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ED-AFFICHE

European Degree Label



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“Strong coordination” from European Commission needed to advance European Degree - ED-AFFICHE’s response to Higher Education Package

ED-AFFICHE, a leading higher education consortium piloting the European Degree, is calling on the European Commission to take a proactive role in coordinating collaboration between all major actors across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to make the European Degree a reality. The call comes in response to the European Commission’s new Higher Education Package including a blueprint for a European Degree, which was unveiled on 27 March.

ED-AFFICHE is a powerhouse consortium of 51 higher education institutions (HEIs) from six European Universities alliances (Una Europa, 4EU+, CHARM-EU, EC2U, EU-CONEXUS, Unite!). In consultation with higher education ministries, quality assurance agencies, students and employers, the consortium has spent the past year co-developing a vision for the European Degree and identifying concrete steps towards its realisation as an instrument to overcome existing legislative and administrative obstacles to developing transnational joint degrees in Europe. Now, the consortium calls on the European Commission to develop processes to support the continuation and scaling up of the close collaboration initiated under ED-AFFICHE and all European Degree pilot experimentation projects.

The European Commission’s blueprint for a European Degree proposes several actions for supporting Member States and the wider EHEA, including a policy lab ‘to develop detailed guidelines and action plans for the implementation of a European degree’; an annual forum for monitoring progress; and new support from Erasmus+ for Member States and HEIs to work on realising the European Degree.

While these steps demonstrate the European Commission's commitment to facilitating the path towards a European Degree, significant questions remain over how the Commission will take up and support the collaboration and dialogue among key stakeholders already established by pilot experimentation projects like ED-AFFICHE. It is also unclear how the knowledge and expertise gained through these projects will be utilised and implemented moving forward.

“As ED-AFFICHE, we warmly welcome the European Commission's blueprint on the European Degree, in particular the proposed policy lab for connecting key actors and annual forum for monitoring the progress on realising the European Degree. Whatever the European Degree will be, it must be meaningful and it must be ambitious. This means strong coordination from the European Commission is needed – to ensure cooperation between Member States, to develop accompanying funding instruments, to build on existing tools such as the Bologna Process and European Approach, and to secure impact beyond EU Member States to all EHEA countries and beyond.

Kurt Willems, Professor in Education Law at KU Leuven and ED-AFFICHE coordinator.



Kurt Willems, Una Europa

ED-AFFICHE and other consortia piloting the European Degree have pooled essential knowledge and expertise, translated into actionable tools to facilitate the Degree's development and implementation for all key actors. As the European Degree pilot projects end, ED-AFFICHE urges the European Commission to take advantage of the project's achievements as a basis for scaling up and deepening collaboration between key actors to make the European Degree a reality for Europe's students.



Laura Colò, Una Europa and Marta Jaworska-Oknińska, 4EU+

Unprecedented collaboration across the EHEA

ED-AFFICHE has worked in continuous collaboration with 19 regional and national higher education ministries, 15 accreditation and quality assurance agencies, around 60 employment representatives, and two student representation organisations, as well as collecting feedback from over 2,500 students from across Europe, to shape a shared vision for the European Degree that meets the needs of Europe's students, academics and employers while integrating with existing processes and tools for developing and implementing joint degrees. The collaboration has resulted in concrete recommendations for Member States, the European Commission, quality assurance agencies and HEIs on actions they can take to pave the way for the European Degree and joint degrees in general, many of which can be actioned right now.

“ The work being done on the European diploma label is confronting us with the many limitations and challenges we face as Europeans. The ED-AFFICHE project has embodied in the best possible way the iterative and collective process that is crucial and a prerequisite for any progress.

Benjamin Dagot, Head of European Affairs at HCERES

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By engaging a diverse range of stakeholders, ED-AFFICHE's vision for the European Degree meets the needs of the market and embodies students' priorities, ensuring that the future European Degree will have real added value to the students who receive it.

“ The European Degree, apart from striving for international cooperation and supporting the achievement of seamless mobility, is an initiative that originates directly from the ground, from the higher education institutions. For the Erasmus Student Network, it has been a privilege to be involved in the ED-AFFICHE pilot project and to contribute to shaping one of the most ambitious higher education policies of our time. Being part of ED-AFFICHE also means being part of something that will hopefully be available to millions of higher education students in Europe in the future: the European Degree. The steps taken by this pilot project were not only significant but also well thought out, considering perspectives from all stakeholders involved. Formulating good policy requires consulting every voice at the table, and we want to thank the ED-AFFICHE team for taking into account all our perspectives and singularities.

