

European Degree and Joint Programmes

Terms of Reference

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I. Objectives

The European Degree and Joint Programmes Topical Group (ED&JP TG) unites expertise from various European University Alliances and national contexts to work on the European Degree (ED) framework. The group will engage in activities such as sharing best practices and facilitating peer learning as well as strengthening collaboration on the design, implementation and sustainability of joint programmes. In particular, it contributes to the ongoing development of joint educational provision with a strong emphasis on the European Degree Label by sharing insights on its applicability, disseminating good practices, and providing structured feedback from the sector to inform possible refinements.

Main Objectives

The group's main objectives are to:

- Support alliances and higher education institutions in designing, implementing, and scaling joint programmes by providing good practices and lessons learned from successfully implemented programme, especially in the context of the ED framework.
- Promote the exchange of expertise and good practices, building the sector's capacity to tackle evolving challenges and opportunities.
- Act as a channel for policy input, bringing the sector's vision and needs to European-level discussions.
- Support advocacy and policy-oriented dialogue at European level on the transformation, innovation, and enhancement of joint programmes, by ensuring that the perspectives and priorities gathered within this group (composed of representatives from European University Alliances working hands-on with joint programmes) are duly reflected and taken into account, in close collaboration with WP1 Project Management and WP3 Policy Dialogue.

Target Audience

This group engages with:

- Appointed representatives from university alliances and higher education institutions
- European Commission and other EU-level stakeholders
- Projects and/or other EU/EHEA actions focused on joint programmes and joint education
- Quality assurance agencies and other related bodies at national/regional level
- Diverse stakeholders (employers, civil society, public institutions, etc.) with an interest in joint educational provision
- Experts, academics, researchers, and practitioners in designing, developing, and implementing joint programmes at European level

Actions and Timeline

In the short term (Year 1), the group will prepare a FAQ document, aligned with existing, Bologna-validated definitions related to joint programmes, such as those set out in the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes* and applied through EQAR. The aim is not to redefine these terms, but to support a shared and practical understanding across contexts, providing guidance for their consistent use within the European Degree framework. It will support alliances and higher education institutions in the implementation of the ED framework and communication about its added value through a peer-to-peer learning approach and constant exchange of best practices. The group aims to develop a stakeholder engagement toolkit, providing resources to support Alliances in effectively communicating and demonstrating the value of the European Degree to external stakeholders. The group will also provide expert input to the Policy Lab for the European Degree Label, advising on key issues during its initial phase.

Throughout years 1 and 2, the group will focus on deepening collaboration and supporting implementation. The members of the group are supported to organise events, training sessions, peer-learning activities, and policy communication activities focused on joint programmes and the ED framework. The group will help alliances strengthen inter-alliance cooperation and curriculum innovation, while gathering updates on legislative and regulatory developments in member countries and at European/regional level. It will provide practical guidance on integrating ED criteria into existing and new programmes, as well as further enhancing the transformative approach towards joint educational provision at European HE level. Coordination with WP2 for strategic alignment and with WP3 will ensure consistent policy dialogue, while external stakeholders such as the European Commission, quality assurance agencies, and others will be invited to participate in relevant discussions to ensure alignment and transparency.

In the long term (Year 2), the group has the potential to advise and support European stakeholders, including supporting the European Commission during the testing, implementing, and reporting phases for the ED (Label). Policy papers might be developed to address barriers and propose practical solutions, considering also potential cooperation with other topical groups (such as, but not only, the topical group on QA).

Regular monthly meetings will be carefully moderated to ensure focused, respectful dialogue and held regularly to help maintain active participation. Agendas will be realistic and concise, respecting participants' time and allowing sufficient opportunity to thoroughly address each topic. Documented follow-up actions will track progress and ensure accountability. The group, through these meetings and other formats, will also serve as a forum where members can raise questions and seek clarifications, supported by peer-to-peer expertise.

Additional meetings may be organised at the request of the topical group to address specific issues and/or to engage a broader audience.

