in approaching new and improved teaching techniques and opportunities[290]. The European Training Foundation (ETF) 2018 study on vocational education and training (VET) educators[291] confirms the need for educators to have effective training and professional development and investing into ICT/digital skills.

Moreover, as highlighted in the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027, the education and training system is increasingly part of the digital transformation[292]. Digital competence should be a core skill and be embedded in the professional development of educators, who should be empowered to adopt innovative and digital teaching methods.

In line with this, the 2023 Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training[293] recommended that Member States provide quality training on the use of digital technology for teaching and learning purposes and reward and recognise efforts of teaching staff and higher education institutions to strengthen the provision of digital skills to all students.

Challenges to the reform of career types in higher education include overload of administrative tasks that are not formally recognised in appraisal systems[294], precarity of short-term contracts (leading to

[288] Myklebust, J., White paper calls for quality culture improvement, *University World News*, February 4, 2017, http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20170204095749569

[289] European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Crosier, D., Kocanova, D., Birch, P., Davykovskaia, O., Parveva, T., *Eurydice Brief. Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Academic staff, 2017,* https://www.eurydice.si/publikacije/Eurydice-Brief_Modernisation-of-Higher-Education-in-Europe_Academic-Staff-2017-EN.pdf

[290] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Schleicher, A., *Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future: Excellence and Equity for all*, International Summit on the Teaching Profession, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2021, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/learning-from-the-past-looking-to-the-future_f43c1728-en

[291] European Training Foundation (ETF), Brolpito, A., *Digital skills and competence, and digital and online learning*, Turin, 2018, https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/digital-skills-and-competence-and-digital-and-online

[292] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027: Resetting education and training for the digital age, COM(2020) 624, 30.9.2020, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0624

[293] Proposal for a Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training, COM(2023) 206, 2023/0100(NLE), 18.4.2023, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52023DC0206

[294] Deem, R., On doctoral (in)visibility and reframing the doctorate for the twenty-first century, *European Journal of Higher Education*, 12:4, 373-392, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2022.2105370

short-term actions rather than longer-term building of teaching and learning content[295], or excellent staff leaving higher education for better paid and more secure jobs[296] [297]. According to the head of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development international migration division, researchers and students may not be as willing to relocate as they were pre-COVID, as they are able to do research, teach and learn remotely online[298].

Adding to these challenges, appraisal, reward, and recognition of activities in higher education remain mainly dependent on scientific output and publication. A study in Spain found that non-mobile careers are a strong predictor of the timing of rewards in the form of early permanent positions, questioning the assumption that mobility and the broad experiences correlated with it enhance career prospects[299]. Those who had their first employment after the PhD outside academia are at a disadvantage for early tenure in comparison with those whose first position as PhD holders was at a university or public research centre[300].

The importance of teaching and learning as well as research

The 2022 Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation highlighted the need for higher education institutions for their career assessment policies to recognise and value the time spent by academics on developing new innovative pedagogies and new research practices through transnational cooperation[301].

Studies support the view that there is a need to reform academic careers: academics need to be recognised for the full range of their activities, including teaching, innovation with business public sector and civil society, and the recognition of open science practices[302].

The European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) points out that university missions are evolving towards greater 'hybridity', 'blurring the traditional distinctions between teaching, research, innovation, and service'. Despite this shift, 'assessment and career development remains rooted in an outdated concept of linear paths and mainly focuses on research'[303].

Indeed, the European University Association argues that reforming academic careers requires. having parity between different career paths (and between research and teaching), incentives for activities with different forms of impact (innovation, mentoring), achieving less precarious conditions and more attractiveness of careers to retain talent, and creating more flexibility for academic careers (to switch to

[295] European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Crosier, D., Kocanova, D., Birch, P., Davykovskaia, O., Parveva, T., *Eurydice Brief: Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe, Academic staff, 2017*, https://www.eurydice.si/publikacije/Eurydice-Brief_Modernisation-of-Higher-Education-in-Europe_Academic-Staff-2017-EN.pdf

[296] Myklebust, J., Foreigners outperform Norwegians on academic productivity, *University World News*, September 11, 2019, https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20190911134037454

[297] Berta, P., Mauguin, P., and Tunon de Lara, M., Attractivité des emplois et des carrières scientifiques, *Loi de Programmation Pluriannuelle de la Recherche*, 2019, https://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/content_migration/document/RAPPORT_FINAL_GT2_Attractivite_des_emplois_et_des_carrieres_1178464.pdf

[298] Matthews, D., and Hudson, R., Scientific 'war for talent' heats up as pandemic restrictions ease, *Science Business*, January 4, 2022, https://sciencebusiness.net/news/scientific-war-talent-heats-pandemic-restrictions-ease

[299] Cruz-Castro, L., Sanz-Menéndez, L., Mobility versus job stability: Assessing tenure and productivity outcomes, *Research Policy*, Vol 39, Issue 1, pp. 27-38, 2010, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2009.11.008

[300] Cruz-Castro, L., Sanz-Menéndez, L., Mobility versus job stability: Assessing tenure and productivity outcomes, Research Policy, Vol 39, Issue 1, pp. 27-38, 2010, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2009.11.008

[301] Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (2022/C 160/01), OJ C 160, 13.4.2022, p. 1–8, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H0413(01)

[302] Deem, R., On doctoral (in)visibility and reframing the doctorate for the twenty-first century, *European Journal of Higher Education*, 12:4, 373-392, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2022.2105370

[303] European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), *Towards the European Framework for Attractive and Sustainable Academic Careers*, Policy paper, 2023, https://www.eurashe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/D2.2-Towards-the-European-Framework-for-Attractive-and-Sustainable-Academic-Careers.pdf

other sectors, and from other sectors to switch to academia)[304]. As noted by the Young European Research Universities Network:

'The diversity of roles and tasks is not well recognised in terms of reputation and career progression, with a persistent imbalance in the weight given to some research-related outputs over other types of activities (such as education, leadership, knowledge valorisation, open science, internationalisation, etc.). A more balanced approach would encourage everyone to contribute with their own talents and competencies to the collective work carried out within universities by valuing their diverse contributions through more comprehensive recognition systems and by developing diverse career paths'[305].

'Portfolio' career paths are still uncommon in higher education. Moving from research to business, administration or other is possible, but a return to research is more difficult. This reinforces the perceived primacy of research in determining academic career mobility.

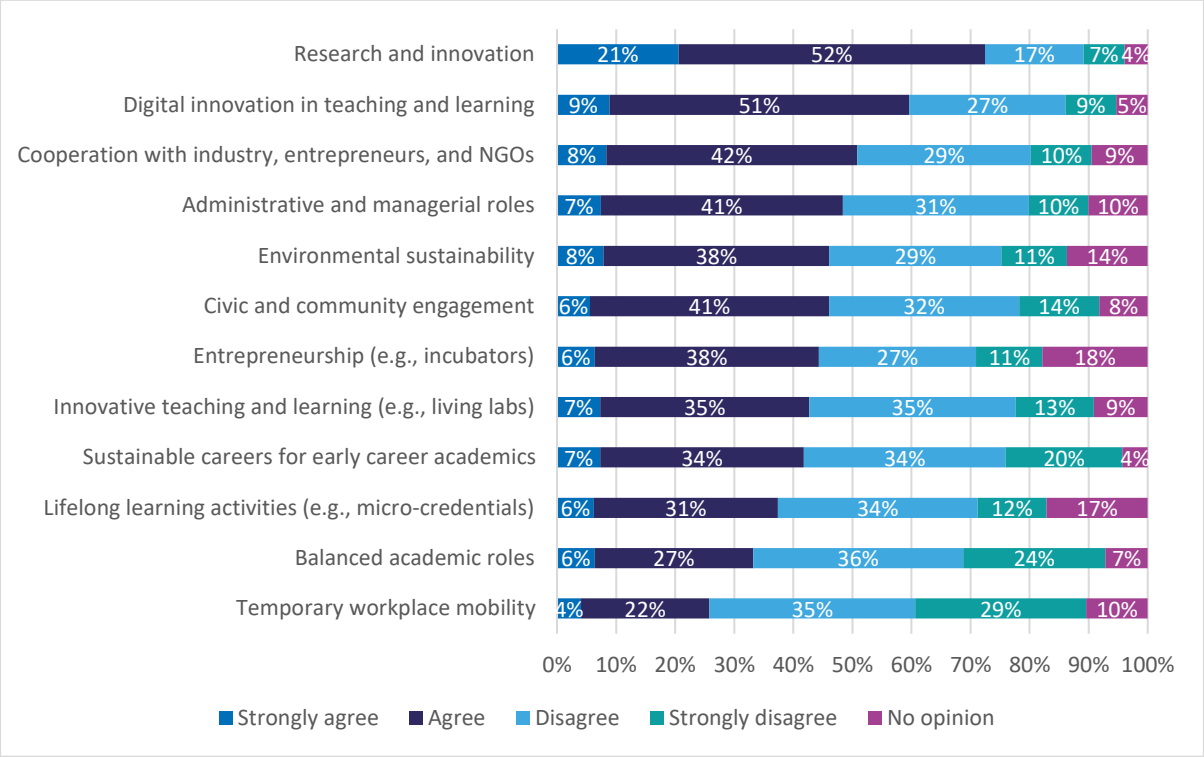
> *'Teaching pathways and collaboration-based routes are crucial for a more diverse career advancement, but seem not to be sufficiently recognised and promoted, marking a strategic priority for raising the attractiveness of the academic profession among those who do not aspire to a career based purely on research'.*
>
> European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) – Call for Evidence.

As shown in Figure 5.4, 73% of respondents believe that research and innovation are supported in academic career development paths; at the same time, 60% believe that career pathways do not allow to change the balance of academic staff roles (such as teaching and learning, community engagement, research, participation in management and leadership).

[304] European University Association (EUA), Thomas Ekman Jørgensen, Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik, *Pathways to the future: A follow up to "Universities without walls – a vision for 2030",* 2021, https://eua.eu/resources/publications/983:pathways-to-the-future.html

[305] Young European Research Universities, *Three steps to make careers in academia more attractive and sustainable,* p. 2, 2024, https://yerun.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Three-steps-to-make-careers-in-academia-more-attractive-and-sustainable-.pdf

Figure 5.4: (Opinions) Academic career development pathways enable and support…



Source: Ecorys, based on research carried out in 2023 to assess the current situation regarding academic staff in higher education in Europe.

Respondents also believe that current career development paths place importance on other areas such as digital innovation in teaching and learning (60% agreement), cooperation with industry (50%), recognising administrative and managerial roles (48%), and civic and community engagement (47%). This sends a clear message that the diverse academic roles, including engaging in innovative teaching and learning, are important to academic staff and must be recognised in appraisal, reward, and career progression.

However, there is a persisting bias in careers structures and overall social recognition towards research at the expense of teaching and other non-research academic activities[306]. In fact, according to a survey conducted by the European University Association, just over a third (39%) of European higher education institutions fully consider teaching performance in career appraisal. Institutions consider teaching experience (50-52%) and evaluations of teaching performance (46-48%), but participation in teaching enhancement is a requirement for only 30% of higher education institutions in the case of professorial appointments and for 35% in the case of lecturers or associate professors. Additionally, large differences exist in how these criteria are interpreted and used[307].

[306] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Reducing the precarity of academic research careers*, *OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers*, No. 113, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1787/0f8bd468-en

[307] European University Association (EUA), *Leadership and Organisation for Teaching and Learning at European Universities – LOTUS*, https://eua.eu/resources/projects/786-lotus.html

Furthermore, the provision of training for innovative teaching and learning is uneven across higher education institutions; There are processes to 'professionalise' teaching such as in Denmark[308] and Spain[309] but practices vary across Member States.

An interesting example comes from the Netherlands. In 2019, the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), published a position paper outlining their intention to work towards broader recognition and rewards for academic staff, with more emphasis on domains such as teaching, impact, and leadership, and less emphasis on the number of publications[310]; this was followed by a roadmap, published in 2023, to implement the necessary processes and tools in practice[311].

As part of this roadmap, the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is developing a new recognition and rewards system and a new recruitment and promotion policy where teaching, fundamental and applied research, impact, patient care, educational innovations, public-private partnerships, policy development and leadership are equally recognised and rewarded[312]. The goal is to make various career paths available to assistant, associate, and full professors, with both horizontal and vertical development opportunities.

Data and resources

Improving the attractiveness of academic careers implies the monitoring of actions and the collection and use of reliable data. However, the diversity of Europe's higher education landscape makes data generation and collection a challenging task. While data platforms exist, they are often fragmented and operate in silos.

The Eurydice network[313], for instance, provides indicators and statistics in the field of higher education, but there remains a need for coherent and consistent data related to academic careers. The European Tertiary Education Register[314] (ETER), is a European database containing information at the institutional level on the activities and outputs of nearly 3 500 higher education institutions, including students, graduates, personnel, and finances, which are complementary to Eurostat[315] educational statistics at the country and regional level.

The current efforts to develop a European Observatory on Higher Education together with the European Tertiary Education Register, underline the existing need for coherent, consistent and comparable data relating to academic careers, including in areas such as contract status, reward and promotion (beyond data about salaries), professional development activities, and tertiary teacher mobility.

There are also challenges in data supply from highly diverse higher education systems across Europe. For example, in theory, many higher education institutions say that equality and diversity are prioritised in doctoral education, with 82% mentioning this in a 2022 survey as having very high or high priority[316]. However, the evidence of this commitment is not always forthcoming, as a global rankings scheme found out that out of 750 universities sending equality data on gender equality policies, many could not

[308] Eurydice, Denmark: 9. Teachers and Education Staff, https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/denmark/initial-education-academic-staff-higher-education

[309] Eurydice, *Spain: 9. Teachers and Education Staff*, https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/spain/initial-education-academic-staff-higher-education

[310] VSNU, NFU, KNAW, NWO and ZonMw, Ruimte voor ieders talent, https://www.nwo.nl/sites/nwo/files/documents/2019-Erkennen-en-Waarderen-Position-Paper_NL.pdf

[311] Joint Recognizing & Valuing Programme, Ruimte voor ieders talent in de praktijk, https://recognitionrewards.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Ruimte-voor-ieders-talent-in-de-praktijk-Routekaart-Erkennen-Waarderen.pdf

[312] Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, *Academic career paths*, https://assets.vu.nl/d8b6f1f5-816c-005b-1dc1-e363dd7ce9a5/de3480c3-3962-4a3e-a934-b61fe6deb90e/Academic%20Careerpath%202023%20VU_EN.pdf

[313] Eurydice, https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/

[314] ETER European Tertiary Education Register Project, https://www.eter-project.com/

[315] Eurostat, *Education and Training*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/education-and-training

[316] European University Association (EUA), Council for Doctoral Education, Hasgall, A., Peneoasu, A., *Survey on Doctoral education in Europe: current developments and trends*, 2022, https://eua-cde.org/downloads/publications/web_council%20on%20doctoral%20education_horizontal.pdf

provide any evidence of those policies working[317]. Higher education institutions often lack data and tools on how to monitor the effectiveness of their policies in practice[318].

Promoting equality, diversity, fairness, and inclusion in academic careers –from recruitment to training, funding opportunities, and career promotion– requires the collection and use of reliable data that can inform institutional policies and legislation. To account for multiple discrimination or confounding variables, data should: be disaggregated by sex and/or gender, ethnic or racial origin, disability, age, religion, and sexual orientation while paying special attention to possible intersections of multiple categories; fully comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)[319]; and follow available European guidelines, including the European Handbook on Equality Data and the latest guidance note on the collection and use of data for of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) equality[320].

It is possible to collect potentially sensitive data within the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) providing that specific safeguards and conditions are met. A compilation[321] of best practices on collecting data on ethnic or racial origin, religion and sexual orientation (not necessarily in education) provides clear examples. For example: in Ireland[322] questions on sexual orientation and gender identity were introduced in the equality module in the General Household survey and Census; the Brussels Region[323] asked questions about national origin; and there has been a survey in Germany[324] about experiences of discrimination.

The consultations and focus groups conducted during the Ecorys study highlighted that there is a need to build better connectivity across excellent teaching and learning centres. Figure 5.5 notes that 90% of survey respondents saw value in coordinating and sharing information about academic careers.

[317] Deem, R., On doctoral (in)visibility and reframing the doctorate for the twenty-first century, *European Journal of Higher Education*, 12:4, 373-392, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2022.2105370

[318] Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the document Proposal for a Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability SWD/2022/3, 14.1.2022, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=SWD:2022:3:FIN

[319] Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation), OJ L119/127, 4.5.2016, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32016R0679

[320] European Commission, *Equality data collection: Equality data*, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combatting-discrimination/equality-data-collection_en

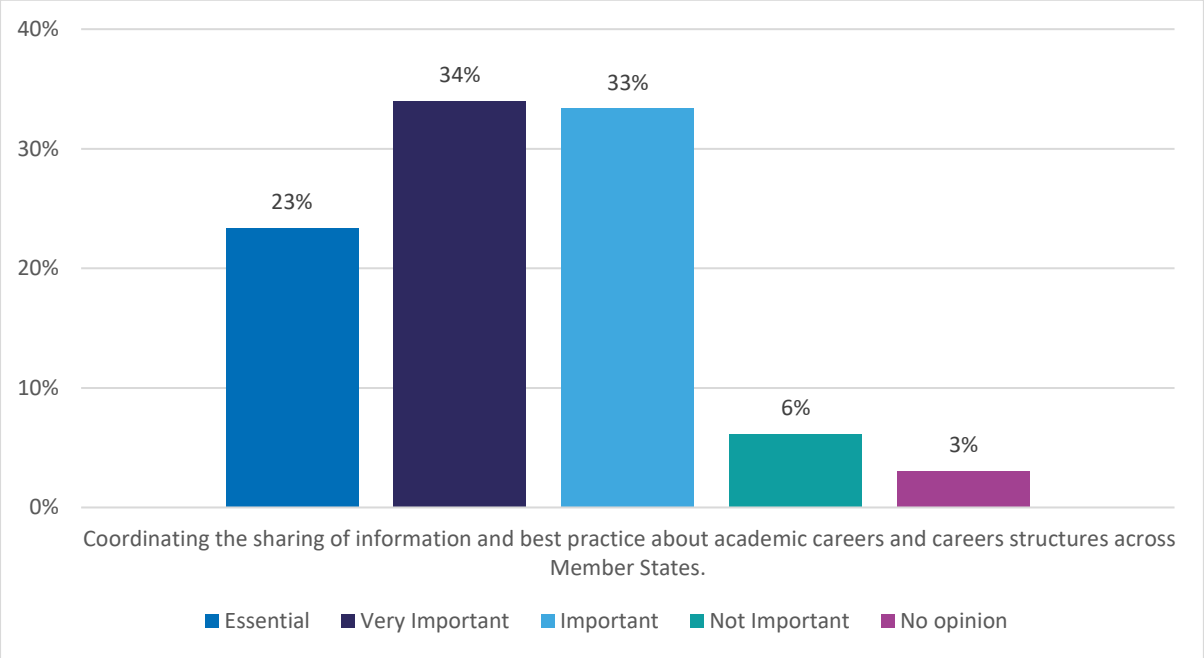
[321] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Compendium of practices for equality data collection,* https://fra.europa.eu/en/promising-practices-list

[322] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Introducing questions on sexual orientation and gender identity in the equality module of the Irish General Household Survey and the Census*, https://fra.europa.eu/en/promising-practices/introducing-questions-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-equality-module

[323] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Profile and pathway of job seekers in the Brussels Region: Monitoring by national origin*, https://fra.europa.eu/en/promising-practices/profile-and-pathway-job-seekers-brussels-region-monitoring-national-origin

[324] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Survey on Experiences of Discrimination in Germany*, https://fra.europa.eu/en/promising-practices/survey-experiences-discrimination-germany

Figure 5.5. The importance of coordinating and sharing information about academic careers



Source: Ecorys, based on research carried out in 2023 to assess the current situation regarding academic staff in higher education in Europe.

