



ED-AFFICHE's input to European Commission call for evidence

The ED-AFFICHE Project stands as a collaborative consortium, comprising **six university alliances (Una Europa, 4EU+, CHARM-EU, EC2U, EU-CONEXUS, and Unite!)**, collectively bringing together 51 universities spanning 22 diverse countries. Additionally, the project has garnered **support from 15 quality assurance agencies, 19 national/regional authorities**, and other key stakeholders. In tandem with other pilot projects, the mission of ED-AFFICHE aligns with the European Commission's summons to offer recommendations for the enhancement and development of the European Degree label. Over recent months, the consortium has diligently amassed data pertinent to this initiative. Therefore, **it is imperative that the insights of ED-AFFICHE and other pilot projects be accorded due significance in discussions pertaining to the future trajectory of the European degree label.**

The European degree label initiative gives the opportunity to enhance collaboration among universities to **simplify the development and implementation of joint degrees in EHEA**. It is also a unique opportunity to address legal barriers linked to joint programmes within each country. ED-AFFICHE is actively analyzing potential barriers to the European degree label and exploring ways to overcome them.

The active role of the European Commission is needed to elucidate the value-added by European degrees and the **ways in which the Commission intends to support countries in their pursuit of these endeavors.**

We acknowledge the ongoing efforts of the European Commission in formulating a communication regarding the European Degree label. However, should the objective be the integration of the European Degree into national legislation, whether as a label or a qualification, it becomes crucial for all **legislators to adopt a unified and coherent approach**. This consistency is crucial to avoid adding more conflicting legislation for joint degrees instead of streamlining the process. To achieve this, **more than communication, clear guidelines are needed for countries**, which could take the form of a guidebook, council conclusions, or recommendations. Moreover, it is important to emphasize the importance of **all countries adhering to the established standards and guidelines (ESG) and having trust in each other's quality assurance (QA) systems and agencies**, particularly those that are EQAR registered.

Differentiating traditional joint programmes from those eligible for the label is a primary consideration. In this regard, it is crucial to explore and articulate the concrete added value of the European Degree for the different stakeholders involved more clearly. Once more, the ED-AFFICHE, along with the other **pilot projects, uniting these stakeholders, play a pivotal role, and should be involved in the decision-making process.**

1. For students: Distinguishing the label from other joint programmes lies in providing added **benefits to students** (additional career opportunities, innovative learning approaches and reduced administrative burdens).
2. For university staff: To boost enthusiasm among **university staff (both academic and administrative)**, it's crucial to avoid additional administrative burdens and improve **recognition (financial and professional) for those involved in joint degrees.**



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3. For universities: the criteria should be universally understandable and applicable, while ensuring flexibility and **preserving diversity among participating universities.**

Funding to allow universities to develop these programmes should be attached to the initiative.

4. For **national authorities:** the initiative should offer clarity in definitions, timelines, and scope, simplifying processes and creating a standardized framework while respecting the principle of subsidiarity. On a national level, legislators should update legal systems to accommodate newer forms of cooperation. **Legislation offering more flexibility for European Degree programmes or legislation accepting that a European Degree programme is governed by the law of the coordinating university** simplifies the regulatory framework and thus also the designing and implementation process which is currently demanding for universities. A dedicated supra-national funding scheme for mobility can further advance the cause.

The ED-AFFICHE team advocates for the success of the initiative by suggesting that European institutions:

1. Consider a **European uniform system for degree titles**, including interdisciplinary degrees.
2. The European Approach can be expensive and if in addition to national procedure can be a burden. Simplify the **European Approach process and offer specific funds to cover related costs to motivate countries and universities.** It's crucial for the European Commission to empower ministries to address this issue effectively.
For existing programmes applying for the European Degree Label, a new procedure, such as a European Approach "light", involving EQAR registered national accreditation agencies, should be designed.
3. Flexibility in regulatory aspects (tuition fees, admissions, academic regulations, parchment) can contribute to smooth joint degree operations. Consortium agreements will play a pivotal role then, and providing a database with possible ways of addressing hurdles in such consortium agreements, could help institutions to maneuver more easily during the designing process. Standardize diploma formats at the European Union level and creating a default ECTS conversion table can facilitate the cooperation among HEIs and make easier for them to engage in joint programmes.

To conclude, we advocate that the European institutions attach to the initiative the creation of **comprehensive guidelines for European joint degrees**, the **development of a standardized diploma template**, and **assist in the coordination of a coherent process in which countries provide flexibility in their legislations to accommodate joint programs.**

The central policy question that requires attention is: **how many of the joint programmes do you intend to grant the European Degree?** From the perspective of ED-AFFICHE, which sees the European Degree as a facilitator to streamline international collaborations in higher education using the existing Bologna tools, it makes more sense to broaden the criteria rather than tighten them. This approach ensures **that more programmes can benefit from the added value.** Otherwise, there is a risk of creating an "elite group of joint programmes," primarily serving as a commercial tool to attract students from outside the European Higher Education Area to study in Europe.

Some opinions and recommendations on the European degree label have already been shared in the context of the ED-AFFICHE Project and can be found here:



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- [ED AFFICHE_D3.1_Obstacles for Transnational Collaboration.pdf](#)
- [ED AFFICHE_D4.1_Comparative analysis of the criteria associated to the European Degree label and the process behind it.pdf](#)



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