Rita Dias, President of the Erasmus Student Network and member of the ED-AFFICHE External Advisory Committee

”

Collaborating with Member States to enact change

Recognising the critical role of Member States in overcoming obstacles to developing and implementing the European Degree, ED-AFFICHE partnered with higher education ministries to identify existing legal hurdles to transnational collaboration across the EHEA and co-develop solutions to facilitate the development of joint programmes.

“ Following the ED-AFFICHE workshop, Polish universities and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education reconvened and translated ideas into tangible outcomes. This collaborative effort culminated in a precise and comprehensive proposal for legislative amendments regarding transnational joint programmes. Zuzanna Hazubska, Head of Minister’s Political Cabinet, Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Poland ”



Meritxell Chaves, CHARM-EU

ED-AFFICHE has facilitated dialogues in 19 of the EU's 27 Member States with legal experts at their higher education institutions on obstacles to transnational collaboration and how the European Degree could act as an enabler to overcome these hurdles. The outcomes of these dialogues have already been taken up by the European Commission to shape the blueprint for a European Degree. With proactive facilitation from the European Commission, Member States will be empowered to leverage the recommendations developed under ED-AFFICHE to streamline the implementation of the European Degree, and joint degrees in general, in dialogue with HEIs as initiated under the pilot experimentation projects.

Next steps for the European Degree

The European Commission blueprint on a European Degree proposes two entry points: a joint European Degree Label; or a European Degree qualification awarded either jointly by several universities from different countries, or by a European legal entity established by such universities.

“When one of the aims of the European Degree is to remove obstacles in national or regional legislation for joint degrees, the difference between the pathway towards a label and the pathway towards a degree might be smaller than one thinks. Both require strong coordination by the European Commission. Both require clear guidance on how the national or regional legal framework should be amended to facilitate the label or the degree. Both require Member States’ agreement. That is of course, as long as the European Commission pushes for a more ambitious vision for the Label, making it more than ‘just a label’ without any legal meaning – which is what the ED-AFFICHE consortium strives for. Kurt Willems, Professor in Education Law at KU Leuven and ED-AFFICHE coordinator.”

To ensure the European Degree has real impact, ED-AFFICHE strongly recommends the European Commission take the following actions:

- Integrate the European Degree with established quality assurance mechanisms already in place through the Bologna Process and European Approach, to ensure the initiative actively supports and enhances existing frameworks and therefore fostering coherence and effectiveness.
- Develop funding mechanisms directly linked to the European Degree, building on the commitment to dedicate Erasmus+ support as included in the blueprint. These mechanisms should prioritise inclusivity, bolster recognition, and promote the advancement of high-quality programmes.
- Establish and continuously update a database of legal obstacles to developing joint programmes within the EU and EHEA, as initiated under ED-AFFICHE.
- Develop a dedicated strategy to enhance the visibility of programmes that receive the label.



Neringa Narbutiene, EU-CONEXUS and Josef Matoušek, 4EU+

ED-AFFICHE and its fellow consortia piloting the European Degree have amassed a wealth of essential knowledge and expertise, translated into comprehensive, actionable tools to facilitate development and implementation for all key actors. As the European Degree pilot projects draw to a close, it is crucial that the Commission take a coordinating role for the European Degree to ensure the collaboration continues and all key actors remain engaged in the co-creation process.

ED-AFFICHE strongly encourages the European Commission to take advantage of the project's achievements as a basis for scaling up and deepening collaboration between key actors – from HEIs to Member States, quality assurance agencies to employers – and together cultivate and consolidate the European Degree into a reality for the benefit of Europe's students.

Recommendations for the European Commission (I)

Coordination and Leadership

- The European Degree Label's potential goes beyond just a "preparatory phase". A robust vision for the Label can provide substantial added value, especially in addressing barriers within national/regional frameworks.
- The European Commission should take a central role in coordinating the European Degree initiative, engaging member states and stakeholders to ensure smooth incorporation into legislative frameworks.
- Discussions should extend to the European Higher Education Area, involving key stakeholders such as QA agencies, EQAR, and ENQA.
- Continue and enhance the mapping exercise initiated by the pilot projects on legal obstacles hindering the implementation of joint programmes.
- Facilitate conversations among member states to tackle these issues in a coordinated fashion.