Expected Outcomes

The group's work could result in:

- A shared understanding and consistent implementation of the pathway of joint programmes and the ED framework across alliances and higher education institutions in general.
- Stronger policy dialogue and clear, relevant, and informed input from the sector into European-level decision-making.
- Practical guidance to support alliances and universities in embedding the ED (Label) effectively and sustainably (via informative sessions, documents, peer to peer sharing).
- Overview of respective country-specific obstacles that may hinder the establishment of joint programmes.
- A collaborative, adaptable community ready to support each other in the implementation of joint programmes.
- Trans-alliance and trans-institutional cooperation initiatives emerged from the group members' interactions (projects, joint programmes, events, etc.)

The group remains flexible and responsive to evolving policy developments and emerging priorities. Membership includes representatives from alliances (primarily those engaged in governance and joint programme implementation) along with experts involved in policy experimentation for the ED (Label). External stakeholders and other potential participants can be invited to participate in specific discussions.

II. Background

The formal adoption of the European Degree label by the Council of the EU in May 2025 marks a significant milestone in European higher education policy. This initiative aims to facilitate the development and recognition of joint programmes across Europe, enhancing student mobility, employability, and the global competitiveness of European higher education institutions.

The European Degree & Joint Programmes TG, comprising experts from various university alliances, is strategically positioned to support the implementation of the European Degree label and joint educational provision at European HE level and across national and regional sectors. Drawing on extensive experience from policy experimentation projects such as ED-AFFICHE, ED-LAB, ETIKÉTA, FOCI, SMARTT and JEDI, as well as the extensive experience of the alliances, the group can offer valuable insights into the practicalities of designing, accrediting, and delivering joint programmes.

Originally established in 2022 as the FOREU Subgroup on the European Degree, the group facilitated collaboration among European University Alliances to address challenges in creating and accrediting joint programmes. It also facilitated alignment and communication among the policy experimentation projects for the European Degree Label in 2023–2024. These efforts have informed the development of the European Degree label, contributing to the European Commission's Blueprint and subsequent policy recommendations.

Building on this foundation, the group will continue to:

- Support the European Commission and other European-level relevant bodies and institutions in the process of strategic coordination and policy input, jointly bringing forward the visions and needs of the alliances to European-level discussions on joint educational provision.
- Serve as a platform for sharing best practices and lessons learned from joint programme implementation at alliance and HEI levels, with focus on European, national and local regulations and practices.
- Provide evidence-based recommendations to inform policy development and refinement of the European Degree label and the development of joint educational provision at HE level.
- Engage with stakeholders, including European Commission representatives and quality assurance agencies, to support the alignment of national frameworks with the European Degree initiative.

The implementation of the European Degree label presents both opportunities and challenges. While it offers a framework for facilitating the implementation of joint programmes, its success depends on effective collaboration among higher education institutions, policymakers, and quality assurance bodies. The European Degree & Joint Programmes TG potentially addresses these needs by:

- Facilitating dialogue among stakeholders to ensure coherent and coordinated implementation of the European Degree label.
- Identifying and addressing legal, administrative, and quality assurance challenges associated with joint programme development.
- Peer to peer support in addressing challenges related to the creation, implementation and sustainability of joint programmes.
- Enabling inter-alliance and inter-university cooperation on joint educational provision and the development of transnational HE.
- Developing support documents and resources at policy and practice level that further expand cooperation and transformation of joint programmes and the European Degree (label).

III. Work plan and working modalities

Work Plan and Provisional Timeline

The group will support the development and implementation of joint programmes and the ED(L) and share good practices and challenges related to joint programmes among alliances. It will focus on identifying challenges, gathering best practices, and providing recommendations to stakeholders at institutional, national, and EU levels.

On a continuous approach, the group will cooperate with the FOREU4ALL Board, as well as with WP1 and WP2 respectively.

Year 1

May 2025

- Online Kick-off Meeting
- Confirmation of the chairs

June 2025

- Terms of Reference Document
- Cooperation with the European Commission on the advisory role of the group vis à vis the Policy Lab.

December 2025

If the application to organise the first transversal Community of Practice (CoP) workshop is successful, the group will proceed with preparing an in-person event in Venice, hosted by the EUTOPIA Alliance. This will be done in collaboration with the QA TG and the topic will be on the validation of the European Degree Label criteria (ongoing discussions between the groups to refine the workshop's focus).

