

## Higher education package – Commission adoption 27 March

- The higher education package was announced by President von der Leyen, following the 2023 State of the Union address, and on the Commission’s 2024 work programme.
- The higher education package is composed of 3 important initiatives to advance transnational cooperation between higher education institutions.
- The package consists of:
  - a Communication on a blueprint for a European degree
  - a proposal for a Council recommendation to improve quality assurance processes and automatic recognition of qualifications in higher education.
  - a proposal for a Council recommendation to make academic careers more attractive and sustainable.
- The three initiatives tackle the remaining legal and administrative barriers to partner universities setting up competitive joint degree programmes at Bachelor, Master or Doctoral levels, without impinging on universities’ institutional autonomy, academic freedom or Member States’ remit of power.
- Both proposals for Council recommendations go beyond the pure ambition of developing a European degree and are relevant for the wide and diverse higher education sector.

### Commission Communication on a blueprint for a European degree

The Communication proposes a concrete cooperation path between EU Member States and the higher education sector towards the creation of a European degree.

#### Why a European degree?

- As the key challenges of our time become increasingly global, and Europe’s open strategic autonomy is becoming increasingly urgent, transnational education is no longer a ‘nice-to-have’ option but a necessity. It is a condition for equipping future generations with the competences and skills that European societies will need to thrive in an ever more interconnected world. We need to facilitate and accelerate the development of future-proof joint degree programmes to contribute to Europe’s competitiveness and prosperity, to master the green and digital transitions and ensure Europe’s open strategic autonomy in key areas.
- To build a common European identity and a stronger European sense of belonging.



### What is a European degree?

- A new type of degree awarded after transnational Bachelor, Master, or Doctoral programmes delivered at national, regional, or institutional level.
- Automatically recognised everywhere in the EU.
- Awarded jointly and on a voluntary basis by a group of universities across Europe in full respect of the competence of Member States in the sphere of education, of institutional autonomy, and academic freedom.
- Based on a common set of criteria agreed at European level. With the aim to foster the mobility of students across Europe, allowing them to study in different countries and in different languages, to be actors of change during their studies by working on interdisciplinary challenges, in cooperation with economic and social actors across Europe, and to be equipped with green and digital skills.

### How to get there?

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**: a label given to joint degree programmes which meet the European criteria: Students receive a European degree label certificate together with their joint degree.
- **A European degree**: a new type of qualification awarded either jointly by several universities from different countries or possibly by a European legal entity established by such universities: Students receive a 'European degree'.

### To support Member States and the higher education sector, the Commission intends to set up in 2025:

- A **European degree Policy Lab** to develop detailed guidelines and action plans to guide the implementation of a European degree with experts from Member States, higher education institutions, quality assurance/accreditation agencies, students, and economic and social partners.
- A **new annual European degree Forum** monitors progress and provides guidance, gathering high level representatives from Member States, key organisations in quality assurance and recognition, education social partners and representatives from economic and social partners.
- **New Erasmus+ support for European degree Pathway Projects** enabling Member States, together with their accreditation and quality assurance agencies, universities, students, economic and social partners, to engage in the pathway towards a European degree.
- **New Erasmus+** supports higher education institutions in the **design of joint degree programmes leading to a European degree**.

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

- Quality assurance in higher education is key to ensure trust between universities and trust from employers in the degrees they award.
- A lot has been done already but many higher education institutions in Europe indicate that quality assurance processes for transnational programmes are too long, costly, and unsuitable for transnational joint programmes.
- This proposal invites Member States and higher education institutions to simplify and improve their quality assurance processes and practices. This would allow higher education institutions to adapt the programmes offered more quickly to societal needs.
- This would also endorse innovative pedagogical offers and ensure that higher education institutions can more easily deliver transnational programmes that are quality assured and automatically recognised across the EU.

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

- Delivering the European degree also requires dedicated and skilled staff.
- The proposed Council Recommendation aims to make academic careers an attractive prospect.
- It makes recommendations to ensure that national higher education systems address the uneven recognition of the diverse roles staff take on in addition to research - such as teaching, the development of transnational education activities, of micro-credentials, or mainstreaming sustainable development.

**The higher education package is an important step towards making the European Education Area a reality.**