There is no consolidated list of innovative centres or the continuous professional development and training offers that they provide. The existing Working Group on Higher Education[325], coordinated by the European Commission, was cited as being an important potential focus for information gathering, along with the Observatory for Higher Education. Some examples of good practice are:

Good practice examples at national and regional level

The Centre for Teaching and Learning (Zentrum für Wissenschaftsdidaktik, ZfW) at Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany[326] focuses on e-learning, didactics of higher education and academic writing. The Centre offers support to both teachers and students, with a view to improve teaching and learning at the university.

'Good Practice in Researcher Evaluation. Recommendation for the Responsible Evaluation of a Researcher in Finland' is a national recommendation for the responsible evaluation of a researcher in Finland and includes 'Diversity of Activities' as one of its core evaluation criteria, covering the role of teacher and supervisor, as well as societal impact and characteristics related to the field of research. The recommendation was adopted in February 2020 and issued by a working group set up by the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies[327].

In Belgium, Wallonia's National Fund for Scientific Research (F.R.S.-FNRS). The Board of Trustees approved its 'Gender Equality Plan' in April 2022, which includes actions to counter the gradual erosion of female presence throughout their academic careers, such as a mentoring programme for female researchers implemented, and the introduction of institutional structures to enhance gender balance, such as the appointment of a 'gender contact

[325] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, the group aims to promote mutual learning on policy reform of national education systems to contribute to the achievement of the European Education Area by 2025. Membership involves organisations, Member States' authorities, other public entities including public entities from acceding and candidate countries, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, Union bodies, offices or agencies and international organisations. See https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EAC/Higher+Education+Documents?preview=/48761849/55903424/EAC_ToR_Higher%20Education.pdf

[326] Zentrum für Wissenschaftsdidaktik Ruhr-Universität Bochum, https://zfw.rub.de/welcome/

[327] Working Group for Responsible Evaluation of a Researcher, *Good practice in researcher evaluation. recommendation for the responsible evaluation of a researcher in Finland, Responsible Research Series* 7, V2, 2020https://edition.fi/tsv/catalog/view/170/128/567-1

person' for all actions pertaining to gender issues. There is systematic monitoring of gender data with yearly reports[328].

Charles University, in the Czech Republic, has appointed an institution-wide pedagogical skills coordinator[329]. This will be a long process of culture change in a large university, where a new vice-rector was appointed in 2022 to focus on enhancing pedagogical skills across the university faculty. There are two main challenges: first, resistance from faculty members to engage with what they see as another element of workload (motivation, recognition and reward are not evident); second, there is a lack of skilled personnel who can give the training. They also need a clear competence framework within which training can be focused, and also to provide a mechanism for recognition.

In Ireland, developments have been more at the system level, with mergers of universities and other higher education institutions, resulting in a need to define who can 'teach' and what (if any) qualification is required. Ireland (with 7 'traditional' universities) and a broad range of higher education institutions[330], has seen a change in focus through a new government Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science[331]. It has a focus on enhancing accessibility and has established mergers[332] between technical higher education institutions and universities to give a broad teaching and learning offer.

5.3.3 Attractive working conditions and social protection

Human Resource Policies: recruitment, contract conditions, and remuneration

How higher education institutions recruit, who they recruit, into what disciplinary or interdisciplinary areas, the types of contracts, and levels of remuneration, strongly influence the performance of the institution in teaching and learning and research.

The literature and other sources analysed presented a wide array of challenges related to the working conditions of staff in higher education institutions. This relates both to pressures to undertake specific work within short-term contracts, and to the ways in which academics are allocated their workload.

Levels of job security vary across countries, with some higher education systems appointing academic staff with the expectation of a lifelong career as civil servants (although this may not be open to all staff); on the other hand, stability is often determined by the career level, with junior academics facing more precarious conditions[333]. In recent years, higher education institutions have paid more attention to the conditions for postdoctoral researchers. Researchers increasingly remain in this position for many

[328] Qualitative and Quantitative Data on National Trends in Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Policy, *Women and Sciences Committee*, https://stip.oecd.org/stip/interactive-dashboards/policy-initiatives/2023%2Fdata%2FpolicyInitiatives%2F25527

[329] Centrum celoživotního vzdělávání, A*ctive learning: Crafting Engaging Learning Environments*, https://cczv.cuni.cz/CCZV-449.html

[330] Higher education in Ireland is provided by universities, technological universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education. In addition, a number of other third-level institutions provide specialist education in fields such as art and design, medicine, business studies, rural development, theology, music and law, https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/175f3-further-education/

[331] Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, *Innovation and Science*, https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-higher-education-innovation-and-science/#

[332] Higher Education Authority, *The landscape of higher education is changing. New types of institutions are being formed, and other institutions are engaging in strong alliances, including consolidation and mergers*, https://hea.ie/policy/he-reform/the-changing-landscape/

[333] European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Crosier, D., Kocanova, D., Birch, P., Davykovskaia, O., Parveva, T., *Eurydice Brief. Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Academic staff, 2017*, https://www.eurydice.si/publikacije/Eurydice-Brief_Modernisation-of-Higher-Education-in-Europe_Academic-Staff-2017-EN.pdf

years, sometimes even in situations where there is just a small hope of long-term employment in academia[334].

> *'Academics across Europe face decreasing job security due to budget constraints, reduced employment opportunities, and increasing precarity. Academics play a vital role for quality education and research in universities and their decent working conditions and fair salary should be addressed by the initiative'.*
>
> European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) – Call for Evidence.

The term 'research precariat' emerged in the literature, indicating the condition of postdoctoral researchers holding fixed-term positions without permanent or continuous employment prospects. Countries are addressing research precariat by taking policy action in a variety of areas, such as recruitment, employment status, working conditions, professional development and mobility[335]. It is important to highlight that precarity affects not only research staff. For example, in the UK, 46% of universities and 60% of colleges use zero hours contracts to deliver teaching. Staff on short-term contracts in UK universities can be 'second-class academics'[336].

A survey of doctorate holders in Europe showed that while 87% of doctorate holders were employed on permanent full-time contracts in industry and about 70% in government, in academia it was only 56% and in research organisations 57%[337].

The message from the literature is that human resource management policies across European higher education institutions need to be both 'fit for purpose' for modern teaching and learning needs, and consistent across countries to fully facilitate the flow of mobile academic staff across the European Education Area. Yet, a study by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development noted that higher education institutions often do not have enough human resource management capacity[338]. Despite initiatives such as EU RESAVER[339], the different employment statuses of academics across different European countries translate into limited cross-border portability of social security and pension schemes, restricting the international mobility of academic staff[340].

A recent study notes that one of the changes in academic career recruitment is that it is increasingly human resource sections that decide who enters the academic profession, rather than the academics[341]. However, the value of a strategic view of human resource involvement is evident in the Central European Institute of Technology, which adopted a new recruitment policy requiring a human resources manager to be involved in all recruitment. The change gave human resources access to data, and they

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[334] European University Association (EUA), Council for Doctoral Education, Hasgall, A., Peneoasu, A., *Survey on Doctoral education in Europe: current developments and trends*, 2022, https://eua-cde.org/downloads/publications/web_council%20on%20doctoral%20education_horizontal.pdf

[335] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Reducing the precarity of academic research careers, OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers*, No. 113, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1787/0f8bd468-en

[336] University and College Union, *Stamp out casual contracts*, https://www.ucu.org.uk/stampout

[337] European Science Foundation (ESF), Boman, J., Beeson, H., Sanchez Barrioluengo, M., Rusitoru, M., *What comes after a PhD? Findings from the DocEnhance survey of doctorate holders on their employment situation, skills match, and the value of the doctorate*, 2021, https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.7188085

[338] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Reducing the precarity of academic research careers, OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers*, No. 113, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1787/0f8bd468-en

[339] EU RESAVER is a single European pension fund for individual employees of research organisations in the European Education Area. It aims to help foster mobility and create an attractive labour market for researchers. https://www.resaver.eu/

[340] Commission Staff Working Document accompanying Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on A new ERA for Research and Innovation SWD(2020) 214, 30.9.2020, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0214

[341] Deem, R., On doctoral (in)visibility and reframing the doctorate for the twenty-first century, *European Journal of Higher Education*, 12:4, 373-392, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2022.2105370

were able to evaluate how many people apply, who they are and where they are coming from[342]. A new 'welcome office' manager was hired to assist international recruits in finding their way around the country and dealing with formalities such as visas, renting a house and finding childcare.

Innovations in recruitment policies are important for higher education institutions to attract a variety of international and multidisciplinary talents. Some countries are making their visa process smoother, with new academic recruitment drives, visa schemes and open-door policies[343]. However, there remain significant challenges through the prevalence of the English language in international higher education. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development notes that, as a result, the United Kingdom and Australia are examples of very competitive markets in attracting non-local academics[344]. There are examples of flexible contracting approaches that are focused more on researchers, but less so for teachers.

The University of Antwerp has remodelled its academic staff recruitment application form to ensure an increased focus on quality and avoid that single metrics (e.g., publication records) define the first selection round. Applicants are asked to indicate key achievements not only in research, but also in education and service to society, and to reflect on their leadership development journey in a standardised format that allows for objective comparison of applicants[345].

In Canada, the British Columbia Public Scholars gives academics two years of funding to orient their research planning and findings towards public participation and dissemination[346].

In Germany,[347] there is a different emphasis on assessing academic careers between institutions with different teaching and research traditions. For Universities of Applied Science, there is an expectation that appointees to professorial positions will have experience beyond academia, and the teaching load is about twice that in universities. For universities, the expectation is that appointees will have postdoctoral qualifications and experience in junior academic positions, whereas teaching-related criteria are taken into account to a lesser extent.

As part of the funding model reform, Croatia and Slovakia have planned changes to contracts in higher education[348]. In 2022 in Spain[349], a reform has increased job security for researchers by introducing a new type of indefinite work contract for all researchers, greater job security for postdocs (with contracts for up to six years), and recognition of experience gained abroad, which will make it easier for researchers to come back or move to Spain. Measures to ensure better gender balance are also included along with protocols against gender- and sexual-oriented discrimination and sexual harassment (following Horizon Europe requirements). Other measures include reforms to reduce the administrative

[342] Zubașcu, F., New recruitment strategies help research managers attract talent to eastern Europe, *Science Business*, March 22, 2022, https://sciencebusiness.net/widening/news/new-recruitment-strategies-help-research-managers-attract-talent-eastern-europe

[343] Matthews, D., and Hudson, R., Scientific 'war for talent' heats up as pandemic restrictions ease, *Science Business*, January 4, 2022, https://sciencebusiness.net/news/scientific-war-talent-heats-pandemic-restrictions-ease

[344] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Reducing the precarity of academic research careers, OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers*, No. 113, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1787/0f8bd468-en

[345] Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN), Roquero da Costa Pinto, I., Gomez Recio, S., Colella, C., *Rethinking Academic careers: Cultural change as a key bottleneck to be addressed*, 2022, https://yerun.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/YERUN-RethinkingAcademicVFinalSpreads.pdf

[346] Deem, R., On doctoral (in)visibility and reframing the doctorate for the twenty-first century, *European Journal of Higher Education*, 12:4, 373-392, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2022.2105370

[347] Kleimann, B., Hückstädt, M., Selection criteria in professorial recruiting as indicators of institutional similarity? A comparison of German universities and universities of applied sciences, *Quality in Higher Education*, 27:2, 168-183, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2021.1889760

[348] European University Association (EUA), Bennetat Pruvot, E., Estermann, T., *NextGenerationEU: What do National Recovery and Resilience Plans hold for universities?*, Briefing, 2021, https://eua.eu/resources/publications/984:nextgenerationeu-what-do-national-recovery-and-resilience-plans-hold-for-universities.html

[349] Naujokaitytė, G., Spain votes through overhaul of research careers, *Science Business*, August 30, 2022, https://sciencebusiness.net/news/spain-votes-through-overhaul-research-careers

burden in the research and development sector and facilitate knowledge transfer and public procurement of innovation.

In France, national reform aiming to promote excellence has enabled the emergence of professional figures such as project managers who play key roles in the successful delivery of excellence projects and can champion community engagements and outreach. However, they often face precarious contractual conditions[350], which is particularly relevant in the context of funding increasingly being allocated on the basis of calls for projects/tenders in higher education[351].

Remuneration is key to attracting and retaining academic staff, but differences across countries in the costs of living have an impact on recruitment and mobility. The 2022 index of household price consumption[352] shows how many currency units a given quantity of goods and services costs in different countries, where 100 is the EU-27 average. The index shows a significant gap between the most expensive countries such as Ireland (146) and Denmark (145), and the least expensive, which include Poland (62), Bulgaria (59), and Romania (58).

Similarly, there also are big differences across national economies in the number and proportion of low-wage earners[353]. For example, the level of remuneration for researchers/academics in France is not only lower than the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and European averages but also lower than civil service salaries and even more so compared to private sector wages. This is particularly acute for early careers researchers/academics, who are paid 63% of the average entry-level salary in Europe and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development countries.

Researchers in France at the highest end of the spectrum are paid only 91% of the European average maximum salary and 84% of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development average maximum salary. This situation contributes to the decreasing attractiveness of careers in public research and the brain are also the best talents. Remuneration is also low for technical support staff working at research organisations and universities[354].

The proposal for a Council Recommendation European framework for attractive and sustainable careers in higher education that is included in this higher education package cannot in itself influence wage and cost of living levels, but it can encourage Member States to make academic careers more attractive and sustainable through activities such as funding higher education to counter imbalances, and the exchange of good practice and policy reviews (such as peer counselling).

Workload allocation and pressures

According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the use of precarious contracts in higher education institutions impacts on the wellbeing of academic staff and on the ability of academia to attract and retain talent – especially when combined with long working hours, an overly competitive academic culture, and poor interpersonal relationships[355]. While some elements of this

[350] Precarious contracts include repeatedly renewed short-term contracts, part-time contracts, non-standard contracts, zero hours contracts.

[351] Harroche, A., Les petites mains de l'excellence. Place et rôle des chargées de projet dans la mise en œuvre d'une Initiative d'excellence, *Revue française d'administration publique*, 169, 151-167, 2019, https://doi.org/10.3917/rfap.169.0151

[352] Eurostat, *Price level index for final household consumption expenditure (HFCE) 2022, (EU=100)*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Price_level_index_for_final_household_consumption_expenditure_(HFCE)_2022,_(EU%3D100).png

[353] Eurostat, *Earnings statistics*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Earnings_statistics

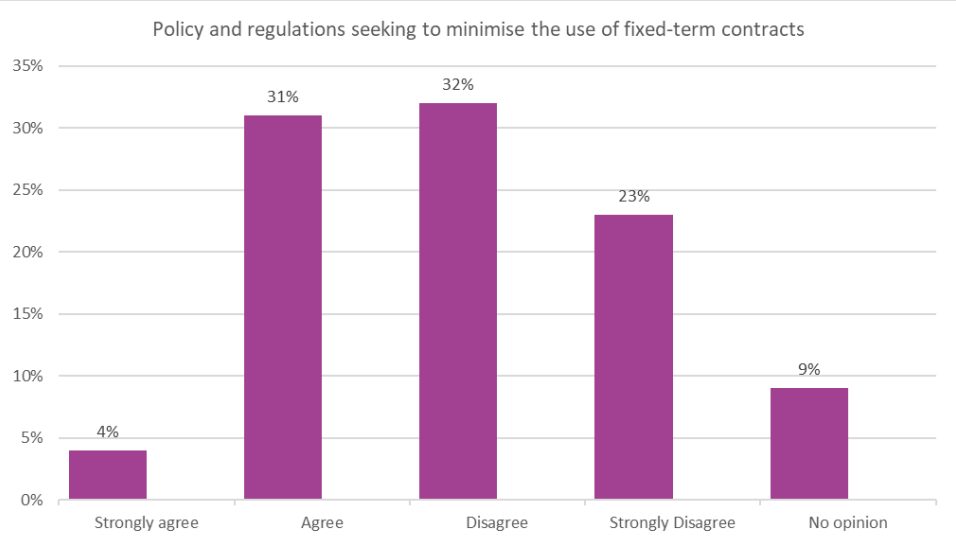
[354] Berta, P., Mauguin, P., Tunon de Lara, M., Attractivité des emplois et des carrières scientifiques, *Loi de Programmation Pluriannuelle de la Rechereche*, 2019, https://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/content_migration/document/RAPPORT_FINAL_GT2_Attractivite_des_emplois_et_des_carrieres_1178464.pdf

[355] OECD (2024), "The state of academic careers in OECD countries: An evidence review", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 91, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/ea9d3108-en.

problem have been recognised, institutional responses tend to focus on encouraging individual rather than structural change.

The survey conducted by Ecorys revealed that there are strong concerns about short-term precarious contracts in both teaching and research (Figure 5.6). Half of survey respondents (55%) disagreed that existing higher education policy and regulations minimise the use of fixed-term contracts.

Figure 5.6. The impact of existing regulation on the use of precarious contracts



Source: Ecorys, based on research carried out in 2023 to assess the current situation regarding academic staff in higher education in Europe.

About two thirds of survey respondents reported negative attitudes towards the distribution of workload of academic staff in terms of fair distribution across staff types and seniority levels (68%), and roles (70%). Respondents pointed out that workload is typically heavier for staff with research roles and junior staff. Transparent mechanisms to assess the workload of academic staff also appear to be lacking according to most respondents (72%).

Workload pressures can also lead to burnout among academic staff. An analytical review from the Network of Experts working on the Social dimension of Education and Training (NESET) mentions an international study which confirms that university employees that face precarious working conditions, particularly women, often experience high levels of burnout as a consequence of having to work harder to earn respect for their contributions, find their place, and keep it[356].

Additional challenges exist in the realm of up-skilling and re-skilling of higher education staff so that they can cope better with the changing demands of an academic career. The Commission Communication on a European strategy for universities, calls for educational staff across the EU to be equipped with the green and digital skills for the future and the innovation and technological potential of universities needs to be put at work to tackle related societal challenges[357].

Staff should have opportunities for training on sustainability, to understand its relevance to their role and context; such opportunities should be recognised as professional development – and can support

[356] Riva, E., Lister, K., and Jeglinska, W. (2023). Student and staff mental well-being in European higher education institutions, NESET report, p. 39. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. doi: 10.2766/933130

[357] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European strategy for universities, 18.1.2022 Com(2022) 16, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2022%3A16%3AFIN

their career[358]. There is also a need for training courses that would enable teaching staff to embed Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in their teaching methods and materials, and to improve effectiveness[359].

Stronger synergies between the European Education Area and the European Research Area are seen as essential to ensure talent flow in academic careers, as employers need highly skilled and specialised labour, which higher education institutions could provide. However, while there is a clear EU policy focus on teaching and learning modernisation and innovation, the literature emphasises more researcher careers at the expense of teachers and teaching and learning in higher education.

