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INFORMATION NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Council
Subject:	A European degree - <i>Information from the Commission</i>

Delegations will find attached an information note from the Commission on the above subject, which has been put on the agenda under 'Any other business' for the next Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting on 13 May 2024.

A European degree

Information note from the Commission

Context

In September 2020, the [Commission Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025](#) identified the need to explore a framework to ease the delivery of joint degree programmes by alliances of higher education institutions. The Council backed this idea in its [2021 Conclusions on the European Universities initiative](#), inviting the Member States and the Commission to investigate the need and feasibility for joint European Degrees.

In January 2022, the [Commission Communication on a European strategy for universities](#) further developed this vision by proposing exploratory work towards a European Degree. Later that year, the [Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe](#), adopted in April 2022, invited Member States and the Commission “to support alliances of higher education institutions (...) to explore common criteria that could lead to a potential European label for joint programmes and to later on envisage the possible design and delivery, on a voluntary basis, at national, regional or institutional level, of joint degrees at all levels, based on these co-created European criteria, in accordance with the existing instruments of the Bologna Process”. The related [Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation](#) 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.

Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects on a European Degree (label)

Based on the mandate from the Council, the Commission co-developed a set of preliminary European criteria for a joint European Degree (label) with Member States, higher education institutions and other stakeholders and launched an [Erasmus+ call for European policy experimentations on the joint European Degree \(label\)](#). Six project consortia involving more than 140 higher education institutions from all EU Member States were selected to pilot the joint European Degree (label) over a one-year period starting in April 2023. The [Communication on a Blueprint for a European Degree](#) builds on the results of these projects. The report of these policy experimentation pilots is expected towards the end of 2024. This evidence base - which has been called for by Member States to inform their next steps - will require an in-depth analysis, including by interinstitutional partners, Member States and other stakeholders.

The European Degree package

On 27 March 2024, the Commission adopted a package of ambitious proposals for Europe's higher education sector, as a key priority of the 2024 Commission work programme, with the aim of working towards a European degree. It consists of:

- [a Commission Communication on a Blueprint for a European Degree](#)
- [a proposal for a Council recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system](#)
- [a proposal for a Council recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education](#).

The three initiatives aim at tackling the legal and administrative barriers faced by higher education institutions wishing to set up competitive and innovative joint learning offers. The proposals build on universities' institutional autonomy and academic freedom. They fully respect the competences of Member States and regional governments in the area of higher education.

The Communication on a Blueprint for a European Degree paves the way for a new type of joint degree programme, delivered on a voluntary basis at national, regional, or institutional level, using existing structures, and based on a common set of criteria agreed at European level. These criteria aim at boosting the implementation of existing Bologna instruments and equip students with future-proof skills for a competitive and attractive Europe.

The Communication proposes a concrete cooperation path between EU Member States and the higher education sector towards the creation of a European Degree. In view of the diversity of the European higher education systems across Europe, the Commission proposes a gradual approach for Member States towards a European Degree, with two possible entry points:

- A preparatory European label given to joint degree programmes that meet common European criteria.
- A European Degree enshrined in relevant national or regional legislation and based on common European criteria. It would be awarded jointly by several higher education institutions from different countries.

Such a European Degree would allow higher education institutions from different countries to cooperate seamlessly across borders and set up innovative joint degree programmes. On top of being a strong symbol of our European identity, a European degree would benefit students by boosting learning mobility and by increasing their employability. At the same time, it would meet the labour market and society needs, ultimately boosting Europe's competitiveness and attractiveness.

The package received very positive feedback from the higher education sector, while calling for a clear engagement from the Member States in the discussions. The sectors express a wide acknowledgement of existing difficulties encountered by higher education institutions in the current situation and the need to go beyond the existing instruments.