March 2026

- **FAQ Document and Guidelines**
 - **Purpose:** Based on existing definitions of joint programmes, in their different extensions or operational developments, support shared understanding and interpretation. Answer questions from stakeholders about the ED. Develop guidelines for providing advice on integrating the ED criteria into both existing and new programmes.
 - **Content:** Clarifications on its purpose, implementation, relevance, quality, and benefits for alliances, students, and institutions.
- **Recommendations**
 - **Purpose:** Provide information about the ED to higher education, alliances, stakeholders, and employers.
 - **Content:** Evidence-based arguments at the level of the alliances.

April 2026

- Report of activities during the first year

Year 2 and Beyond:

- **Policy Papers**
 - Address barriers to implementing joint programmes and propose solutions.
 - An overview of possible extensions and developments of the innovative perspectives towards flexible learning pathways / learning arrangements in designing joint programmes at European level
 - Focus on compatible QA standards and regulatory challenges.
- **Case Studies and Good Practices**
 - Share success stories from alliances effectively implementing joint programmes, supporting engaged services and staff.
- **Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit**
 - Develop resources to help alliances communicate and share the value of the ED to external stakeholders.

Meeting Plan and Working Modalities

- **Frequency:** Once per month online every last Friday of the month (1 hour), possible in-person meetings twice a year.
- **Purpose:** Monitor progress, discuss emerging challenges, and share best practices.

Attributions of GCT and group members

Group Chairing Team:

- Collection of inputs
- Preparation of agenda
- Follow-up material
- Reporting to WP2 Board and other relevant FOREU4ALL bodies when requested

Group members:

The group members provide input for topics to address during the meeting. When preparing an important document, a task force composed of volunteers is formed and the entire group is asked then to provide feedback. The group members are responsible for reporting the group's discussion within their alliance when relevant.

The members should respect the proper cooperation and dialogue environment among the other members of the group, ensuring a collaborative, open, and collegial space for all participants.

The members should ensure that their mandate is clear and properly approved at their respective alliance, so that no conflict of interest or of any other nature may appear in the group for this reason or similar ones.

Group members (or formal alliance representatives) should inform the GCT about any changes in the representation and mandates of the group members of the respective alliance.

Considerations on Equality & Diversity in organisational modalities

- Ensure balanced representation across alliances, regions, and institutions, reflecting the diversity of the EHEA.
- Promote gender equality and equitable participation in all group activities and leadership roles.
- Guarantee accessibility by accommodating diverse needs, including those of individuals with disabilities.
- Prioritise inclusion of underrepresented institutions, regions, and perspectives in joint programme development.
- Use inclusive language and culturally sensitive practices to foster mutual respect and collaboration.
- Align all actions with EU values on equality, diversity, and inclusion, ensuring accountability and continuous improvement.

IV. Inputs to WP3 Policy Dialogue & WP4 Communication and Dissemination

The group will maintain ongoing communication with Work Package 3 (Policy Dialogue) to ensure alignment of messaging and to avoid duplication of efforts. Several members of WP3 are also actively involved in this thematic group, which will help facilitate coordination and streamline discussions.

The same approach applies to engagement with the General Forum, where overlapping participation will support coherence across activities.

When information needs to be shared publicly (such as announcements regarding a potential workshop, success stories, or policy recommendations) the chairs will proactively inform the WP4 team and seek their support in dissemination efforts.

V. Members

The group is mainly composed of experts in Joint Programmes and Quality Assurance, as well as policy advisors and/or secretaries general from approximately 60 university alliances. Currently, each alliance is represented by around two to three members. The alliances have full authority to decide their respective representatives and ensure that proper communication is conducted with the GCT on this matter.

Members actively engage in the group's monthly meetings, where they share challenges, exchange good practices, ask questions, and seek clarification on key issues. When a member wishes to raise a specific topic, they contact the chairs, who then include it in the earliest possible meeting agenda.

All members are expected to provide constructive feedback and contribute actively to the group's ongoing work.

Other invitees (experts, stakeholder representatives, etc.) can be adjourned to the meetings, as per the approval of the GCT and the proper communication in this regard.