Norway has acknowledged this challenge. A government white paper to enhance the quality culture of higher education in Norway called in 2017 for the development of career tracks of academics prioritising teaching (over research), pedagogical training for all teaching positions (and higher demands for higher positions), the investigation of the option of having specific professor positions with competencies from industry and business, and compulsory international cooperation (of study programmes)[360]. The Norwegian government now requires higher education institutions to develop pedagogical merit systems to encourage more teaching initiatives and to reward important development work[361].

Financing models in higher education

The European strategy for universities observes that funding of universities is often insufficient to fulfil their growing societal missions. Investment has either declined despite growing numbers of students or has not increased at the same pace[362]. Underfunding widens gaps among higher education institutions and across Member States, with an uneven playing field and an increased competition for resources[363].

A study for the European University Association[364] underlined that adequate investment with sufficient and sustainable core funding and the ability to diversify funding streams are essential success factors for the future of universities. The COVID-19 pandemic led to additional investment needs and loss of revenues. Across Member States there are different funding mechanisms for teaching, research, and infrastructure, dependencies on national funding frameworks (and their budgetary pressures), reliance on student fees, and an uncertain flow of external finance from commercial contracts, and research grants.

Some funding models have particular impacts on academic career paths and higher education staff job security. For example, in Sweden, the key drawback of the high level of external funding is that many

[358] Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the document Proposal for a Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability, SWD/2022/3, 14.1.2022, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=SWD:2022:3:FIN

[359] Guillén-Gámez, F.D., Cabero-Almenara, J., Llorente-Cejudo, C. *et al.* Differential Analysis of the Years of Experience of Higher Education Teachers, their Digital Competence and Use of Digital Resources: Comparative Research Methods. *Tech Know Learn* 27, 1193–1213, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10758-021-09531-4

[360] Myklebust, J., White paper calls for quality culture improvement, *University World News*, February 4, 2017, http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20170204095749569

[361] Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, *New White Paper on Quality in Norway*, 2017, http://www.qnhe.no/?p=399

[362] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European strategy for universities, 18.1.2022 Com(2022) 16, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2022%3A16%3AFIN

[363] Myklebust, J., Humanities research vital to tackling societal challenges, *University World News*, February 13, 2021, https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20210213082320720

[364] European University Association (EUA), Thomas Ekman Jørgensen, Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik, *Pathways to the future: A follow up to "Universities without walls – a vision for 2030",* 2021, https://eua.eu/resources/publications/983:pathways-to-the-future.html

academic roles, even permanent ones, are not fully covered by institutional finances, and careers can be precarious[365].

Balancing funding for teaching (dependent often on student numbers and affected by whether higher education institutions are allocated student numbers centrally or recruit students via fees) and research (dependent on core funding, research grants, and external contracts) is part of the challenge for institutional sustainability. The literature also showed that some geographic disparities exist when securing funding, especially between the East and West of Europe. Researchers in countries that joined the EU after 2004 won a small percentage of the total funding available through the European Commission's framework research programmes[366].

Examples of national reform related to (albeit more for research) funding of higher education have been cited in the literature. In August 2022 the Spanish Congress approved a reform of the 2011 science, technology and innovation law. The reform boosts public spending on research with an increase of public research spending to 1.25% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2030, which will help Spain's research spending to reach the EU average (being 0.9 percentage points lower than the average in 2020)[367].

The Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan has included EUR 3 billion for inclusion and cohesion, and for strengthening the provision of lifelong learning. Croatia has implemented a training and upskilling programme voucher scheme, notably for green and digital knowledge[368].

Despite the funding of higher education institutions not being an area for direct action at EU level, there are aspects where there might be added value have been identified in the literature. The European University Association views public authorities as responsible for allocating core public funds corresponding to the growing responsibilities of universities, and for ensuring them financial autonomy, also through European funding programmes[369].

NextGenerationEU investment and reform components have elements that are relevant for higher education systems. For governance and funding, these include the creation or enhancement of specific regulatory/advisory/funding bodies, an overhaul of the regulatory framework, changes to the university funding model and large-scale concentration measures[370].

The 2022 Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation has aimed to create strong inter-connected higher education institutions to tackle the challenges related to green and digital transitions and to an ageing population, and to secure Europe's capacity to boost technology-driven competitiveness. It recommends that Member States commit to sustaining financial support for European Universities Alliances and to deepen transnational

[365] Myklebust, J., Investigator proposes overhaul of university funding, *University World News*, February 15, 2021, https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20190214103125883

[366] Between 2014 and 2020, these countries were awarded less than 6% of the Horizon 2020 budget. Zubaşcu, F., New recruitment strategies help research managers attract talent to Eastern Europe, *Science Business*, March 24, 2022, https://sciencebusiness.net/widening/news/new-recruitment-strategies-help-research-managers-attract-talent-eastern-europe

[367] Naujokaitytė, G., Spain votes through overhaul of research careers, Science Business, August 30, 2022, https://sciencebusiness.net/news/spain-votes-through-overhaul-research-careers

[368] European University Association (EUA, Bennetat Pruvot, E., Estermann, T., *NextGenerationEU: What do National Recovery and Resilience Plans hold for universities?*, Briefing, 2021, https://eua.eu/resources/publications/984:nextgenerationeu-what-do-national-recovery-and-resilience-plans-hold-for-universities.html; Croatia Public Expenditure Review in Science, Technology and Innovation, *Report on Smart Skills*, 2022, https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/EUfondovi/Report-on-Smart-Skills---7-2023.pdf

[369] European University Association (EUA), 'Universities without walls: A vision for 2030', 2021, https://www.eua.eu/downloads/publications/universities%20without%20walls%20%20a%20vision%20for%202030.pdf

[370] European University Association (EUA), Bennetat Pruvot, E., Estermann, T., *NextGenerationEU: What do National Recovery and Resilience Plans hold for universities?*, Briefing, 2021, https://eua.eu/resources/publications/984:nextgenerationeu-what-do-national-recovery-and-resilience-plans-hold-for-universities.htmlhttps://eua.eu/resources/publications/984:nextgenerationeu-what-do-national-recovery-and-resilience-plans-hold-for-universities.html

institutional cooperation in higher education. It encourages higher education institutions to involve learners, academics, and researchers more in the governance of transnational cooperation structures[371].

Institutional structures

The internal organisation of higher education institutions (for example along historical faculties and disciplinary silos) will determine how teaching, learning and research are organised thematically. The institutional structures of higher education refer to numerous aspects of its management and functioning and involve: the accessibility and availability of its outputs and publications to the general public (Open Science[372] and the sharing of teaching and learning resources)[373]; the transparency and inclusiveness of governance structures[374]; openness towards external (transnational) collaboration; responsiveness to the evolving needs of teaching and learning (including digitalisation)[375]; regulatory frameworks; and quality assurance processes.

The success of initiatives such as digitalisation depends on the state of existing regulatory and quality frameworks in an institution. If these frameworks do not permit flexibility to innovate, it becomes more difficult to make strides towards institutional changes[376].

Legal and administrative challenges exist, such as the possible hindrance to joint degrees awards posed by national legal frameworks and regulation, and the varying requirements related to curriculum design and delivery in different higher education systems[377].

Strategies governing the institutional structures of higher education institutions impact academic careers. For example, institutional orientation towards privatisation and private financing has impacts on which fields receive investment or attention (often negatively impacting the humanities)[378]. The institutional buy-in of knowledge-based economy (KBE) models can divert resources into research, creating pressures in many universities to reduce teaching costs and therefore teaching time.

Data from a European University Association survey shows that leadership buy-in plays a key role in the achievement of the green transition and Sustainable Development Goals[379]. This shows how the values and principles influencing the governing structures of the institution have impacts on teaching staff and the valuing of different higher education professionals[380]. The decisions that institutional structures make on funding can also impact how teaching and research are conducted and the procedures that academics must adhere to. For example, when institutions accept European funding such as

[371] Proposal for a Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, COM(2022) 17, 18.2.2022, https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/proposal-for-a-council-recommendation-on-building-bridges-for-effective-european-higher-education-cooperation

[372] European Commission, *Research and innovation: Open Science*, https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-2020-2024/our-digital-future/open-science_en

[373] European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Meijer, I., Chan, T., *The Netherlands' plan on open science – Open science monitor case study*, Publications Office, 2018, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/19799.

[374] European University Association (EUA), *Briefing from Europe's universities to the EU Council Presidency Trio: France, Czech Republic, Sweden*, 2021, https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/trio%20briefing.pdf

[375] Cendon, E., Lifelong Learning at Universities: Future Perspectives for Teaching and Learning. *Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research*, 7(2), 81-87, 2018, https://naerjournal.ua.es/article/view/v7n2-1

[376] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *The State of Higher Education: One Year into the COVID-19 Pandemic*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2021, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/the-state-of-higher-education_83c41957-en

[377] European University Association (EUA), *Considerations for a "European Degree"*, policy input, 2022, https://eua.eu/resources/publications/1026:considerations-for-a-%E2%80%9Ceuropean-degree%E2%80%9D.html

[378] Myklebust, J., Humanities research vital to tackling societal challenges, University World News, February, 13, 2021, https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20210213082320720

[379] Gaebel, M., and Stoeber, H., Getting higher education working for a greener Europe, University World News, May 29, 2021, https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20210528092502495

[380] Jessop, B., Varieties of academic capitalism and entrepreneurial universities. *High Educ* 73, 853–870, 2017, https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10734-017-0120-6.pdf

Erasmus+ they will be also accepting the new Green Charter[381] that promotes the sustainable implementation of activities[382].

Institutional structures influence human resource management and the rewards, recognition, and recruitment of staff. Everyone, especially teachers and educational staff, needs to be involved in decision-making[383]: Higher education institutions are organisations of learning, in which academic decision-making authority should be distributed[384], involving all learners, academics and researchers more in the governance of cooperation structures[385]. In some higher education institutions in France, some recruitment competitions for research directors and university professorships have become almost internal competitions. This undermines career mobility and the extent to which researchers external to an institution or who are returning after an external activity fear being penalised by the promotion criteria[386].

The Strategy for European Universities recommends that Member States commit to sustaining financial support for European Universities alliances, and to open up their institutions to deepen transnational institutional cooperation in higher education governance structures[387]. Indeed, international cooperation is identified to be a prerequisite for high quality research and innovation and learning and teaching, together with flexible learning and career paths[388], and this has implications for the management approaches of higher education institutions.

The European University Association briefing paper on the position of and opportunities for higher education in national recovery plans in the context of NextGenerationEU indicates that on the topic of institutional governance and funding higher education institutions can focus on the creation or enhancement of: specific regulatory/advisory/funding bodies (Bulgaria, France, Luxembourg, and Romania); the overhaul of the regulatory framework (Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, and Slovakia); changes to the university funding model (Bulgaria, Spain, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia); and large-scale concentration measures (Bulgaria, Ireland, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia)[389].

In recent years, support structures[390] for the education of doctoral candidates (who need to be educated in both research and career development) have increased significantly, and many higher education institutions have introduced structural doctoral education throughout doctoral schools and doctoral programmes. As a result of this development, universities have had to equip themselves with adequate

[381] European Parliament, *Research for CULT Committee - Effective measures to 'green' Erasmus+, Creative Europe and European Solidarity Corps programmes*, Concomitant expertise for INI report, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/629218/IPOL_IDA(2020)629218_EN.pdf

[382] Gaebel, M., and Stoeber, H., Getting higher education working for a greener Europe, University World News, May 29, 2021, https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20210528092502495

[383] European Training Foundation, Stanley, J., *Listening to vocational teachers and principals – Results of the ETF's international survey 2018*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2816/151700

[384] http://www.qnhe.no/?p=399

[385] Proposal for a Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, COM(2022) 17, 18.2.2022, https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/proposal-for-a-council-recommendation-on-building-bridges-for-effective-european-higher-education-cooperation

[386] Berta, P., Mauguin, P., Tunon de Lara, M., Attractivité des emplois et des carrières scientifiques, Loi de Programmation Pluriannuelle de la Rechereche, 2019, https://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/content_migration/document/RAPPORT_FINAL_GT2_Attractivite_des_emplois_et_des_carrieres_1178464.pdf

[387] Proposal for a Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, COM(2022) 17, 18.2.2022, https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/proposal-for-a-council-recommendation-on-building-bridges-for-effective-european-higher-education-cooperation

[388] European University Association (EUA), *Universities without walls: A vision for 2030*, 2021, https://www.eua.eu/downloads/publications/universities%20without%20walls%20%20a%20vision%20for%202030.pdf

[389] European University Association (EUA), Bennetat Pruvot, E., Estermann, T., *NextGenerationEU: What do National Recovery and Resilience Plans hold for universities?*, Briefing, 2021, https://eua.eu/resources/publications/984:nextgenerationeu-what-do-national-recovery-and-resilience-plans-hold-for-universities.html

[390] European University Association (EUA), *'Building the Foundations of Research: A Vision for the Future of Doctoral Education in Europe'*, 2022, https://eua.eu/resources/publications/1028:building-the-foundations-of-research.html

specialist staff to respond to the growing needs of doctoral candidates[391]. Since doctoral candidates become post-doctoral researchers, who then are recruited as academic staff in the longer term, the extent to which post-doctoral researchers are prepared for teaching becomes an important consideration.

The literature also notes that performance agreements can strengthen the relationship between the higher education sector and public authorities, provided the negotiation is based on a real dialogue between institutions and their funding authority undertaken in a spirit of mutual respect[392]. There is also an opportunity to reinforce cultures of quality, starting with quality in institutional structures. Higher education institutions that succeed in developing both high-quality teaching and research are permeated by a culture of quality at every level and typically have management teams that clearly prioritise educational quality[393].

Values and academic freedom

The European Union core values[394] emphasise human dignity, freedom of movement, democracy, equality, and the rule of law. These principles should underpin two core academic values: that higher education institutions should be free of external pressures (institutional autonomy); and that academic staff should be free of any external interference – including political or economic – to teach or research in a particular manner (academic freedom).

The EU emphasises the fundamentals of freedom and democracy in the European Pillar of Social Rights[395] and in the Treaty on European Union[396], the importance of which was acknowledged in the European Strategy for Universities. The European University Association acknowledges the central role of both regulatory frameworks and the actions of higher education institutions to protect freedoms and autonomy[397].

The European Charter for Researchers, published in December 2023[398]brings European added value given the existing fragmentation of research careers in Europe at local, regional, national and sectoral level, which keeps Europe from maximising its scientific potential.

However, there are factors that impinge on these core values. There can be political interference relating to which academic teaching and research fields are acceptable. This can happen through direct political pressure, through directed funding, through specific conditions being attached to business contracts, and through the appointment of specific leadership roles. There can be civil society pressure on academic staff through media coverage and campaigns or through social media. Job security can be weakened, putting pressure on academic staff to comply with particular contractual conditions in order to be eligible for another position.

[391] European University Association (EUA), Council for Doctoral Education, Hasgall, A., Peneoasu, A., *Survey on Doctoral education in Europe: current developments and trends*, 2022, https://eua-cde.org/downloads/publications/web_council%20on%20doctoral%20education_horizontal.pdf

[392] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Resourcing higher education in Ireland: Funding higher education institutions, *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 51, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2022 https://doi.org/10.1787/67dd76e0-en

[393] Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, New White Paper on Quality in Norway, 2017, http://www.qnhe.no/?p=399

[394] European Union, *Aims and values*, https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/principles-and-values/aims-and-values_en

[395] European Commission, Employment, *Social Affairs & Inclusion: European Pillar of Social Rights - Building a fairer and more inclusive European Union*, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights_en

[396]European Union, *Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union*, 2012 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12012M/TXT

[397] European University Association (EUA), Thomas Ekman Jørgensen, Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik, *Pathways to the future: A follow up to "Universities without walls – a vision for 2030",* 2021, https://eua.eu/resources/publications/983:pathways-to-the-future.html

[398] Euraxess, *The European Charter for Researchers*, https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter/european-charter

A recent report on academic freedom by the European Parliament points out that a 'critical framework condition is the level of public funding.'[399] According to the report, low levels of public funding can push higher education institutions to look for external funding sources, including private funding. However, a growing dependence on non-governmental funding can come with specific conditions attached that may influence and even direct the focus of academics' work.

Institutional autonomy is an opportunity for higher education institutions to protect their core principles and make independent decisions on internal governance, financial, staffing, and academic matters, and protect their academic freedom. In the European University Association's vision of the higher education institutions of the future, universities must enjoy significant autonomy and the capacity to make strategic choices on organisational, financial, staffing, and academic matters[400].

While higher education institutions across Europe have a history of autonomy, this is being challenged. For example, a proposed reform from the Norwegian Ministry to change the Universities and Colleges Act will see a university board chairman appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research, thus potentially preventing academics from being involved and potentially undermining university autonomy[401].

Academic freedom is essential for higher education. The Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe[402] emphasised that 'the EU should be positioned as a safe haven for academic freedom and democratic principles'. Furthermore, it called on 'the Commission and the Member States to promote and protect fundamental academic values, including academic freedom and integrity'.

However, the 2023 Academic Freedom Index (AFi) shows variations in academic freedom across the EU. While Belgium, Czechia, and Estonia are in the top 10% regarding academic freedom, Greece and Poland are only in the top 40-50%, whereas Hungary is in the bottom 10-20%[403]. As the European University Association has warned:

'Academic freedom and the institutional autonomy of universities are under pressure across Europe; in many instances this consists in isolated political attacks on scientific freedom, in other cases the threats are more subtle, taking the form of growing funding constraints or excessive regulation, which can nonetheless cause lasting damage to higher education and research systems and intellectual life in general. Moreover, universities in Europe do not have the same degree of institutional autonomy, nor is there a uniform trend towards greater autonomy. Greater institutional autonomy is fundamental for universities' capacity to make strategic choices about organisational, financial, staffing, and academic matters'[404].

Recent literature has highlighted pressures on academic values and freedoms (for example, in the face of populism or the politically targeted allocation of funding) and explored the balance between individual agency and structural control. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development recognises constraints on academic freedom are identified as a contributing factor to the worsening of

[399] European Parliament, Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services, EP Academic Freedom Monitor 2023, European Parliament, 2024, p. 124, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/393533

[400] European University Association (EUA), *Universities without walls: A vision for 2030*, 2021, https://www.eua.eu/downloads/publications/universities%20without%20walls%20%20a%20vision%20for%202030.pdf

[401] Myklebust, J. P., 'Professors publicly add to pressure for elected rectors', *University World News*, May 20, 2016, http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20160519190025351

[402] Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe, 6 April 2022, 7936/22, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7936-2022-INIT/en/pdf

[403] Friedrich-Alexander-University Institute for Political Science, V-Dem Institute, *Academic Freedom Index, Update 2023*, 2023, https://academic-freedom-index.net/research/Academic_Freedom_Index_Update.pdf

[404] European University Association (EUA), *Briefing from Europe's universities to the EU Council Presidency Trio: France, Czech Republic, Sweden*, 2021, https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/trio%20briefing.pdf

working conditions for researchers (and by implication also teachers and learners)[405]. The European University Association warns about threats of radicalisation and misinformation[406], or by institutional pressure, or foreign interference to steer teaching and research content and activities[407]. There are further fears that the issue of academic freedom could split democracies and autocracies, making a common understanding of the term difficult[408].

Recent examples of challenges to academic freedom include measures faced by academics in Turkey (criminal investigations, detentions, prosecutions, mass dismissal, expulsion, and restrictions on travel), where more than 7 500 academics were targeted and nearly 60 000 students were displaced[409]. Such events compromised core values and put significant pressure on academic staff to comply with the government, and where this was not acceptable many academic staff left the country. The extent of student and academic displacement are clear warnings to the European Education Area that talent will move to places which preserve the core academic values of freedom, autonomy, and democracy.