Scope of the European Degree

- Extend the European Degree beyond EU universities and European University alliances for higher impact and inclusiveness.

Link to Bologna Process

- Actively involve QA agencies, member states, employers, and students in designing and implementing a common framework for the European Degree.
- QA agencies should play a pivotal role in verification, ideally through a lean version of the European Approach, with member states' alignment across the entire EHEA.

Roadmap for Introduction of Implementation Phases

- Propose a timeline and open a dialogue with member states about various stages of implementation of the European Degree.
- Advocate for a coordinated process where all members start with the label phase and move to the degree phase simultaneously without hindering ongoing legal framework revisions.

Recommendations for the European Commission (II)

Criteria Refinement

- Further refinement of criteria is advised to address diverse stakeholder needs.
- Specific recommendations include provisions for regulated professions, adherence to validated Consortium Agreements, mandatory adoption of the European Approach for Quality Assurance and major engagement of labor market representatives.

Transitional Period for Implementation

- Implement a transitional period for new criteria, and especially for the European Approach, to allow member states time for legislative adjustments.

Practical Guidelines for Criteria Interpretation

- Develop comprehensive guidelines for criteria interpretation to address subjective interpretations, ensuring transparency and consistency.
- Entrust QA agencies, facilitated through EQAR/ENQA, with preparing these guidelines.

Model Consortium Agreement

- Prepare a model consortium agreement, drawing upon best practices, to address regulations and integrate European Degree Label criteria.
- Consider existing national/regional regulations during model development.

Verification Methods and Actors

- Utilize a single EQAR-registered QA agency chosen by the joint programme consortium for verification.
- Propose a lean verification procedure based on the processes of the European Approach focusing on checking alignment with the European Degree (Label) criteria.
- Allow for flexibility in verification time frames to accommodate programme needs.
- Ensure sufficient added value for the European Degree to justify workload associated with verification procedures.

Recommendations for the European Commission (III)

Template of a European Diploma

- Design a unified diploma template at the European level for joint diplomas, maintaining clear distinction between label and qualification diplomas.
- Prioritize quality branding and a cluster of features over singular visual representation, allowing for co-existence of multiple visuals.

Visibility and Branding

- Launch a branding campaign by the European Commission to promote pathways towards a European Degree, articulating the added value for HEIs and students.
- Introduce uniform visual identification tools, such as a certificate template and logo, for actors engaged in the awarding process.
- Establish a website to present existing European Degrees and European Degree Label Programmes, supporting students in programme selection.

Funding

- Provide dedicated funding instruments for European Degree programmes, incentivizing programme creation and supporting students.
- Align existing financial instruments to attract students and implement joint programmes, reviewing mobility rules under Erasmus+.
- Investigate challenges posed by existing Erasmus regulations and address concerns regarding compulsory mobility periods.

Continuation of Work

- Maintain active involvement of pilot projects throughout the process, forming a single working group with interested team members.
- Recognize the ongoing need for collaboration and support from stakeholders, extending beyond the pilot phase.

Recommendations for Member States

Introduction of the European Degree

- Member states are advised to make informed decisions on introducing the European Degree into legislative frameworks, considering various award types and their implications.
- Continuous dialogue with the European Commission and HEIs is recommended, along with ensuring transparent information flow regarding member states' measures.

Bologna Follow-up Group

- Organize within the Bologna follow-up group for coordinated actions related to the European Degree, especially concerning verification methods aligned with the European Approach.

Support for QA Procedures

- Member states should ensure their legislation incorporates the European Approach and aligns QA agency procedures with the criteria.
- Enhanced support towards QA agencies is recommended for effective implementation, considering resources and sustainability.
- Coordination among QA agencies is essential for a uniform process across participating countries.

Funding

- Offer scholarships and financial incentives to students engaging in joint programmes.
- Financial support for launching joint programmes would incentivize universities and academics to commit to collaboration.
- Address challenges in accessing national funding schemes for joint programmes, by for example having interministerial consultations and financial incentives for HEIs.