Foreign governments can put political pressure on national administrations, higher education institutions, and academic staff to self-censor what they teach or research, typified by current worries about the influence of the Confucius Institutes funded by China[410]. European universities and governments are strengthening their approach to collaboration with China in dual-use technologies. There is a paradigm shift underway in how universities deal with foreign collaborations; the Danish minister for education and research said there was a high risk that Danish researchers were helping to build up foreign military capability and enabling human rights abuses, and unwittingly contributing to the reduction in freedom and democracy in the collaborating countries[411].

Such changing political relations can generate many ethical challenges, and in 2023 the European Commission published a toolkit for universities to mitigate foreign influence in research and innovation[412].

Inclusion and equity

Modern teaching and learning across the European Education Area must be both equitable (a level playing field across all education systems) and inclusive (of all abilities, gender, disabilities, ethnicity, health conditions, under-represented groups, and non-traditional learners). As highlighted by the Communication on a European strategy for universities, 'academics, administrative staff and researchers from disadvantaged backgrounds are still underrepresented in higher education'[413].

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[405] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Reducing the precarity of academic research careers*, *OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers*, No. 113, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1787/0f8bd468-en

[406] European University Association (EUA), *Universities without walls: A vision for 2030*, 2021, https://www.eua.eu/downloads/publications/universities%20without%20walls%20%20a%20vision%20for%202030.pdf

[407] European University Association (EUA), 'Building the Foundations of Research: A Vision for the Future of Doctoral Education in Europe', 2022, https://eua.eu/resources/publications/1028:building-the-foundations-of-research.html

[408] Matthews, D., 'In a sea of discord and distrust, countries get together to define scientific values and principles', *Science Business,* July 12, 2022, https://sciencebusiness.net/news/sea-discord-and-distrust-countries-get-together-define-scientific-values-and-principles

[409] O'Malley, B., 'Purge of academics has reached a 'staggering' scale – SAR', *University World News*, July 15, 2017, http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20170715061722938

[410] Fischer, K., 'Latitudes: Political pressures and funding threats led to a wave of Confucius Institute closures', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 1, 2023, https://www.chronicle.com/newsletter/latitudes/2023-11-01

[411] Matthews, D., 'European universities under fire over work with Chinese military', *Science Business*, June 16, 2022, https://sciencebusiness.net/news/european-universities-under-fire-over-work-chinese-military

[412] Matthews, D., 'European universities under fire over work with Chinese military', *Science Business*, June 16, 2022, https://sciencebusiness.net/news/european-universities-under-fire-over-work-chinese-military

[413] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European strategy for universities, 18.1.2022 Com(2022) 16, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2022%3A16%3AFIN

'Ensuring academic freedom, diversity, and gender equality is paramount for unlocking potential for innovation. Promotion and recognition of these factors should also be emphasised, to make sure that they play a role in the selection, assessment, development and advancement of academic staff'.

European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) – Call for Evidence.

Challenges to inclusion and equity relate to socio-economic and cultural factors such as social disparities, and accessibility. Diversity and social cohesion are key issues as universities aim to provide opportunities to people from diverse backgrounds, and access to higher education should be equitable and open to all who qualify. The European University Association argues for internal university governance representing all groups within the higher education community[414].

During the COVID-19 pandemic, European higher education institutions faced particular challenges of inclusion as learning and teaching moved almost totally online in many countries. For example, students with visual learning disabilities were often faced with learning and teaching moving to online screens and the prevailing use of PowerPoint presentations. However, such challenges also stimulated innovation and heightened sensitivity to inclusion and equity, with the European University Association reporting that student well-being and inclusion received more attention during the pandemic[415].

Widening participation not just to disadvantaged students, but to all ages was emphasised in the 2021 Council Conclusions on equity and inclusion in education and training in order to promote educational success for all[416]. It advises that higher education should have a role in further engaging adults, promoting upskilling and reskilling, as well as play a role in lifelong learning through flexible alternatives to full academic programmes, by exploring the concept and use of micro-credentials[417].

The Eurydice report Towards equity and inclusion in higher education in Europe[418], argues that inclusion in the education system should be approached from a lifelong learning perspective. Higher education institutions should receive support to strengthen their capacity in responding to the needs of a more diverse student and staff body and create inclusive learning environments and inclusive institutional cultures. International mobility programmes in higher education should be structured and implemented in a way that fosters diversity, equity and inclusion and should particularly promote participation of students and staff from vulnerable, disadvantaged, or underrepresented backgrounds.

In a recent review, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development highlights that much of the evidence has only examined gender identity through a binary lens[419]. As reported in the same evidence review, a recent study found that a majority of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer,

[414] European University Association (EUA), 'Universities without walls: A vision for 2030', 2021, https://www.eua.eu/downloads/publications/universities%20without%20walls%20%20a%20vision%20for%202030.pdf

[415] Gaebel, M., and Stoeber, H., 'One year of Covid-19: the impact on European higher education', European University Association (EUA), 2022. https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/one%20year%20of%20covid19%20the%20impact%20on%20european%20higher%20education_final.pdf

[416] Council conclusions on equity and inclusion in education and training in order to promote educational success for all 2021/C 221/02 (OJ C, C/221, 10.06.2021, p. 3, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8693-2021-INIT/en/pdf

[417] Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability 2022/C 243/02 (OJ C, C/243, 27.06.2022, p. 10), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022H0627%2802%29

[418] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Towards equity and inclusion in higher education in Europe, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/fa946919-b564-11ec-b6f4-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-255273612

[419] OECD (2024), "The state of academic careers in OECD countries: An evidence review", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 91, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/ea9d3108-en.

and Intersex academics report having experienced discrimination because of their gender identity or sexual orientation[420].

The UniSAFE survey on gender-based violence in academia shows that two-thirds (62%) of survey respondents 'have experienced at least one form of gender-based violence since they started working or studying at their institution. Moreover, respondents who identify as LGBTQ+ (68%), who reported a disability or chronic illness (72%), and those belonging to an ethnic minority group (69%) were more likely to have experienced at least one incident of gender-based violence, compared to those who do not identify with these characteristics'[421].Academics regularly face harassment and bullying. A recent analysis by the journal Nature found that 27% of surveyed scientists had experienced discrimination, bullying, or harassment in their current job, whereas a third (32%) had been witness to them[422].

Furthermore, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development underlines that the lack of environmental adaptations makes academia a challenging setting for academics with disability, chronic illness, and neurodivergence. Consequently, academics from these groups often hesitate to disclose their disability unless it is visible, often to the detriment of their health[423]. A lack of institutional action to address this kind of behaviours allows inequalities to be perpetuated in academia.

Gender balance

U-Multirank data[424] shows that the share of female higher education staff is still lower across academic career paths, and it decreases with the level of seniority (female PhD students account for 48%, while this drops to 28% at the professor level). This appears to be the case even in institutions where females account for a majority of students (such as in humanities and health fields). Additionally, females appeared to be particularly underrepresented among academic staff in research-intensive institutions. Institutions characterised by science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields are still typically male-dominated.

A recent analysis using microdata from the European Tertiary Education Register found a similar pattern across higher education institutions in 28 European countries: women represent 44% of the total academic population, but only 28.4% of senior positions[425]. The study proposes a Gender Equality Index by calculating the difference between the share of women in senior academic personnel and the share of women in total academic positions; this index is negative for 96% of the universities analysed, the lowest being in those specialising in a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics discipline.

A 2020 report by the European Expert Network on Economics of Education called for recruitment policies addressing the gender balance of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics faculty composition as a strategy to redress the gender balance in science, technology, engineering, and

[420] OECD (2024), "The state of academic careers in OECD countries: An evidence review", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 91, p. 71, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/ea9d3108-en; Estrellado, J., Breen, A., and Rider, N., 'The "Double Burden" Facing Nonbinary Faculty and Graduate Students', *Spark: Elevating Scholarship on Social Issues*, 2019. https://medium.com/national-center-for-institutional-diversity/the-double-burden-facing-nonbinary-faculty-and-graduate-students-1d824f78e080

[421] UniSAFE, *Results from the largest European survey on gender-based violence in academia*, November 7, 2022, https://unisafe-gbv.eu/project-news/results-from-the-largest-european-survey-on-gender-based-violence-in-academia/

[422] Woolston, C., 'Discrimination still plagues science', *Nature* 600, 177-179, 2021. https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-03043-y

[423] OECD (2024), "The state of academic careers in OECD countries: An evidence review", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 91, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/ea9d3108-en.

Brown, N. and Leigh, J., 'Ableism in academia: where are the disabled and ill academics?', *Disability & Society*, 33:6, 985-989, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2018.1455627

[424] U-Multirank, *'U-Multirank Gender Monitor 2021: An analysis of the female to male ratio within the higher education ladder'*, 2021, https://www.umultirank.org/press-media/umultirank-news/umultirank-gender-monitor-2021/

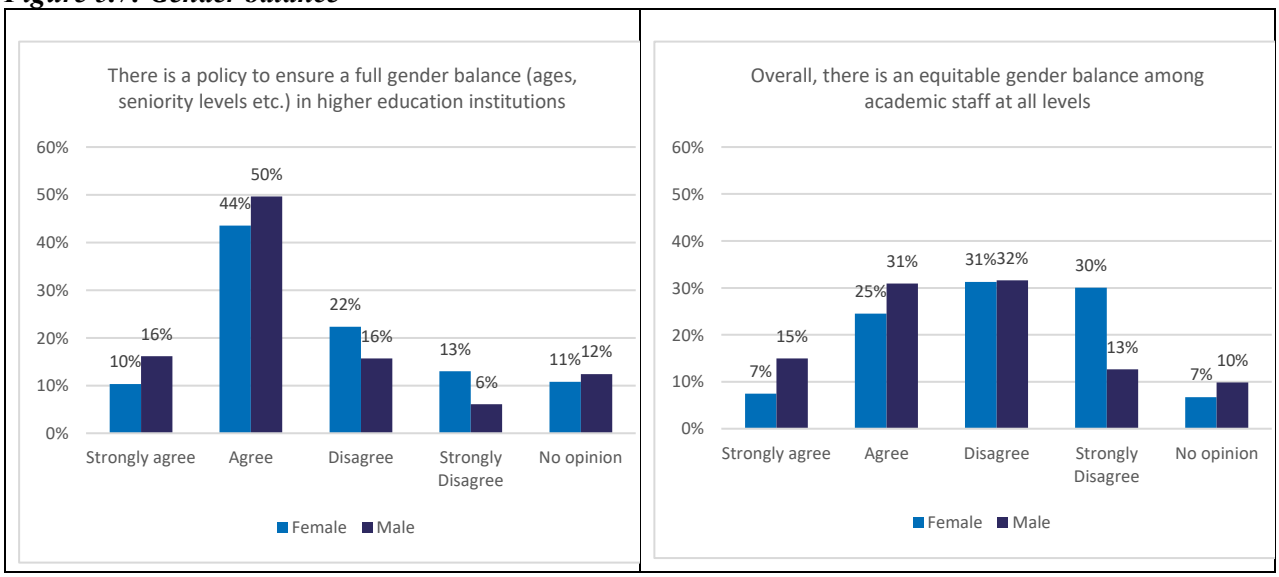
[425] Bonaccorsi, A., *'Academic personnel at European universities: Issues of career structure and gender equality (Version 1)'*, RISIS Policy Brief Series Issue 14. 2023 https://zenodo.org/records/8177349

mathematics subjects[426]. The 2021 She Figures report, focusing on research and innovation, highlights that across the EU's higher education sector, a higher proportion of women researchers, compared to men researchers, worked part-time and under precarious working contracts (11.1% for women and 7.2% for men), and as authors become more senior, women tend to publish less than men. Furthermore, in 2019, women represented less than 25% of heads of institutions in the higher education sector[427].

A 2021 study from the European Training Foundation examining the results of its 2018 international survey[428] shows that in vocational education and training institutions, teaching staff is more likely to be female while principals tend to be male. While progress is evident at the teacher level, there remain worrying gaps at senior levels.

The Ecorys survey showed that there is a disparity between the perceived existence of gender policies and the actual gender balance in academic staff at various levels (Figure 5.7). There is also a difference in perceptions by gender. A higher percentage of male than female respondents agree that there are policies in place to ensure gender balance (54% versus 66%), and that there is gender balance among academic staff (46% versus 32%).

Figure 5.7: Gender balance



Source: Ecorys, based on research carried out in 2023 to assess the current situation regarding academic staff in higher education in Europe.

The Austrian University Act has introduced organisational framework conditions for the continuation of equity policies, such as coordination centres for gender research, and encouraged universities to adopt their own women's promotion and equality plans[429] Additionally, the Austrian Federal Ministry of

[426] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, McNally, S., *Gender differences in tertiary education – What explains STEM participation?*, Publications Office, 2020, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/33c86740-cd54-11ea-adf7-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

[427] European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, *She figures 2021 – Gender in research and innovation – Statistics and indicators*, Publications Office, 2021, https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/knowledge-publications-tools-and-data/interactive-reports/she-figures-2021

[428] European Training Foundation, Stanley, J., *Listening to vocational teachers and principals – Results of the ETF's international survey 2018*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e451b262-00e6-11ec-8f47-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

[429] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Supporting entrepreneurship and innovation in higher education in Austria*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a06af4bd-2255-11ea-af81-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

Education, Science and Research promotes work-life balance with a series of gender-sensitive actions in research (e.g. gender-sensitive career models and selection procedures in public universities)[430].

Initiatives in other parts of the world have also highlighted how creating a community of female academics might be effective in encouraging young girls to seek careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. These include programmes in the United States such as Empowering Women in Science (Cornell) and Engineering Women (University of Minnesota), which showcase professional women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics research and facilitate seminars on positions and compensation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. However, there is a lack of information provided on how such initiatives benefit female academics and improve their working conditions[431].

By reforming institutional structures, there are opportunities for higher education institutions to take a stance on gender equality through their institutional structures. For example, the Ljubljana declaration reiterates that gender equality in decision-making can have a large impact in the general gender equality of the institution and makes clear that 'gender-based violence (including sexual harassment) has severe negative impacts on career outcomes in higher education and research'[432].

Chapter 6: Conclusions - the path towards the European degree

6.1 A European degree

Transnational joint programmes are a cornerstone of European higher education. They strengthen cross-border cooperation among higher education institutions; encourage knowledge sharing and the use of innovative pedagogies among academic staff; equip students with useful skills and competencies for the labour market; allow higher education institutions to increase their study offer and international profile by playing to each other's strengths; and reinforce a sense of European belonging in students and staff.

This has been reflected in the success of European initiatives such as Erasmus Mundus, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Joint Doctoral Programmes, programmes labelled by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, and the European Universities initiative. Nonetheless, there remain obstacles to developing and implementing transnational joint programmes, ranging from complex and lengthy quality assurance processes, to barriers to automatic mutual recognition of qualifications, and the inconsistent recognition of the work of academic staff involved in transnational cooperation activities.

While the Bologna Process and EU-led initiatives have addressed some of these challenges, shared tools and mechanisms such as the ESG and the European Approach have been unevenly implemented across higher education systems in the European Education Area. Furthermore, programme and curriculum structures and diploma templates, governance structures and student admission and enrolment rules are often incompatible between Member States, effectively limiting positive trends towards the establishment of joint degree programmes in Europe.

The research carried out for this Staff Working Document has shown that a European degree could help overcome some of the remaining obstacles. Through the set of criteria co-created with Member States, it would bring about economies of scale, allowing higher education institutions to offer more

[430] European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, She figures 2021 – Gender in research and innovation – Statistics and indicators, Publications Office, 2021, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/67d5a207-4da1-11ec-91ac-01aa75ed71a1

[431] Sey, A., and Hafkin, N. (Eds.), '*Taking Stock: Data and Evidence on Gender Digital Equality*', United Nations University 2019. i.unu.edu/media/cs.unu.edu/attachment/4040/EQUALS-Research-Report-2019.pdf

[432] Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, '*Ljubljana Declaration: Gender Equality in Research and Education*', 2021. https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MIZS/Dokumenti/PSEU/Ljubljana-Declaration-on-Gender-Equality-in-Research-and-Innovation-_endorsed_final.pdf

opportunities to students, reduce the administrative burden associated with the design and delivery of joint degree programmes, facilitate collaborative teaching, research and development projects, empower staff and provide them with additional internationalisation opportunities, and increase the transparency and automatic recognition of joint degrees.

With regard to the European degree criteria, the results of the study 'The Road towards a possible joint European degree" and the preliminary findings of the Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects in higher education have demonstrated a high degree of alignment of the proposed criteria with the expectations of students, higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies, Member State authorities and labour market representatives. Stakeholders mostly suggested changes that reinforce the transnational and joint nature of joint degree programmes, with a focus on the wide accessibility and inclusiveness of these offerings, and ensuring that they remain firmly rooted in the foundations established under the Bologna Process. The feedback received also clearly signalled the need to provide more detailed clarification of the criteria in the form of guidance developed through a co-creation process. The criteria annexed to this Staff Working Document are a solid basis to engage on the next steps towards a European degree.

The piloting of a European degree label, and a European degree as a qualification based on common European criteria, revealed a preference for a European degree due to the potential regulatory simplification it would bring. In addition, there was a broad consensus that a European degree should integrate existing processes and become part of the regular accreditation and quality assurance process, for example involving national accreditation and quality assurance agencies registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education.

The Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects have also made it possible to identify a notable increase in the number of alliances of higher education institutions seeking stronger forms of institutionalised links in order to share financial, human, digital and physical resources, infrastructures and services, as well as joint activities, including educational activities. However, none of the existing legal instruments, either at the national or European level, fully allow for the achievement of the long-term objectives and missions of the alliances, suggesting the need for further exploration of possible and voluntary cooperation instruments in the future.

In this context, reflections were conducted to design a flexible approach towards a European degree, allowing each system to embark on this path according to its own circumstances and objectives. The entry points analysed consisted of a European label for joint degree programmes that meet the European criteria and a European degree, either jointly awarded by several universities from different countries and integrated into national legislation as a new type of qualification. or awarded by a European legal entity set up by a number of universities from different countries.

6.2 A fit-for-purpose European quality assurance system

Quality assurance is essential for accountability, transparency, trust, excellence, and improvement in the higher education sector. It is also key to encouraging automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and to enabling the development of transnational joint programmes. Quality assurance can take place both internally and externally, at the programme or institutional level, with most EU Member States following a combined approach.

Quality assurance frameworks must: be agile, dynamic, and fit for the fast changes underpinning Europe's higher education landscape, where teaching and learning activities continuously evolve and incorporate new innovative pedagogies; programmes become more international; lifelong learning and micro-credentials are mainstreamed; the importance of green and digital skills increases; and where values such as equality, inclusion, accessibility, and academic integrity grow in relevance.

Over the past 20 years, the Bologna Process has pioneered common quality assurance procedures and tools to build more compatible, comparable, and coherent higher education systems in the European

Higher Education Area. Prime examples are the ESG, which provide guidance for internal and external quality assurance, and the European Approach, which entails a single quality assurance review (based on the ESG) for transnational joint programmes.

The EU has adopted initiatives to encourage Member States to develop quality assurance systems in line with Bologna Process tools and to enable automatic mutual recognition of qualifications. The European Universities Initiative has spurred the development of transnational joint programmes and given new momentum to the Bologna Process. European Universities alliances have made use of the European Approach and are exploring ways to improve its implementation.

Despite these efforts, challenges related to quality assurance remain. There is uneven implementation of both the ESG and the European Approach. Four Member States have yet to align their quality assurance systems to the ESG. However, higher education institutions are not always allowed to choose quality assurance agencies registered with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education from other Member States; and not all quality assurance assessments are publicly accessible or fully independent.

The European Approach has experienced modest success, with only 26 joint programmes having used it for accreditation as of January 2024. On the one hand, the implementation of the European Approach varies in the EU: less than half of EU Member States (11) allow its full implementation without imposing additional conditions, whereas six countries do not allow it at all. On the other hand, a significant number of higher education institutions are not aware of the European Approach and often confuse it with the ESG.

Additionally, barriers to automatic mutual recognition still exist. A third of higher education institutions in the EU check the quality assurance arrangements of the sending institution when making a decision on recognition. Recognition procedures vary significantly between EU Member States, types of higher education institutions, and education levels and are often complicated, lengthy, and expensive.

The findings suggest that solutions could require changes to national policy frameworks as well the provision of clearer guidance for the implementation of the European Approach, the ESG, and automatic mutual recognition of qualifications. In line with the April 2022 Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, Member States are encouraged: to move further towards institutional-based external quality assurance (for greater accountability and compatibility); to allow for self-accreditation of programmes based on institutional quality assurance (placing the primary responsibility on higher education institutions); and to enable the use of the European Approach without adding any additional national requirements.

Furthermore, for quality assurance processes to stay relevant and reflect the changing social, political, environmental, and economic landscape, higher education systems must be able to incorporate specific objectives on key societal priorities, such as the green and digital transitions, lifelong learning opportunities, gender balance, inclusion, employability, academic integrity, and synergies between education, research, innovation, and service to society.

6.3 European framework for flexible and attractive academic careers

Europe's higher education sector encompasses a wide range of public and private higher education institutions – traditional universities, universities of applied sciences, colleges, business schools, specialised higher schools, polytechnics, non-university level public institutions of higher education, tertiary professional schools, and specialised research universities – each of them with a different focus and distinct priorities.

This diversity is reflected in the different roles that academic staff play within higher education institutions, including engaging in research, teaching and learning, administration, knowledge transfer, open science, leadership, community engagement, and transnational cooperation with other higher

education institutions. However, not all roles are valued equally; research continues to be the priority area in recruitment and promotion; and most academic career paths continue to follow an outdated and rigid concept of linear career progression.

The research undertaken identified factors that impact on the career paths of academic staff: the lack of parity of esteem between research and teaching and learning; recruitment processes, contract conditions, and remuneration and reward and promotion mechanisms; inflexible career development paths; workload pressures; gender imbalance, inclusion, and equity; academic freedom and institutional autonomy; financing models; and the lack of harmonised and reliable data on academic careers.

Some of these observations resonate with the December 2023 Council Recommendation on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe. This includes aspects such as career progression, salaries, recruitment and appraisal mechanisms, inclusiveness and gender equality, and mobility. However, the proposed research careers framework does not address the issue of uneven parity of esteem between research and teaching and learning, which poses challenges to recognising the work of academic staff engaging in other academic activities such as transnational cooperation.

Parity of esteem between different career paths is needed and should be reflected in recruitment, recognition and rewards policies. The identified issues suggest the need for a reform of academic careers to make them more attractive, flexible, and sustainable.

Areas for action include improving contract conditions of academic staff, so they are fair and attractive, followed by adequate long-term resourcing for academic staff and the minimisation of precarious and short-term contracts. Moreover, the workload distribution across staff types and seniority levels must be balanced via transparent assessment mechanisms. Additionally, the engagement of academic staff in transnational cooperation must be recognised, which requires making academic career pathways less linear and more flexible to accommodate and value different academic roles.

Other challenges identified include: the need for sufficient funding, which has a direct impact on ensuring sustainable and attractive career conditions; the importance of transparent and inclusive governance structures in higher education institutions, which influence human resource management and the rewards system; the protection of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, which are key to protecting the activity of academic staff and their work conditions; the lack of an inclusive environment; and persistent gender imbalances that are more acute at higher levels of academic seniority.

Academic staff across the EU should have access to social protection and fair remuneration, which in turn require higher education institutions to be able to rely on sustainable financial models and adequate core funding.

Institutional and decision-making structures in higher education institutions must be transparent and inclusive. There must be mechanisms to tackle imbalances and discrimination, strengthen and recognise the role of teaching, and ensure equitable workload. The harmonised collection of reliable and disaggregated data in full compliance with data protection regulations is required to monitor progress in the different dimensions of academic careers. This goes hand in hand with building better connectivity across excellent teaching and learning centres to provide academic staff with databases on the professional development and training offers available to them.

6.4 General conclusions

Education is fundamental for the future of Europe. It is the foundation for personal fulfilment, employability, and active, responsible citizenship. It is essential to the vitality of our European societies and economies. Education systems need to rely on fit-for-purpose quality assurance and recognition systems and excellent academics. The future of Europe depends on its capacity to equip the next

generations with future-proofed skills to accelerate and master the green and digital transitions, and to ensure European autonomy in strategic areas.

As the key challenges of our time become more global, transnational education is no longer an option but a necessity to equip future generations with the necessary competencies to thrive in an ever more connected world. Higher education institutions need to pool expertise and combine complementary strengths not available at any single institution, to provide graduates and lifelong learners with strategic skills for their future. The European degree can be the facilitator to reach this goal.

ANNEX I: Synopsis of stakeholder consultations

Introduction

The European Commission initiated consultations in early 2022 to gather stakeholders' views on 'A blueprint towards a future European degree, accompanied by Council Recommendations on Quality Assurance and Recognition System and on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education'. The consultations aimed to understand how the Commission can establish a European degree and, in this way, contribute to the achievement of the European Education Area.

This section provides a synopsis of the key findings from the feedback received from stakeholders and Member States through the stakeholder events. The stakeholder feedback has been important in shaping the Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the blueprint towards a European degree and the two Commission proposals for Council recommendations.

Consultation and activities

The consultation aimed at gathering the views of stakeholders and Member States to ensure the creation of a European degree, which has been identified as a key priority for 2024 by President von der Leyen in her letter of intent of the 2023 State of the Union address. The objective is to contribute to the establishment of the European Education Area and strengthen transnational higher education initiatives in the EU. This will involve stepping up transnational cooperation, enhancing the valorisation and recognition of careers in higher education, and better preparing for the green and digital transitions.

The consultation consisted of two main activities: the collection of feedback through a Call for Evidence, and a broad range of public and targeted stakeholder consultations involving key stakeholder groups.

Call for Evidence

From 9 January 2024 to 6 February 2024, the European Commission collected feedback through a Call for Evidence on the blueprint towards a European degree and the Commission's proposals for two Council recommendations on a European quality assurance and recognition system and on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education.

The call attracted 150 contributions from a wide range of stakeholders, including 5 Member States, 10 university associations, 22 European Universities alliances, 3 student organisations and 7 organisations representing industry and trade unions. This made it possible to gather information, expertise and views from all interested parties and to build a strong evidence base for the development of the three initiatives.

Public and targeted stakeholder events

Public and targeted consultation events were organised from the first half of 2022 up to the beginning of 2024 to maximise the participation of all interested stakeholders. The events aimed to gather perspectives on the scope and content of the proposed blueprint for a European degree and the two Commission's proposals for Council recommendations on a European quality assurance and recognition system and on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education. Tables A1-A3 detail the public and targeted stakeholder consultation events.

Table A1: Public events

Date	Name of consultation event
23 June 2022	European and Innovation Summit
28 September 2022	LOTUS[433] Erasmus+ project final conference
27 June 2023	European Education and Innovation Summit
30 November 2023	Education Summit

Table A2: High-level targeted consultation meetings

Date	Name of consultation event
14 November 2022	High-level meeting with Directors General for Higher Education
23-24 November 2022	High-level meeting with Directors General of Higher Education
23-24 March 2023	High-level meeting with Directors General for Higher Education
14-15 December 2023	High-level meeting with Directors General for Higher Education

Table A3: Targeted consultation meetings with the stakeholder groups, coordinators of European Universities alliances and Member States representatives

Date	Name of consultation event
2022-2024	Bilateral meetings with stakeholder organisations (EUA, YERUN, LERU, CESEAR, The Guild, Coimbra Group, EURASHE)[434]

[433] LOTUS: Leadership and Organisation for Learning and Teaching at European Universities.
[434] EUA: European University Association (EUA); YERUN: Young European Research Universities Network; LERU: League of European Research Universities; CESEAR: Conference of European Schools for Advanced Engineering Education and Research; The Guild: The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities; EURASHE: European Association of Institutions in Higher Education.

Date	Name of consultation event
16 March 2022	Meeting of the EEA Strategic Framework Higher Education Working Group
27 April 2022	Meeting of the EEA Strategic Framework Higher Education Working Group
19 September 2022	OECD Higher Education National Experts Group
14 September 2022	Meeting of the EEA Strategic Framework Higher Education Working Groups
22 September 2022	European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education Working Group on Higher Education and Research
28 October 2022	Bologna Follow-up Group Teaching and Learning Group (PLA)
7 November 2022	Bologna Follow-up Group
21-22 November 2022	CZEDUCON (Czech presidency Higher Education stakeholders conference)
30-31 January 2023	Meeting with Rectors of European Universities alliances
28 February 2023	Meeting of the EEA Strategic Framework Higher Education Working Group
6 March 2023	Meetings with representatives of European Universities (Rectors and Coordinators)
7 March 2023	Meeting with the Higher Education and Research Standing Committee of the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE)
12 May 2023	Consultation with employers (European University Association, etc.) on academic careers
15 May 2023	Consultation with alliances of European universities on transnational cooperation and academic careers

Date	Name of consultation event
	(European Universities alliances, Erasmus Mundus programmes)
16 May 2023	Consultation with academic employees and social partners on academic careers
22 May 2023	Consultation with national authorities on academic careers
31 May 2023	Consultation with national authorities on academic careers
22 June 2023	Meetings with representatives of European Universities (Rectors and Coordinators)
26 June 2023	Seminar organised by the Spanish Presidency on European Universities
29-30 June 2023	Meeting of the EEA Strategic Framework Higher Education Working Group
10 July 2023	Focus group on Flexible pathways/Intersectoral and transnational mobility
11 July 2023	Focus group on Workload/Wellbeing/Time management
12 July 2023	Focus group on Continuous professional development (pedagogy, green, digital)
13 July 2023	Focus group on Careers structures and appraisal mechanisms
13 July 2023	Focus group on Workload/Wellbeing/Time management
14-15 September 2023	Meetings with representatives of European Universities (Rectors and Coordinators)
13-14 November 2023	Meeting of the EEA Strategic Framework Higher Education Working Group

Date	Name of consultation event
12 February 2024	Consultation with youth and student organisations
21 February 2024	Meeting of the EEA Strategic Framework Higher Education Working Group
2 March 2024	EU Youth Conference

Many of the events had a focus on research and innovation. A consultation process with umbrella stakeholder organisations and higher education experts, including meetings, workshops, interviews and surveys, also took place as part of the work on the study report *The road towards a possible joint European degree: identifying opportunities and investigating the impact and feasibility of different approaches* between April 2021 and July 2022, and published in January 2023[435].

Reach of the stakeholder consultation strategy

Overall, a wide range of stakeholders was reached and consulted through the activities described above. Table A4 below provides an illustration of the stakeholder landscape, showing the groups reached through each consultation channel. In general, all intended stakeholder categories were reached through at least one of the consultation channels.

Table A4: Stakeholder outreach through consultation events

Consultation activity	Intended audiences for stakeholder consultation strategy					
	Higher Education Institution	University & student organisations	University Umbrella networks	Rectors' Conference	Social Partners	Member States representatives/ governments
Call for Evidence	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
High-Level Consultation Meeting						✓
Targeted Consultation Meeting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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

Consultation activity	Intended audiences for stakeholder consultation strategy					
	Higher Education Institution	University & student organisations	University Umbrella networks	Rectors' Conference	Social Partners	Member States representatives/ governments
Public Events	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Consultation activity	Intended audiences for stakeholder consultation strategy				
	EU institutional partners (e.g. EP, CoR, EESC)	Organisations representing regional, local and municipal authorities	Citizens/ general public	NGO's	Company/ business organisations
Call for Evidence		✓	✓	✓	✓
High-Level consultation meeting					
Targeted consultation meeting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Public events		✓	✓	✓	✓

Stakeholder feedback

European degree and possible legal status of alliances of higher education institutions

Stakeholders have informed the Commission's work on a blueprint for a European degree through most of the public events, high-level meetings and targeted consultations outlined above. In addition, the findings have been complemented by the outcomes of a commissioned study, preliminary outcomes of the 10 Erasmus+ European policy experimentation in higher education projects (piloting a joint European degree label and institutionalised EU cooperation instruments), and contributions received in response to the Call for Evidence.

Remaining obstacles to transnational cooperation of higher education institutions

Throughout the consultation process, stakeholders reported significant challenges related to the design, delivery and management of joint degree programmes in Europe. Stakeholders highlighted the need to undergo multiple accreditation procedures, difficulties in re-accreditation or disparities in accreditation requirements between Member States. The lack of automatic recognition of qualifications and insufficient recognition of prior learning, periods of study abroad and online learning were also noted.

Stakeholders also pointed to the wide disparity of curricular requirements across Member States and higher education institutions (e.g. programme length, interdisciplinarity, approach to micro-credentials), the existence of very specific rules regarding the mobility of students and staff, use of languages or parchment requirements that create very concrete obstacles to transnational cooperation.

Higher education institutions expressed the need for the availability of tools to enable more institutionalised forms of cooperation, in particular with regard to digital infrastructure and establishing a legal entity for alliances of higher education institutions. Other issues raised by stakeholders were the uneven levels of implementation of Bologna and EU instruments across Member States and academic partners, a lack of guidance or clear legal framework leading to insufficient awareness of the added value of joint degrees among students and employers.

In addition, further challenges were highlighted by stakeholders in the Call for Evidence, including cultural and linguistic barriers, financial barriers like disparities in tuition fees, scholarship regulations, or costs of curriculum development and implementation. Some administrative barriers such as incompatibility of academic calendars, conflicting admission requirements and complex employment arrangements for teaching staff were also mentioned.

Added value of a possible European degree

Most higher education institutions welcomed the idea of a European degree. Stakeholders also reported an increasing interest in offering joint degrees.

In general, stakeholders considered that a European degree could address most of the challenges that remain in the provision of transnational higher education, including administrative simplification, increased transparency of joint degrees, improved implementation of Bologna Process instruments, automatic recognition of joint qualifications, reduced barriers and simplification in quality assurance and the design and implementation of joint degree programmes.

Stakeholders agreed that it would contribute to the enhancement of the global reputation of European higher education, to the dissemination of European values, to the facilitation of cooperation arrangements across the EU, and to encouraging students to study in another EU country, thus facilitating brain circulation within the EU while preventing brain drain.

Students and employers emphasised that the labour market relevance of a European degree would be the main added value of such an instrument. Skills related to the digital and green transition and a set of transversal skills (adaptability, creativity, multilingualism, working in an intercultural environment), which are particularly sought after by employers, were considered particularly relevant.

Stakeholders generally agreed that any future European degree should be accessible to all higher education institutions, regardless of their model for cooperation, and not impose an additional administrative burden. Some alliances of higher education institutions pointed to the possible need for legislative empowerment of national accreditation agencies to award a European degree label, the adaptation of Erasmus+ funding to European degree mobility, and sufficient funding to ensure the socio-economic inclusiveness of programmes.

The use of existing national procedures for accreditation and quality assurance of programmes was the most preferred option by the stakeholders, especially by national accreditation and quality assurance agencies and national authorities.

There was a common understanding among higher education institutions and students that a European degree as a type of qualification would bring the most added value as compared to a label.

Many stakeholders commented that the European degree as a label would have limited added value if it is a supplement to a degree as it would not align or bridge national requirements but adds on top of the existing complex regulatory landscape. Furthermore, stakeholders highlighted that the European degree should not be reserved for European Universities alliances as it should be linked to the study programme, not to the awarding institutions. The importance of additional discussions, notably on the results of the Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects was highlighted by some stakeholders.

Suitability of the proposed criteria for the award of a European degree

The proposed criteria are the result of extensive consultations conducted in preparation of the Erasmus+ European policy experimentation call for proposals on a European degree label. Six projects were selected with partners from higher education institutions, student and youth organisations, businesses, national and regional authorities in charge of higher education, accreditation and quality assurance agencies and other stakeholders.

As part of their objectives, these projects gathered feedback on the proposed set of criteria in order to assess their relevance and suggest improvements. Preliminary outcomes from publications and regular meetings with the projects showed that there is an agreement that the proposed criteria are deemed relevant and important, in particular those presented as mandatory. Criteria pertaining to labour market relevance of the programme, or the offering of traineeships for students were considered particularly pertinent by employers, students and higher education institutions. Stakeholders suggested that the list of criteria should be accompanied with clear definition, indicators and guidelines for their assessment in an accompanying document.

Despite an overall agreement with the proposed criteria for the European Degree, stakeholders proposed specifications and additional criteria in the Call for Evidence. Some suggested the inclusion of mandatory points on the development of soft and transversal skills. Such criteria would ensure a future-proof education that promotes active learning and critical thinking. In the same vein, they suggested that the initiative should embrace lifelong learning and flexible learning pathways and include other models of higher education in addition to full programmes.

Additionally, while most stakeholders agreed that physical mobility should constitute an important part of the European degree, some argued that students should have the opportunity to opt for blended or virtual mobility options. Finally, a strong plea was expressed for the criteria to respect academic freedom and autonomy of higher education institutions and the diversity of national and regional education systems.

Institutionalised EU cooperation instruments for a possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions

Stakeholder feedback also addressed one of the possible enablers for more institutionalised transnational cooperation between higher education institutions, namely a possible legal status of alliances of higher education institutions. The consultations have shown that there is a wide variety of models for cooperation between higher education institutions in Europe, and that some partnerships seek to be recognised as higher education providers at European level to be able to recruit learners, offer new learning opportunities and provide quality assured and recognised qualifications.

The needs identified, and which could potentially be addressed by legal status, include facilitating the provision of educational services, management of students, joint management of resources, recruitment of staff at the European level, attracting funding from the public and private sectors, and increased visibility and representation *vis-à-vis* international policy makers, administrations and organisations.

Stakeholders reported potential benefits of a legal status at the level of higher education institutions, staff, students, the private sector and national administrations. Some of these include increased legal certainty, economies of scale through sharing of operations and resources, greater staff mobility and new employment opportunities, easier access for private actors to the ecosystem of all partner universities, transparency, and sustainability of operations.

Quality Assurance and Recognition System

This proposal for a Council Recommendation has been discussed extensively with all relevant stakeholders over the last three years, both as part of the general discussions that supported the creation of the European strategy for universities, and more recent targeted discussions on the specific components of this Council Recommendation. Further, a Commission-contracted study examined the state of play of automatic recognition and quality assurance in the EU and the feasibility of a quality assurance and recognition system. The Call for Evidence and the contributions received in response to it concluded the consultation process.

Issues raised

Administrative burden

Higher education institutions expressed concerns about sometimes excessively bureaucratic and lengthy procedures for quality assurance and recognition systems, particularly for joint programmes developed by European Universities alliances. Participants in the Call for Evidence considered the current procedures burdensome and disincentivising institutions to develop new joint degrees or short-term mobility initiatives.