Recommendations for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agencies

Additional Workload and Processes

- QA agencies should have a crucial role in the European Degree implementation, possibly issuing the label or checking compliance with criteria.
- Recommendations include active participation in framework co-creation and development of implementation guidelines.
- Consideration of resources such as workload, staff, and timeline is advised.

European Approach

- Have a new procedure aligned with the European Approach, with a single EQAR-registered agency for verification.
- New programmes should follow the full European Approach, while existing accredited programmes shift to a lean version of the European Approach.
- Internal procedures should be updated to embed these processes.

Cooperation and Coordination

- Coordinate at the European level, suggesting EQAR and/or ENQA take a leading role.
- QA agencies should cooperate closely to ensure a uniform interpretation of criteria and processes.

Electronic Certification System

- Establish an online platform listing European Degree-awarded programmes.
- EQAR or the European Commission could host the website.
- Implement a downloadable certificate function for graduates, synchronized with national QA agencies' websites

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions (I)

Active and Leading Role

- HEIs should actively participate in negotiations regarding the European Degree within their countries, ensuring their voices are heard and considered.
- Dialogue with responsible ministries and the European Commission is essential for successful implementation, balancing EC recommendations, legal frameworks, and HEIs' preferences.

Strategy for Joint Programmes

- HEIs are advised to develop a comprehensive strategy defining the role of transnational joint programmes within their educational portfolio.
- This strategy should establish priorities, preferred partners, degree types, funding targets, and other considerations, serving as a foundation for informed decisions.

Institutional Procedures Curated for Joint Programmes

- HEIs must adapt internal regulations to accommodate the needs of transnational joint programmes, ensuring streamlined processes without compromising quality.
- Amendments and exemptions should clarify their purpose and avoid reintroducing obstacles removed by legislation.

Supporting IT Background

- Dedicated attention to IT tools and services is crucial for smooth operation of student lifecycle processes, especially in joint programmes.
- IT tools should be adapted to handle the complexity of joint programmes, ensuring efficient data tracking, reporting, and exporting.

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions (II)

Practical Support for Joint Programmes

- Establishing a dedicated support network within HEIs for joint programmes is essential, providing resources, guidelines, and contacts to increase engagement.
- Internal funding instruments and dedicated personnel positions support the development and execution of joint programmes, incentivizing participation and relieving workload.

Alignment with European Framework

- HEIs interested in facilitating transnational collaboration should adopt tools connected to the Bologna process to ensure compatibility with European and EHEA standards.
- Alignment with basic principles and definitions across member states is crucial for future development and collaboration.

TOGETHER ON THE SAME PATH

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24



Recommendations on the European Degree Label

FOR EUROPEAN COMMISSION

- Coordinate & streamline processes
- Enhance branding to attract students & employers
- Utilize existing processes (Bologna tools)
- Ensure compliance by meeting EDL criteria in national legislations
- Secure funding to support mobility

FOR MEMBER STATES

- Remove legislative obstacles
- Establish sandboxes for experimentation
- Deregulate for sustainable experimentation
- Consortium agreements supplement legislation
- Give possibility to opt for one legal system
- Shift competences for transnational collaboration

FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

- Policy development
- Increase joint programme visibility
- Adapt IT & procedures for international collaboration
- Active national role
- Allocate funding
- Staff recognition
- Promote European approach

FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

- Adopt the role of a key actor for verification processes
- Contribute to the development of European procedures
- Cooperate and coordinate at the national and European level
- Establish electronic certification system

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Co-creating the education of tomorrow

Uniting a Broad Consortium and Collaborative Network



Engaging with students through questionnaires and meetings. Gathering over 2500 student responses.

Mapping legal obstacles and facilitating dialogue with national and regional authorities, quality assurance agencies, employers, and more.

Analysing state of play of joint programmes in 22 countries and collecting insights from legal experts across 51 universities.



Read about ED-AFFICHE Mid-Term Meeting (November 2023)



Read about how ED-AFFICHE engaged with different stakeholders



Read about ED-AFFICHE Final Dissemination Event (March 2024)

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The ED-AFFICHE team wants to express its sincere gratitude to all the stakeholders who participated: full members, associated partners, academic and administrative staff from Higher Education Institutions, the European Commission, national and regional authorities, Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agencies, students and employers.

Your invaluable contributions were instrumental in making this project a success.

Thank you!



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