They suggest that overlapping procedures should be avoided and that additional layers of quality assurance should only be added when institutional and/or national procedures are not sufficient, contributing to defining simplified accreditation procedures for European Universities alliances to develop and implement joint programmes. Additionally, stakeholders emphasised the need to reduce administrative burden related to short-term mobilities and simplify administrative tasks related to data collection, reporting, and follow-up measures.

Insufficient implementation of existing tools

In the Call for Evidence, stakeholders expressed concerns that existing European-level quality assurance tools had not been fully implemented or implemented with additional requirements. Particularly, the implementation of the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes varies significantly across Member States, creating overlapping requirements and making the development of joint degree unattractive for higher education institutions. Stakeholders suggested implementing the existing system based on The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and Bologna tools. They argued that the measures should primarily boost the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the existing instruments.

Mismatch between quality assurance and societal needs

Some stakeholders expressed concerns about the prominent focus on quality assurance processes while overlooking aspects such as learning outcomes, values, and engagement of societal stakeholders. They also considered that quality enhancement in this regard was often limited because it was difficult to

integrate assurance and enhancement in a fully balanced manner. Furthermore, they posited that institution-based external quality assurance would offer more flexibility for the development of joint programmes that should respond to societal needs.

Certain stakeholders highlighted that it is necessary to broaden the scope of stakeholder engagement to include employers, industry representatives, and other societal stakeholders that can provide valuable insights into the skills and competencies required by the labour market, thus enhancing the relevance and applicability of higher education programmes. They also emphasised the need to include in quality assurance processes aspects related to digital and green transitions to guarantee the development of qualified professionals who meet the required skills in these fields. Furthermore, they called for enhanced transparency that can facilitate the readability of learning outcomes for the labour market.

In the Call for Evidence, student representatives emphasised the importance of ensuring staff and student involvement and grassroots participation throughout the quality assurance process.

Availability of cross-institutional quality assurance

Stakeholders participating in the Call for Evidence expressed varying opinions regarding quality assurance systems at the cross-institutional level for joint activities and joint programmes. While some stressed the importance of institutional autonomy, others welcomed new internal and/or external approaches to quality assurance.

Some stakeholders emphasised that higher education institutions are responsible for their own quality assurance, which implies self-accreditation of programmes based on the institutions' quality assurance procedures. Since joint degrees will still be awarded by higher education institutions themselves, they highlighted that it is necessary to respect the existing institutions' quality assurance systems. They suggest that 'multi-institutional quality assurance' does not have to be external. It can be internal and subject to national external quality assurance.

However, when separate quality assurance systems are insufficient, higher education institutions welcome the implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. They highlighted that the shift towards multi-institutional external quality assurance needs to be fully considered and tested before implementation since its added value must be proved. They stated that a 'parallel European Quality Assurance and Recognition system where joint programmes could seek recognition and therefore true 'jointness' makes sense'.

Lack of automatic recognition

Stakeholders in the Call for Evidence expressed concerns regarding the lack of automatic recognition. They considered that there should be a better link between quality assurance and recognition as a key step in making automatic recognition a reality. They highlighted that discrepancies among institutions and countries in delivering degrees must be identified and removed. They supported the goal of promoting automatic recognition, which is regulated at the national level.

Others expressed the aspiration that whenever a degree has been approved at the European level, it should automatically be accredited and registered at the country level of the higher education institutions involved in awarding the degree. They also suggested that the development of quality assurance and automatic recognition should consider new phenomena in the field of education, such as emerging skill sets and the potential of using Artificial Intelligence in recognition processes.

Lack of trust

Stakeholders in the Call for Evidence expressed a lack of mutual trust among some institutions and systems. This lack of trust creates additional burdens for the recognition of mobility credits and makes it difficult to recognise them. Hence, they call for the promotion of trust among European partners in the existing Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area,

and the promotion of a culture of trust. This implies mechanisms for trusting existing quality assurance procedures and practices at the level of the partner higher education institutions, as well as on regional and/or national quality assurance processes to which partner institutions are subject.

Attractive academic careers in higher education

Stakeholder feedback on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education was collected through most of the public events, high-level meetings, and targeted consultations outlined in the tables above. In addition, targeted consultation events took place within the framework of the *Study supporting the European Framework for Attractive and Sustainable Careers in Higher Education*, carried out by an independent consultant between May 2023 and July 2023 to gather evidence on the conditions underpinning academic careers in the European Union.

The study involved an extensive literature review; five consultation events in May 2023 with national authorities, employers, academic staff, social partners, and actors engaged in transnational cooperation alliances of European universities; an online survey which ran between April and June 2023 to collect views on challenges, good practices, and potential actions from 864 respondents[436]; and five thematic focus groups that took place in July 2023 for in-depth discussions of the evidence collected.

The information gathered was complemented by the feedback received through the Call for Evidence.

Diversity of European higher education and academic career paths

The general picture that emerged from the consultation process is that policy frameworks need to be sensitive to the diversity of the European higher education sector, which includes a wide range of public and private higher education institutions -– traditional universities, universities of applied sciences, colleges, business schools, specialised higher schools, polytechnics, non-university level public institutions of higher education, tertiary professional schools, and specialised research universities– each of them with a different focus and distinct priorities.

This diversity is reflected in the different roles that academic staff play within higher education institutions, including engaging in research, teaching and learning, administration, knowledge transfer, open science, leadership, community engagement, and transnational cooperation with other higher education institutions. However, not all roles are valued equally, and research continues to be the priority area in recruitment and promotion.

Identified needs and challenges

The consultations identified several factors that influence the careers of academic staff: recruitment processes, contract conditions, remuneration, and reward and promotion mechanisms; lack of parity of esteem between research and teaching and learning; the possibility of having flexible career development paths; workload pressures; gender imbalance, inclusion and equity; academic freedom and institutional autonomy; financing models; and the lack of harmonised and reliable data on academic careers.

<u>Human resource policies: recruitment processes, contract conditions, and remuneration</u>

The survey revealed that most stakeholders consider that fair and attractive contract conditions need the most attention, followed by adequate long-term resourcing for staff and the minimisation of precarious contracts. Indeed, there is strong concern among academics about existing policy and regulations not being enough to curb the use of short-term contracts.

[436] This included universities (650); other higher education institutions such as polytechnics, business schools, etc. (91); teaching and learning support staff at a higher education institution (47); national and regional ministries and government bodies responsible for higher education (24); national and regional teaching and learning organisations (9); employer organisations (7); organisations and social partners at EU level (2); and other respondents (34).

The Call for Evidence also highlighted the prevalence of short-term contracts, decreasing job security and social protection, unpredictable career pathways, lack of career flexibility and cross sectoral mobility as factors making it difficult to attract and retain talent, particularly affecting PhD students, early career researchers, and vulnerable groups like women, ethnic minorities or people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Workload pressures

Most survey respondents reported dissatisfaction with workload distribution across staff types and seniority levels and underlined the lack of transparent mechanisms to assess the workload of academic staff. Heavy workload and poor work-life balance were also cited in the Call for Evidence.

Appraisal and promotion systems and reward mechanisms (that value and reward different academic roles)

Valuing the engagement of academic staff in transnational cooperation emerged as a key issue both in the survey and in the Call for Evidence. While transnational cooperation in teaching and learning is part of the institutional strategy of many higher education institutions, it is often not sufficiently valued or recognised in appraisal, promotion, and reward mechanisms. The Call for Evidence further highlighted unequal recognition and reward of diverse roles encompassing teaching, learning, research, innovation, and civic engagement.

Flexible career development paths and the importance of parity of esteem between teaching and learning and research

Associations of European universities pointed out that academic careers are still rooted in an outdated concept of linear paths, which mainly focus on research. The survey showed that most academic staff still perceive research and innovation as having the greatest impact on their career development while indicating that career pathways are rigid and do not allow for change in the balance of academic staff roles (e.g. teaching and learning, community engagement, research, internationalisation, participation in management and leadership).

The Call for Evidence indicated several obstacles to the development of flexible cross-sectoral career pathways such as lack of entrepreneurship, education and career development programmes, insufficient recognition of teaching and collaboration-based pathways, and of prior or non-formal learning.

Financing models in higher education

The survey identified the need for sufficient funding, which has a direct impact on ensuring sustainable and attractive career conditions, as a significant challenge. The topic was also widely discussed in the Call for Evidence emphasising the need for long-term and sustainable core public funding.

Institutional structures

Transparent and inclusive governance structures in higher education institutions are essential as they influence human resource management and the rewards system. The Call for Evidence highlighted that robust frameworks and strategies for human resources and cross-sectoral collaboration would increase attractiveness of academic careers.

Academic freedom and values

The protection of academic freedom and institutional autonomy is key to protecting the activity of academic staff and their work conditions. Contributions to the Call for Evidence further highlighted the importance of academic freedom, diversity, and gender equality to unlock innovation in the higher education sector.

Inclusion and equity

The survey revealed that policies related to disabilities are more visible than policies relating to diversity. Respondents had more positive attitudes towards policies to avoid discrimination and include people with disabilities than policies and actions ensuring equal representation.

The lack of an inclusive environment with the necessary accommodations for academics with a disability, chronic illnesses, or neurodivergence, discourages them from disclosing their disability and pushes them to impose additional expectations on themselves about their performance to the detriment of their health.

The Call for Evidence drew attention to additional disadvantaged groups like people with caring duties or academics from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and to the need to address diversity and inclusion not only at hiring but also at the employment stage.

Achieving gender balance

Gender balance among academic staff is a particularly concerning issue. Survey results showed that while most respondents agree that there are policies in place to ensure gender balance in their higher education institutions, most of them consider that this is not reflected in a more equitable gender balance among academic staff. These perceptions are shared more strongly among female respondents than among male respondents, with the former tending to disagree more regarding the existence and effectiveness of the policies in place.

The Call for Evidence also noted increasing underrepresentation of women in higher academic positions, indicating a need for policies ensuring gender balance and preventing gender-based violence at all career stages.

Lack of data and resources on academic careers

The lack of reliable and disaggregated data on academic careers is an additional challenge. Promoting equality, diversity, fairness, and inclusion in academic careers – from recruitment to training, funding opportunities, and career promotion – requires the collection and use of timely and reliable data to inform institutional policies and legislation. However, higher education institutions often lack tools and processes to collect data that allow them to monitor the effectiveness of their policies in practice, and while European data platforms exist, they tend to operate in silos and lack granularity.

Proposed solutions

The consultations converged on the need to make academic careers attractive, flexible, and sustainable. Stakeholders agreed that a key aim of the European framework for academic careers must be to ensure parity of esteem between research and teaching, as well as the other missions of higher education institutions.

This should be reflected in updated recognition and rewards systems and recruitment and promotion policies that equally encourage different career pathways, both within academia and across sectors, and provide opportunities for both horizontal and vertical development.

Remuneration of academic staff across European universities and between roles must be fair, meet cost-of-living-standards, and be attractive compared to other sectors in order to prevent brain drain among academics. Social protection should be afforded to all academic staff across the EU irrespective of their employment status or role.

Sustainable financial models in higher education are required. Higher education institutions must have sufficient and adequate core funding that is not dependant on simple metrics (e.g., number of students or research publications) and be able to diversify funding streams.

Institutional structures and decision-making bodies in higher education institutions should be transparent and inclusive, ensuring gender equality. Initiatives to tackle imbalances and discrimination should be implemented, such as mentoring programmes for female academics or institutional structures to enhance gender balance ('gender contact person' or diversity charters) at all career stages. Mechanisms must be in place to strengthen and recognise the role of teaching ('pedagogical skills coordinator') and ensure equitable workload management policies.

Promoting and respecting equality, diversity, fairness, and inclusion at all stages of academic careers requires the continuous collection and use of reliable and disaggregated data, which must be encouraged in full compliance with data protection laws. There is also a need to build better connectivity across excellent teaching and learning centres and provide academics with accessible databases of innovative centres and the professional development and training offers that they provide.

Finally, the Call for Evidence and the consultations, particularly with representatives of higher education institutions, also pointed to the need to ensure synergies with the Council Recommendation on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe, adopted in December 2023, particularly on aspects such as careers, progression, salaries, reward, inclusion, gender equality, mobility, and transnational cooperation.

Youth check

Building on the achievements of the 2022 European Year of Youth, the Commission adopted a Communication in January 2024[437] setting out a series of actions to give young people a greater say in the decisions that affect them and to reinforce the youth dimension in a range of EU policies. In the Communication, the Commission committed itself to applying a 'youth check' when designing EU policies to ensure that their impact on young people is systematically factored in.

The consultation process leading up to the adoption of the blueprint towards a future European degree and the accompanying Council Recommendations has provided an opportunity to pioneer the youth check process and to deliver on the promises made. The youth check of the initiative started before the adoption of the package and will continue beyond its date. It consists of four targeted meetings:

- Consultative webinar with youth representatives (12 February 2024).
- Panel discussion during the European Youth Conference organised as part of the EU Youth Dialogue (2 March 2024).
- Breakout session during the European Youth Week (12 April 2024).
- Youth Policy Dialogue with Commissioner Illiana Ivanova (19 April 2024).

The results of the first two meetings and earlier targeted consultations with youth representatives revealed that young people welcome the European degree initiative. In particular, young people recognise the importance and value of an international learning experience. Among the key factors that would attract them to enrol in European degrees were labour market relevance, innovative teaching, learning and assessment methods, and transnational cooperation between higher education institutions.

[437] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European Year of Youth 2022, 10 January 2024, COM(2024) 1 final. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2024:1:FIN

At the same time, young people stressed that inclusiveness and wide accessibility of European degree programmes should be the guiding principle of any proposed initiative. Youth representatives also underlined the importance of appropriate student involvement in the design and delivery of joint degree programmes, the need to safeguard student rights, and the need to include a local perspective in European policymaking. Some expressed concerns about the implementation of the initiative in the light of decreasing education budgets in EU Member States.

The Council Recommendations on quality assurance and recognition systems and on attractive and sustainable academic careers were also viewed positively by young people. Facilitating the recognition of learning experiences abroad was seen as a key factor in increasing student mobility in certain countries. Regarding academic careers, young people articulated the need to make academic careers more attractive to students and to address the precarious conditions of student jobs and early career researchers.

Conclusions

The results of the extensive stakeholder consultations revealed that a Commission Communication on a blueprint towards a European degree, together with Council Recommendations on quality assurance and recognition system and on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education, are welcomed. Stakeholders have clearly recognised the relevance of the interventions and their added value for the further development of the European Education Area.

During the consultation process, stakeholders shed light on a number of challenges and obstacles to increased and seamless cooperation between higher education institutions in Europe and called for more institutionalised forms of cooperation. The barriers identified ranged from incompatibility of legal systems to financial and administrative burdens. Against this background, some stakeholders considered that a European degree and accompanying Council recommendations could provide an answer to many of the identified obstacles, while at the same time contributing to the enhancement of the global reputation of European higher education and the creation of a European identity.

Notwithstanding this, stakeholders encouraged to ensure that the future European degree, as well as the underlying criteria, remain accessible to the widest possible range of higher education institutions, inclusive, labour market relevant and respectful of the principles of academic freedom and diversity. Furthermore, there is a need for ongoing discussion platforms on the future of a European degree, going beyond the consultation process accompanying the adoption of the initiative.

With regard to the quality assurance and recognition system, stakeholders were generally unanimous that the existing status quo creates unnecessary administrative burdens and disincentives the creation of new joint degree programmes and the promotion of short-term mobility initiatives. The consultations highlighted the inadequate implementation of the Bologna Process instruments and the need for a feedback cycle between the quality assurance system and societal needs. Stakeholders welcomed measures to facilitate the automatic recognition of learning outcomes and advocated the promotion of a European culture of trust between recognition bodies.

Finally, the consultations revealed that not all career paths are equally valued within the wide diversity of higher education institutions in Europe. Stakeholders drew attention to the sometimes precarious working conditions of higher education staff, decreasing job security and unbalanced workload pressures. This calls for a review of appraisal systems and greater recognition of work undertaken in transnational cooperation, achieving parity of esteem between teaching and learning and research, a review of human resources frameworks and policies, and the provision of sustainable public funding for higher education institutions. Stakeholders also stressed that any reforms should be accompanied by measures to create a non-discriminatory working environment, ensuring equal treatment and opportunities for the most disadvantaged groups.

ANNEX II: Revised list of criteria for a European degree

European degree (label) criteria			European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF) Levels
Transnational programme organisation and management	Higher education institutions involved	The joint programme is offered by at least 2 higher education institutions from at least 2 different EU Member States.	6, 7, 8
	Transnational joint degree delivery	The joint programme is jointly designed and jointly delivered by all the higher education institutions involved.	6, 7, 8
		The joint programme leads to the award of a joint degree.	6, 7, 8
		A joint diploma supplement is issued to students.	6, 7
		The joint programme describes the learning outcomes and credits in line with the ECTS Users Guide.	6, 7
	Joint arrangements for the joint programme	The joint programme has joint policies, procedures and/or arrangements defining curriculum planning and delivery, as well as all organisational and administrative matters. Students' representatives are part of the decision-making process to define the joint policies and procedures and/or arrangements.	6, 7, 8
	Quality assurance arrangements	Internal and external Quality Assurance is conducted in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The higher education institutions, the study field or the programme are evaluated by an EQAR registered agency.	6, 7, 8
		The joint programme is evaluated using the standards of European approach for quality assurance of joint programmes.	6, 7, 8
	Graduate tracking	The joint programme monitors graduates through a graduate tracking system.	6, 7, 8

European degree (label) criteria			European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF) Levels
Learning experience	Student-centred learning	The joint programme is designed and continuously enhanced and delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in the learning process. Assessment of students reflects this approach.	6, 7, 8
	Interdisciplinarity	The joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinarity components.	6, 7, 8
	Labour market relevance	The joint programme aligns with labour market requirements by incorporating intersectoral components or activities and the development of transversal skills.	6, 7, 8
	Digital skills	The joint programme includes components and actions related to the development of advanced digital skills of students, tailored to the capacities and circumstances of the joint programme, ensuring alignment with its scope and scholarly focus.	6, 7, 8
	Transnational campus – access to services	The programme has joint policies for students and staff to have access to relevant services in all participating higher education institutions in equivalent conditions as all enrolled students and local staff.	6, 7, 8
	Flexible and embedded student mobility	The joint programme offers deep intercultural experience, including a minimum of 1 period of student physical mobility (that can be split in several stays) at another or several partner institution(s) representing overall at least 60 ECTS at EQF 6 level and 30 ECTS at EQF 7 level. The joint programme has a policy offering alternatives for students who are unable to travel.	6, 7
		The joint programme offers deep intercultural experience, including a total of at least 6 months of physical mobility at another or several partner institution(s). The joint programme has a policy offering alternatives for students who are unable to travel.	8
	Co-evaluation and co-supervision for dissertations	Dissertations are supervised by at least 2 supervisors and co-evaluated by co-supervisors or a committee	8

European degree (label) criteria			European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF) Levels
		with members from at least 2 different institutions located in 2 different countries.	
European Values	Democratic values	The joint programme's joint policies promote and adhere to democratic values.	6, 7, 8
	Multilingualism	During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different EU languages.	6, 7, 8
	Inclusiveness	The joint programme commits to wide participation by fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion and by adopting tailored measures to support students and staff with less opportunities.	6, 7, 8
		The joint programme commits to respect the principles of the European Charter for Researchers.	8
	Green transition	The joint programme has policies and actions related to environmental sustainability and implements measures to minimise the environmental footprint of its activities.	6,7,8

ANNEX III: List of barriers to the delivery of joint programmes and joint degrees identified by experts in the context of the Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects on a joint European degree label

This list is based on deliverables produced by six Erasmus+ European policy experimentation projects on the basis of interviews, surveys, workshops, focus groups and other activities. The list cannot be considered as exhaustive considering the lack of data collected from certain regions/countries and representing the perspective of practitioners.

Barriers must be understood as a national or regional specific rule (or lack of rule) that has been reported as presenting complications for the establishment of joint programmes and joint degrees without judgement on whether the rule is justified or not.

Type of barrier	Identified information	Countries
Barriers linked to accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, HR, CZ, EL, PT, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	BE-FL, CY, DK, FR, EL, ES, HU, IT, LT, NL, PL, RO
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Restrictions to the creation of joint degree programmes.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FR, LT, PL, RO
	No information.	AT, BE-FR, BE-FL, BG, DK, EE, FI, HR, HU, IE, IT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PT, SE, SI, SK
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, CY, DK, EL, ES, HR, FI, NL, PT
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	BE-FL, CZ, FR, HU, IT, LT, PL, RO, SE

Type of barrier	Identified information	Countries
	No information.	BE, BG, DE, EE, IE, LV, LU, MT, SI, SK
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	HR, NL, RO
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, BE-FL, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, PL, PT, SE
	No information.	BE-FR, LV, LU, MT, SI, SK
Requirements for a new accreditation procedure for changes in consortium partners or curriculum change.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, BE-FL, CZ, DK, FR, LT, NL, PT, RO, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	CY, ES, EL, FI, HR, HU, IT, PL
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
High accreditation costs	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, BE-FL, CY, CZ, DK, ES, FI, FR, EL, HR, HU, IT, LT, PL, PT, RO, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	EE, LV, NL
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, IE, LU, MT, SI, SK
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of joint programmes.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, DK, HR, LT, NL, PL, PT
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	BE-FL, BG, DE, EE, EI, EL, ES, FI, LU, HU, CY, CZ, FR, IT, LV, RO SE, SI, SK

Type of barrier	Identified information	Countries
	No information.	BE-FR, MT
Differences in academic years.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, BE-FL, CZ, DK, ES, FI, FR, HU, LT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	CY, EL, HR, IT
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	BE-FL, DK, ES, FI, HR, PT, RO, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects	AT, CY, CZ, FR, EL, HU, IT, LT, NL, PL
	No information	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LV, LU, MT, SI, SK
Recognition of blended/online learning.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects	AT, BE-FL, CY, FI, HR, HU, NL, PT, RO
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	CZ, DK, ES, FR, EL, LT, IT, PL, SE
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LV, LU, MT, SI, SK
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	BE-FL, CY, DK, ES, HR, NL, PT, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, CZ, FI, EL, HU, IT, LT, PL, RO
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, FR, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Minimum requirements in terms of physical presence.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	CY, CZ, DK, ES, IT, PT, SE

Type of barrier	Identified information	Countries
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, BE-FR, BE-FL, DE, EE, FI, FR, EL, HR, HU, IE, LT, LV, NL, PL, RO, SI
	No information.	BG, LU, MT, SK
Possibility of postponement of studies (due to pregnancy, illness etc.).	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, CY, DK, ES, FR, HR, IT, LT, NL, PT, RO
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	BE-FL, CZ, EL, FI, HU, PL, SE
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, ES, EL, HR, HU, PT, RO, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	BE-FL, CY, CZ, DK, FI, FR, IT, LT, NL, PL
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Different intellectual property rights legislation (development for course material).	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, CY, DK, ES, FR, EL, HR, HU, IT, LT, PL, PT, RO
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	BE-FL, CZ, FI, NL, SE
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Requirements related to regulated professions.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, HR, LT, RO, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	BE, CY, CZ, DK, ES, FI, FR, EL, HU, IT, NL, PL, PT

Type of barrier	Identified information	Countries
	No information.	BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Requirements for consortium agreements.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	/
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, BE-FR, BE-FL, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FR, EL, HR, HU, IT, LT, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK
	No information.	BG, CY, FI, IE, LU, LV, SI
Obligation of double or single enrolment of students in chosen universities.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, BE-FL, CY, DK, ES, EL, HR, IT, LT, PL, PT, RO, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	CZ, FI, FR, HU, NL
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Requirements regarding tuition fees.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, CY, CZ, HR, HU, PT, RO
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	BE-FL, DK, ES, FI, FR, EL, IT, LT, NL, PL, SE
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	No barrier reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	AT, CZ, ES, HR, NL, PL, PT, RO
	Barriers reported by E+ policy experimentation projects.	BE-FL, CY, DK, FI, FR, EL, HU, LT, IT, SE

Type of barrier	Identified information	Countries
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK

Barriers reported per EU Member States

Austria	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Joint degrees may face issues if supporting country-specific documents differ. Specific documents are required to validate the degree title within the country, even for international joint degrees.
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	Austrian legislation mandates the use of a specific grading scale with no exception for joint programmes.
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations (not common in all countries). Minimum requirements in terms of duration (min. number of semesters to be spent at the home university).	The procedure for final examination is regulated with no exception for joint programmes. There are minimum credit requirements (usually 30 or 60 ECTS) that students must obtain at partner institutions to receive their joint degree which limits the possibility for multilateral cooperation models.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	The establishment of a consortium agreement is mandatory between partners.

Belgium	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Regulated professions.	Access to the profession in medicine is regulated by the federal legislator in Belgium, even though the first cycle and second cycle degree programmes are regulated by the Flemish legislator.

Requirements for consortium agreements.	The establishment of a consortium agreement is mandatory between partners.

Belgium-Flanders	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and time frame.	Specific timelines for accreditation procedures that start rather early (with an exception for European Universities but not for other joint programmes). A country-specific test on macro-efficiency in the local context is required (with exceptions for European Universities and Erasmus Mundus but not for other joint programmes).
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	Interdisciplinary degrees require universities to offer all related initial degrees. Only universities with existing second cycle degrees can establish interdisciplinary programmes. Degree titles are regulated by both the institution and its location, hindering course integration for joint degrees.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of joint programmes.	Joint doctoral programmes require accreditation from all participating institutions.
Minimum requirements in terms of duration (min. number of semesters to be spent at the home university).	Minimum requirement of physical mobility for joint bachelor and masters programmes, with students acquiring at least 20 credits at institutions other than their initial enrolment. Joint doctoral programmes require a minimum of six months' mobility. For joint PhDs, Flemish law mandates a minimum six-month stay in Flanders for PhD students.
Postponement of studies (due to pregnancy, illness etc.).	Students need to pass the first-year courses in a two-year time period.
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme .	Quota on the number of foreign language programmes. Programmes need to have an equivalent in the national language. Joint programmes in international cooperation can be conducted in two official languages of the EU.

Different intellectual property rights legislation (development for course material).	Students/researchers themselves own the products of their work.
Regulated professions.	Access to the profession in medicine is regulated by the federal legislator in Belgium, even though the first cycle and second cycle degree programmes are regulated by the Flemish legislator.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Tuition fees.	Fees are regulated by law for first degree and second degree programmes.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	It is possible to impose limits of admitted students in initial first cycle degree programmes for students who hold a degree of secondary education.

Bulgaria	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Specific requirements exist for degree parchments, including paper format, watermarks, and official suppliers.

Croatia	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Requirements for a new accreditation procedure for changes in consortium partners or curriculum change.	Modifications in the programme structure necessitate re-accreditation.
Differences in academic years.	Barrier reported.
Minimum requirements in terms of duration (min. number of semesters to be spent at the home university).	Barrier reported.

Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners. The consortium agreement must clarify enrolment conditions, examination, and evaluation methods for students.

Cyprus	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and time frame.	Barrier reported.
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	Absence of a robust national framework specifically designed for joint programmes with extensive mobility schemes.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Barrier reported.
Requirements for a new accreditation procedure for changes in consortium partners or curriculum change.	Significant modifications in the programme structure necessitate re-accreditation.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	Cyprus mandates the use of its own accreditation agency or requires its consent for accreditation.
Differences in academic years.	Barrier reported.
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	Challenges arise in aligning arithmetic grading systems with letter grading, especially when the correspondence between the two is not straightforward.
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	Barrier reported.
Restrictions related to regulated professions	Barrier reported.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Different rules for distance learning/online programmes and for face-to-face programmes, as

	well as different rules for EU citizens, and non-EU citizens.

Czechia	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	Lack of an adequate national framework specifically for joint programmes involving extensive mobility schemes.
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	A single discipline must represent over 50% in interdisciplinary degrees, determining the programme's classification code.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Diplomas must include the degree name, abbreviation, and a reference to the specific section of the relevant Act (e.g., "Magistr" (Mgr.) awarded under Act No. 111/1998 Coll.).
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	Czechia stated an inability to adopt the European Approach. There is either no or insufficient regulation in Czechia regarding the use of the European Approach.
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	Legislation mandates the use of a specific grading scale.
Recognition of blended/online learning.	The concept of online mobility is not regulated in the Czech legal system. While entire programmes cannot be conducted online, some classes can be, but they must be reported by the universities.
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.	Students in all study programmes must defend a thesis and pass a public state examination in order to graduate.
Possibilities of postponement of studies (due to pregnancy, illness etc.).	Czech legislation specifies the consequences of interruption of studies, but makes an exemption for reasons of parenthood.

Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	A special fee for studying in a foreign language is collected.
Different intellectual property rights legislation (development for course material).	The institution where the student/researcher is affiliated has the main claim to the product of their work. Each final thesis has to be made available to the public for free. Those containing sensitive data can be redacted.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	Programmes related to regulated professions need approval of the responsible ministry.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners
Obligation of double or single enrolment of students in chosen universities.	Enrolment is closely tied to funding.

Germany	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	Applicable to bachelor and masters level only.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Joint degrees may face challenges if the required supporting documents differ between countries. Specific credentials are necessary for the degree title to be recognized within the country, even for international joint degrees. Germany has precise requirements for degree parchments, such as paper format, watermarks, and designated suppliers.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	At least 25% of the programme must be completed at foreign institutions.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.

Denmark	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	The academic profile of the programme must be documented to meet the demands of the local labour market. It is not sufficient to provide a needs analysis of the European/international labour market.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Danish jurisdiction does not recognize distinctions like 'cum laude' on diplomas, affecting joint degrees with countries that do. Danish universities must issue degree certificates within two months of graduation, conflicting with biannual exam boards in other countries.
Recognition of blended/online learning.	Danish legislation does not currently accommodate 'online mobility,' a common feature in joint programmes.
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	Teaching can only be done only in one foreign language (i.e., English).
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Tuition fees.	It is mandatory for Danish universities to charge tuition fee from non-EU citizens but forbidden for EU-citizens.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Detailed regulations about selection to guarantee equal treatment.

Estonia	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules	Over 80% of institutions emphasize the mandatory use of a specific degree template, reflecting a common regulatory practice in Estonia.

High accreditation costs	Higher education institutions bear the costs of accreditation.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence	At least 20% of the joint curriculum must be delivered by a foreign institution.
Requirements for consortium agreements	Obligatory agreement between partners

Finland	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Over 80% of institutions in Finland adhere to a mandatory degree template.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	Reports of a lack of knowledge and understanding concerning the European Approach method.
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.	Finnish law regulates the length of the thesis.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	Minimum requirements in terms of number of credits (or semesters) to be acquired at each partner institution can be requested to get the degree.
Possibilities of postponement of studies (due to pregnancy, illness etc.).	Finland’s Universities' Act regulates the possibility of being absent due to mandatory or discretionary reasons.
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	Programmes need to have an equivalent in the national language. Language proficiency requirements exist.
Different intellectual property rights legislation (development for course material).	Barrier reported.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	Respective ministries regulate the professions that fall under their jurisdiction.

Obligation of double or single enrolment of students in chosen universities.	Students must be enrolled at a Finnish university at the time of graduation.
Tuition fees.	It is not legally permitted to collect fees from EU and EEC students, however Finnish higher education institutions can participate in joint programmes where other partners collect fees.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Detailed regulations about selection to guarantee equal treatment.

France	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	France has early procedural timelines for accreditation, which poses challenges for joint degree creation.
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	French universities can issue diplomas within partnerships only with prior state authorization. French law requires foreign partners to match the capacity to deliver equivalent, recognized diplomas in the same field. Partnerships must be reported to the French ministers of higher education and foreign affairs, with agreements not exceeding five years.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Diploma issuance is strictly regulated, requiring printing on specific parchment from the Imprimerie Nationale. French language is mandatory on diplomas issued by French institutions. The signatory process for diplomas is complex, with strict rules on who can sign and the non-acceptance of electronic signatures. More than 80% of French institutions are bound by a compulsory degree template.

Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	France is identified as a country with either no or insufficient regulation regarding the use of the European Approach.
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS	At the doctoral level, France does not use ECTS.
Recognition of blended/online learning.	Barrier reported.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	Minimum requirements in terms of number of credits (or semesters) to be acquired at each partner institution can be requested to get the degree.
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	Some portion of any given programme needs to be taught in French. If this requirement is not met, French higher education institutions issue a different kind of diploma (a university diploma instead of a national diploma). Foreign nationals need to demonstrate an understanding of the French language adapted to the planned training.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	Specific regulation exists for regulated professions.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners
Obligation of double or single enrolment of students in chosen universities.	Students must be enrolled at all universities awarding the degree at the time of graduation.
Tuition fees.	Fees are established at a national level, with exemptions possible within the framework of the agreement.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Barrier reported.

Greece	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	Barrier reported.

Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	Obstacles noted in awarding joint degrees on bachelor and master-level.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Over 80% of institutions in Greece adhere to a mandatory degree template.
Requirements for a new accreditation procedure for changes in consortium partners or curriculum change.	Barrier reported.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	Ambiguous legislation that doesn't clearly differentiate between joint and double degrees.
Differences in academic years.	Barrier reported.
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	Bachelor programmes can range from 240 to 360 ECTS.
Recognition of blended/online learning.	Barrier reported.
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.	Doctoral dissertations are evaluated by a seven-member examination committee.
Possibilities of postponement of studies (due to pregnancy, illness etc.).	Barrier reported.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	Barrier reported.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Tuition fees.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Obligatory agreement between partners.

Hungary	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**

Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	Hungary requires political approval, such as a ministerial decree, before or after the accreditation process for joint degrees.
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	Barrier reported.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Hungarian law mandates standard texts for all degree certificates and student status certificates.
Requirements for a new accreditation procedure for changes in consortium partners or curriculum change.	Barrier reported.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	Barrier reported.
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.	Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	Minimum requirements in terms of number of credits (or semesters) to be acquired at each partner institution can be requested to get the degree.
Possibilities of postponement of studies (due to pregnancy, illness etc.).	National regulations for study leave periods exist.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	Civil engineering has strict requirements for certificates that are issued by the Hungarian Chamber of Engineers. There is a given list of topics/competencies with a given number of ECTS that are needed to obtain a certificate.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Obligation of double or single enrolment of students in chosen universities.	Barrier reported.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Detailed regulations about selection of students.

Ireland	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	More than 80% of institutions in Ireland are required to use a specific, compulsory degree template.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	Minimum requirements in terms of number of credits (or semesters) to be acquired at each partner institution can be requested to get the degree.

Italy	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	Deadlines for submitting complete study plans are challenging, often immediately following the January exam period.
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	Second cycle degrees categorized by "classe di laurea" with set educational objectives and ECTS. Elective courses are capped (8-15 ECTS), limiting interdisciplinary options. Ministry evaluates study plans for adherence to objectives, including courses from foreign institutions, which must fit into designated scientific disciplines.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Diplomas must include the degree programme name and "classe di laurea." Joint diplomas are allowed if they list the participating universities, degree programme denomination, and its national equivalents. Italian diplomas must be issued in the name of the Italian Republic and include signatures of the Rector and Director General. Specific requirements for parchments include paper format, watermarks, and official suppliers.

Requirements for a new accreditation procedure for changes in consortium partners or curriculum change.	Significant modifications in the programme structure necessitate re-accreditation.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	Italy stated an inability to adopt the European Approach. There is either no or insufficient regulation regarding the use of the European Approach.
Differences in academic years.	Barrier reported.
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	Legislation mandates the use of a specific grading scale. Italian experts highlight the need for clear resolution protocols in cases of discrepancies within joint programmes.
Recognition of blended/online learning.	Italy allows a maximum of 10% of ECTS credits for blended/online courses. Online final exams are generally not allowed.
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.	The number of final exams is regulated in Italy. The legislation does not allow online final exams (with a list of well-defined exceptions) even if the teaching took place online. A maximum of 12 exams is allowed for a second cycle degree (elective courses, further educational activities and thesis are not included).
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	Legislations allows universities to have a maximum of 50% of foreign teachers as “core” of the programme.
Tuition fees.	If the coordinating university where students are enrolled is an Italian university, the law states that the fee is calculated on the base of student's income conditions.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Quotas distinguishing between non-EU and EU students.

Latvia	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
High accreditation costs.	Higher education institutions bear the costs of accreditation.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	The European Approach is not available in Latvia for accreditation purposes.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	Each partner needs to deliver at least 10% of the entire programme.

Lithuania	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	Internal agreement and signature collection are slow and complex, more so than legislative issues, especially with multiple universities or European University structures involved. This can delay the accreditation process if signatures are required beforehand.
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	Lithuania permits the issuance of joint diplomas exclusively for bachelor's and master's level programmes.
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	Programs may cover up to three study fields, but are named after the predominant one. Accreditation of joint specializations is constrained by the need to conform to the main field's criteria, demanding a minimum of 50% of credits. Certain engineering subjects are not allowed to be combined.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Barrier reported.

Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	Lithuania specifies a precise 26.67 hours of work per ECTS. Lithuania specifies ECTS credits for the thesis.
Recognition of blended/online learning.	Lithuania's joint programmes often require physical academic mobility.
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.	Doctoral dissertations are evaluated by a Doctoral Committee consisting of nine high-level research scientists.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	Physical mobility of the student in the joint programme is mandatory (of at least 15 credits).
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	The choice of languages must be explicitly stated in the consortium agreement. Language proficiency requirements exist.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners. The consortium agreement is obligated to encompass student admission conditions, study procedures, principles of assessment, and the crediting of student achievements.
Tuition fees.	The standard price of studies is determined in a course or group of courses, and if it is reduced, the state funding also decreases. Entry and registration fees for foreigners are higher due to the need for educational recognition.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Barrier reported.

The Netherlands	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	A report on a macro-efficiency test in the local context needs to be done before a new programme can be accredited.

High accreditation costs.	Higher education institutions bear the costs of accreditation. Advocates for a single accreditation process for joint programmes argue it should eliminate the need for multiple payments across countries, reducing workload and costs.
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	Each ECTS credit represents 28 hours of study.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	For study programmes that receive government funding, at least 25% of the teaching should take place in the Netherlands.
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	Barrier reported.
Different intellectual property rights legislation (development for course material).	Barrier reported.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	Barrier reported.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Obligation of double or single enrolment of students in chosen universities.	Enrolment is closely tied to the funding of higher education institutions. Details regarding enrolment for joint programmes can be mutually agreed upon in the consortium agreement. In the case of a joint programmes the university can still request that students are enrolled at the Dutch university for the whole period.
Tuition fees.	Experts point out that restrictive rules on the ability to raise tuition fees add complexity to the administration of joint programmes.

Poland	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**

Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	Legal frameworks require government action, such as a ministerial decree, either before or after accreditation to ensure the joint programme aligns with national degree standards, which can further complicate and prolong the process.
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	Polish higher education law allows only certain university categories to offer joint degrees with foreign institutions, with distinct regulations for joint doctoral programmes. Poland is among the countries reported to lack a comprehensive national framework specifically designed for joint programmes with extensive mobility components.
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	Universities are required to assign each field of study to at least one discipline. For fields covering multiple disciplines, one is identified as primary, with over half of the learning outcomes linked to it.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	National legislation requires diplomas issued by Polish universities to be in Polish as an original public document, with translations only allowed in copies. Over 80% of Polish institutions must adhere to a compulsory degree template.
Requirements for a new accreditation procedure for changes in consortium partners or curriculum change.	Barrier reported
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	Poland offers bachelor programmes ranging from 180 to 240 ECTS. At least half of the ECTS should be obtained “in classes” directly involving academic teachers or other lecturers and students, thus limiting time for written assignments or project/individual work.
Recognition of blended/online learning.	A review committee for thesis evaluation includes a minimum of three persons, possibly from foreign institutions.
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.	Doctoral dissertations are evaluated by a Doctoral Committee consisting of nine high-level research scientists.

Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	Certain programmes that differ from the regular duration (for example, 7 semesters for engineering). Regulations indicate that students may participate in short-term mobility abroad for studies or internships, lasting from 5 to 30 days, which must include a virtual component, either before or after the physical mobility period.
Possibilities of postponement of studies (due to pregnancy, illness etc.).	National regulations for study leave periods exist.
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	A special fee for studying in a foreign language is collected. If English is chosen as the language of teaching for the joint programme, then the whole programme must be taught in English.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	The Act on Higher Education and Science lists concrete professions for which the educational standards need to be met.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Tuition fees.	Barrier reported.

Portugal	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Portugal has strict requirements for degree parchments, including specific paper format, watermarks, and designated official suppliers.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	Barrier reported.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.

Romania

Type of barrier	Barrier(s) reported
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	Barrier reported.
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	Although the law theoretically allows for the organisation and accreditation of joint degrees, it's not feasible in practice until ARACIS publishes its "Methodology for accreditation of Joint programmes".
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	Interdisciplinary programmes are regulated in the law only for doctoral studies.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	Although the European Approach is theoretically available, practical implementation is pending until ARACIS finalizes the "Methodology for accreditation of Joint programmes."
Final exams form – possible national/state examinations.	Integrated study programme completion involves a licensing exam, second-cycle integrated programmes require publicly defending a dissertation.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	At master level: at least 1 year has to be studied in Romania; number of ECTS for one semester is 30.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners

Slovenia	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	Minimum requirements in terms of number of credits (or semesters) to be acquired at each partner institution can be requested to get the degree.

Slovakia	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**

Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	European Approach is not available.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.

Spain	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	Existing need for market analysis tailored to specific national criteria.
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	Spain is among the countries reported to lack a comprehensive national framework specifically designed for joint programmes with extensive mobility components.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Diplomas must feature the name of the King, the Spanish shield, and be in Spanish, as mandated by legislation. Lack of specific legislation for joint degrees creates challenges due to the absence of clear guidance. The signature process for diplomas is complex, with limited flexibility on signatory authority and the non-acceptance of electronic signatures.
Requirements for a new accreditation procedure for changes in consortium partners or curriculum change.	Significant modifications in the programme structure necessitate re-accreditation.
Recognition of blended/online learning.	Barrier reported.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	The Spanish Ministry publishes ministerial orders regulating these professions, that are negotiated with the respective other Ministers.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Tuition fees.	Barrier reported.

Sweden	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	Degrees specify minimum credits in core subjects like chemistry and mathematics, limiting the scope for multidisciplinary studies within the credit constraints of a degree.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	The Degree Certificate must include the student's name, registration number, qualification title in both Swedish and English, cycle of award, reference to joint degree legal framework, list of completed courses from each university, and legal framework contact details. Over 80% of Swedish institutions are required to use a compulsory degree template.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	European Approach is not available
Recognition of blended/online learning.	Swedish legislation does not mention digital learning, leading to uncertainties.
Different intellectual property rights legislation (development for course material).	Students/researchers themselves own the products of their work.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	Regulated professions exist in some academic areas, especially in the area of health.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners
Tuition fees.	Mandatory tuition fee for non-European students on first degree and second-degree level and Swedish universities may not charge any fee for students from an EU/EEA country. On PhD-level no tuition fee can be charged.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Detailed regulations about selection to guarantee equal treatment.

ANNEX IV: Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Academic staff in higher education	Staff whose primary or major assignment is instruction or research in institutions offering programmes at International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED[438]) levels 5 to 8. The targeted staff include staff based at higher education institutions who do both teaching and research and staff who do teaching only or teaching mostly, regardless of the status and contractual conditions of the staff.
Automatic mutual recognition of a qualification	The right for holders of a qualification of a certain level that has been issued by one Member State to be considered for entry to a higher education programme in the next level in any other Member State, without having to go through any separate recognition procedure[439].
Automatic mutual recognition of the outcomes of a learning period abroad: at higher education level,	The right to have the learning outcomes of a learning period recognised: as agreed beforehand in a learning agreement and confirmed in the Transcript of Records, in line with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Concretely, it means applying the rule set out in the 2015 ECTS Users' Guide that states that: '[a]ll credits gained during the period of study abroad or during the virtual mobility – as agreed in the Learning Agreement and confirmed by the Transcript of Records – should be transferred without delay and counted towards the students' degree without any additional work or assessment of the student'[440].
Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG)	The Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) is the executive structure supporting the Bologna Process between ministerial meetings (organised every two or three years) and overseeing the implementation of the ensuing decisions adopted in the form of ministerial communiqués [441]. BFUG membership is based on the membership of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)[442].
Bologna Process	The Bologna Process [443], launched with the Bologna Declaration of 1999, is one of the main voluntary reform processes at European level. It aims to bring more coherence to higher education systems across Europe. It consists of a series of ministerial; meetings and agreements between countries that belong to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

[438] UNESCO, *International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)*, https://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/international-standard-classification-education-isced

[439] Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (OJ C, C/444, 10.12.2018, p. 1, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1568891859235&uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)

[440] Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (OJ C, C/444, 10.12.2018, , https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1568891859235&uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01) Ibid.

[441] European Agency for Higher Education and Accreditation (EHEA), Bologna Follow-up Group, https://www.ehea.info/page-the-bologna-follow-up-group

[442] European Agency for Higher Education and Accreditation (EHEA), Members, https://www.ehea.info/page-members

[443] European Agency for Higher Education and Accreditation (EHEA), *How does the bologna process work?* https://www.ehea.info/page-how-does-the-bologna-process-work

Combined approach to external quality assurance	Refers to a situation where a higher education system has both institutional and programme approaches to external quality assurance.
Competent Authority	An individual or organisation that has the legally delegated or invested authority, capacity or power to perform a designated function[444].
Credit Transfer	A process that allows credit awarded by one higher education awarding body to be recognised and count towards the requirements of a programme at another institution; or that allows credit gained on a particular programme to contribute towards the requirements of a different one[445].
Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR)	DEQAR was launched in 2018 to provide access to the reports and accreditation decisions of EQAR-registered agencies[446].
Diploma Supplement	The Diploma Supplement is a document accompanying a higher education diploma, providing a standardised description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies completed by its holder. It is produced by the higher education institutions according to standards agreed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO. The Diploma Supplement is also part of the Europass framework transparency tools. It has eight sections of information: the holder of the qualification; the qualification; its level and function; the contents and results gained; certification of the supplement; details of the national higher education system concerned (provided by the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICs)); any additional relevant information. Graduates in all the countries taking part in the Bologna Process have the right to receive the Diploma Supplement automatically, free and in a major European language[447]. A diploma supplement issued with a joint degree should clearly describe all parts of the degree, and it should clearly indicate at which institutions and/or in which study programmes the different parts of the degree have been earned[448].

[444] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, ECTS users' guide 2015, Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/ects-users-guide_en.pdf

[445] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, ECTS users' guide 2015, Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/ects-users-guide_en.pdf

[446] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *Database of External QA Results (DEQAR)*, https://www.eqar.eu/about/annual-reports/2020-2/database-of-external-qa-results-deqar/

[447] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, ECTS users' guide 2015, Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/da7467e6-8450-11e5-b8b7-01aa75ed71a1

[448] Council of Europe/UNESCO-CEPES, Revised Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees, 2016, https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/Revised_Recommendation_on_the_Recognition_of_Joint_Degrees_2016.pdf

Double degree	A double degree is a specific type of multiple degree. Each degree must be signed by the competent authority of the institution concerned, and recognised officially in the countries where the different awarding institutions are located[449].
E4 Group	The E4 Group entails cooperation between four organisations: the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European University Association (EUA) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) [450]. The E4 Group developed the key principles of the European Approach and are the founding members of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).
Europass	Europass[451] is a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications adopted in April 2018. The Europass platform launched in July 2020 by the European Commission provides free tools and information to support people in their lifelong learning and career management. Europass offers people the possibility to create a profile to record skills, qualifications and experiences in a secure online location and a CV and cover letter builder to effectively communicate their skills and qualifications in Europe in 31 different languages .The platform provides web-based tools for: - documenting and describing skills and qualifications acquired through working and learning experiences, including through mobility and volunteering; - supporting authentication services for any digital documents or representations of information on skills and qualifications (European Digital Credential for Learning); - self-assessing digital skills; - documenting the learning outcomes of qualifications, including the Europass supplement templates (the Diploma Supplement, the Certificate Supplement and Europass Mobility). Moreover, Europass offers: - information on job opportunities provided by EURES (European employment services); - information or links on learning opportunities, on qualifications and qualifications frameworks or systems in line with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), on opportunities for validating non-formal and informal learning, and on recognition practices and relevant legislation in different countries, including non-EU countries; - information on services providing guidance on transnational learning mobility and career management; - skills intelligence as produced as part of EU activities and agencies within their areas of responsibility;

[449] European Commission, Erasmus+: EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, *Glossary of terms – Higher Education*, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-d/glossary-higher-education
[450] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), EQAR's Founders: the E4 Group, https://www.eqar.eu/e4-group/
[451] European Commission, *About Europass*, https://europa.eu/europass/en/about-europass

	- and information on skills and qualifications that could be relevant to the particular needs of non-EU nationals arriving or residing in the EU to support their integration. Europass also provides open standards available free of charge for reuse by Member States and other stakeholders.
European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (European Approach)	Endorsed by Education Ministers of the European Higher Education Area in 2015, its objective is to improve quality assurance of transnational joint programmes by defining standards based on the ESG without the need to apply additional national criteria[452]. It entails a single review of the joint programme, led by an EQAR-registered quality assurance agency, which can be positive (valid for six years), positive if specific recommendations are met, or negative (with a right of appeal against the decision).
European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)	ENQA is the European Higher Education Area's stakeholder organisation for quality assurance agencies[453]. It was established in the year 2000 to contribute to developing, maintaining, and enhancing quality assurance across all the Bologna Process signatory countries. ENQA currently has 58 full members spanning 56 countries[454].
European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)	The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer, based on the principle of transparency of learning, teaching and assessment processes. Its objective is to facilitate planning, delivery and evaluation of study programmes and student mobility by recognising learning achievements and qualifications and periods of learning[455]. ECTS credits express the volume of learning based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated workload. 60 ECTS credits are allocated to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a full-time academic year. ECTS credits are generally expressed in whole numbers.
European Education Area (EEA)	The vision for the European Education Area as common space for quality education and lifelong learning across borders for all was set out by the European Commission in 2017[456]. The commitment is to work jointly with Member States towards a

[452] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*, https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/

[453] European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), *ENQA's Mission*, https://www.enqa.eu/about-enqa/

[454] European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), *Member and Affiliate Database*, https://www.enqa.eu/membership-database/

[455] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, ECTS users' guide 2015, Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/da7467e6-8450-11e5-b8b7-01aa75ed71a1

[456] Communication from the Commission on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture: The European Commission's contribution to the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg, 17 November 2017, COM(201)0673, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2017:673:FIN

	European Education Area by 2025 based on trust, mutual recognition, cooperation and the sharing of best practices, mobility and growth[457].
European Higher Education Area (EHEA)	The European Higher Education Area[458] was created in 1999 with the signing of the Bologna Declaration. It is meant to be a common higher education space built on common values and using common tools that ensures comparable, compatible, and coherent higher education systems in Europe. Currently, EHEA members include 49 countries and the European Commission[459]. To become a member of the EHEA, countries have to be party to the European Cultural Convention[460] and to declare their willingness to pursue and implement the objectives of the Bologna Process in their own higher education systems.
European Qualifications Framework (EQF)	The European Qualifications Frameworks is an 8-level, learning outcomes-based framework for all types of qualifications that serves as a translation tool between different national qualifications frameworks[461]. This framework, set up in 2008 and revised in 2017, helps improve transparency, comparability and portability of qualifications and makes it possible to compare qualifications from different countries and institutions. The EQF covers all types and all levels of qualifications and the use of learning outcomes makes it clear what a person knows, understands and is able to do. The level increases according to the level of proficiency (level 1 is the lowest and 8 the highest). The EQF is closely linked to national qualifications frameworks to provide a comprehensive map of all types and levels of qualifications in Europe, which are increasingly accessible through qualification databases.
European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)	EQAR was founded in 2008 by the E4 Group as an independent organisation in charge of establishing and managing a register of quality assurance agencies that work in line with the ESG framework[462]. EQAR currently lists 57 agencies in 31 countries.
External quality assurance	Refers to the quality assurance processes carried out by quality assurance agencies. The aim of the external quality assurance is to assess the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes of the institution, and whether the institution has a sufficiently mature quality culture to ensure the high quality of its learning provisions.

[457] '*A European education area by 2025*', Summary of Communication (COM(2017) 673 final) – Strengthening European identity through education and culture, 2022, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/a-european-education-area-by-2025.html

[458] European Agency for Higher Education and Accreditation (EHEA), https://www.ehea.info/

[459] European Agency for Higher Education and Accreditation (EHEA), *Full members*, https://www.ehea.info/page-full_members. The membership of Belarus and Russia is currently suspended.

[460] Council of Europe, European Cultural Convention (Paris, 1954), https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/european-cultural-convention

[461] Europass, *The European Qualifications Frameworks*, https://europa.eu/europass/en/europass-tools/european-qualifications-framework

[462] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), *Close-up*, https://www.eqar.eu/about/close-up/#history

Higher Education Institution (HEI)	Any type of higher education institution which, in accordance with national law or practice, offers recognised degrees or other recognised tertiary level qualifications, whatever such establishment may be called, as well as any other type of higher education institution which is recognised by the national authorities as belonging to its higher education system.[463]
Institutional approach to external quality assurance	Means that the higher education institution needs to go through a periodic external quality assurance process at institutional level only. It allows the institution to develop and deliver programmes without the need for an external quality review at programme level (this is called self-accreditation in many countries).
Internal quality assurance	Refers to the quality assurance processes carried out internally by the higher education institutions themselves. Higher education institutions have the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance.
Joint degree	A single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme[464].
Joint degree programme	Refers to a joint programme leading to a joint degree.
Joint programme	Refers to an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions, leading to double/multiple degrees or a joint degree[465].
Learning mobility	Learning mobility is normally understood to involve physical mobility in which the learner/student moves to an institution in another country for part or all of a programme of study. The majority of such mobility takes place in the context of planned and organised programmes. The credits from such mobility are formally recognised by the sending institution. There is also a considerable amount of 'free mover' mobility which depends on individual initiative. As well as physical mobility it is increasingly possible for learners to participate in virtual mobility through organised joint or shared curriculum, or through Open Universities, Open Education Resources, MOOCs, or other on-line material[466].
Learning outcome	Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. The achievement of learning outcomes has to be assessed through procedures based on clear and transparent criteria. Learning outcomes are attributed to individual educational components and to programmes as a whole. They are also

[463] Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (OJ C, C/444, 10.12.2018, p. 1, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1568891859235&uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)

[464] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR): https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/definitions/

[465] European Commission, Erasmus+: EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, *Glossary of terms – Higher Education*, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-d/glossary-higher-education

[466] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *ECTS users' guide 2015*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/da7467e6-8450-11e5-b8b7-01aa75ed71a1

	used in European and national qualifications frameworks to describe the level of the individual qualification[467].
Multiple degree	Refers to at least two separate degree certificates awarded to a student upon successful completion of a joint programme. Each degree must be signed by the competent authority of the institution concerned, and recognised officially in the countries where the different awarding institutions are located.
National qualifications frameworks (NQF)	National qualifications frameworks are instruments for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved[468]. National qualifications frameworks encompass all education qualifications – or all higher education qualifications, depending on the policy of the country concerned – in an education system. They show what learners may be expected to know, understand and be able to do on the basis of a given qualification (learning outcomes) as well as how qualifications within a system articulate, that is how learners may move between qualifications in an education system.[469]
Professional services staff	Staff who are not strictly considered "academic staff", but have extensive high-level expertise in strategic, legal or communication functions (in particular in the field of higher education transnational cooperation); professionals working in areas related to academic tasks but with no direct engagement in them (such as training in innovative pedagogical method, or developing curricula); or higher education professionals with extensive knowledge of higher education and other relevant policies (working in quality assurance, human resources or student affairs.
Programme approach to external quality assurance	Means that each individual programme (or group of programmes) to be delivered by one or more higher education institution needs to go through a periodic external quality assurance process review.
Quality Assurance	Refers to the processes, both internal and external, carried out by a higher education institution or quality assurance agency, to ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are equitable and fit for purpose. Quality assurance activities have the twin purposes of: • Accountability: assuring the higher education community and the public of the quality of the higher education institution's activities by compliance with a set of standards. It can be the basis of providing certain rights to the institution: recruiting students, awarding degrees, obtaining public funding. • Enhancement: providing advice and recommendations to and within higher education institutions on how they might improve what they are doing.

[467] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *ECTS users' guide 2015*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/da7467e6-8450-11e5-b8b7-01aa75ed71a1

[468] Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (OJ C, C/398, 22.12.2012, p. 1, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF

[469] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, ECTS users' guide 2015, Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/da7467e6-8450-11e5-b8b7-01aa75ed71a1

	Taken together, accountability and enhancement create trust in the higher education institution's performance. Quality assurance can take place at programme or institutional level or through a combined approach.
Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG):	A set of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance in higher education, developed within the Bologna Process[470]. The ESG were first adopted by Ministers of the European Higher Education Area in 2005[471], and were revised in 2015[472].
Workload	An estimation of the time learners typically need to complete all learning activities such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, work placements, and individual study required to achieve the defined learning outcomes in formal learning environments. The correspondence of the full-time workload of an academic year to 60 credits is often formalised by national legal provisions. In most cases, student workload ranges from 1,500 to 1,800 hours for an academic year, which means that one credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work. It should be recognised that this represents the normal workload and that for individual learners the actual time to achieve the learning outcomes will vary.[473]

[470] '*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*', Brussels, 2015. https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

[471] European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, '*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*', 2005, https://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/ENQA/05/3/ENQA-Bergen-Report_579053.pdf

[472] European Higher Education Area (EHEA), *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, https://www.ehea.info/page-standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance

[473] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *ECTS users' guide 2015*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/da7467e6-8450-11e5-b8b7-01aa75ed71a1