

The European Degree Label: Advancing Student-Centred Education Across Europe

*Reaction of the Erasmus Student Network to
the Approval of the European Degree Label*



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On 12 May 2025, the [Council of the European Union](#) adopted two key texts: a

Recommendation establishing the criteria for awarding a voluntary **European Degree Label** to joint programmes involving institutions from at least two EU Member States, and a **Resolution** outlining a three-phase **roadmap toward a possible Joint European Degree by 2029**. The Recommendation emphasises agile, internationalised quality assurance and mutual recognition, while the Resolution situates the Degree as a strategic tool to enhance Europe's global academic standing and internal cohesion

The **proposal builds on years of work through the Bologna Process**, the European Universities Initiative, and, more recently, pilot projects conducted in 2023–2024 involving 140 higher education institutions across 23 EU countries. These pilots tested how joint programmes could align with shared European criteria, but also revealed more than 50 barriers related to national legislation, quality assurance, and administrative hurdles that still hinder seamless cross-border cooperation.

The European Degree Label, as proposed, would be voluntarily awarded by national quality assurance or accreditation bodies to joint programmes that meet common European standards. The European Degree Label will not replace national degrees, but rather serve as a voluntary recognition instrument. **It aims to increase the transparency, visibility, and academic credibility of joint programmes that meet common European criteria.** Unlike a legally binding qualification, it acts as a soft mechanism to promote quality and mobility.

The approval of the European Degree label marks a significant step forward in the journey toward deeper European integration in the field of education, and it is strategically aligned with current discussions about enhancing Europe's global position. As highlighted in the 2024 report by Enrico Letta, one of the key recommendations for revitalising the Single Market is the creation of a “fifth freedom” that focuses on research, innovation, and education. Within this vision, higher education is not seen as a standalone sector, but as a vital driver of economic growth and European cohesion. The European Degree is envisioned as a central tool in realising this “fifth freedom,” aiming to remove legal and administrative barriers that still hinder cross-border mobility and cooperation. Ultimately, the goal is to equip Europe with the talent and skills needed to meet global challenges and address the skills gaps that impact its competitiveness.

What makes the European Degree particularly groundbreaking is its ambition to progress European integration in a field that is both politically and legally complex, **marking the**

European Degree one of the most promising and forward-thinking initiatives the European Union has introduced in education.

In addition, the creation of a European Label would help strengthen the implementation of existing tools from the Bologna Process and support the goal of building a more connected and coherent European Education Area.

While the European Degree Label represents a strategic milestone in the journey towards the European higher education area, it shines a light on deeper obstacles facing joint degree programmes. National differences, most specifically in accreditation systems, legislative frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms, continue to complicate the development and recognition of the cross-border qualification.

The European Degree pilot projects (2023-2024), involving 140 universities in 23 EU countries, **revealed more than 50 barriers to the implementation of joint degrees that meet the European criteria.** The label, though a useful branding and recognition tool, was found to lack legal value, meaning it alone cannot guarantee simplified recognition or cut through the complex administrative procedures that universities face when building joint programmes.

Additionally, the lack of regulatory clarity surrounding how national authorities will integrate the label into existing systems creates uncertainty. Although the European Commission's proposed European Degree Lab and Forum (launching in 2025) may help align expectations and share good practices, **systemic reforms at the national level remain essential.** In countries with rigid or highly fragmented legislation, the label may offer only limited benefits unless accompanied by broader legal adjustments.

Despite these challenges, **the European Degree Label can serve as a stepping stone toward a fully integrated European Degree.** The label can drive momentum, highlight good practices, and incentivise gradual reform, especially in sectors or professions where full legislative change is more complex. However, without a long-term commitment from Member States to align laws and streamline recognition, the European Degree risks remaining more of a vision than a viable reality.

As the European Union moves forward with the vision of a European Degree, **the adoption of the label should be seen not as an end in itself, but as the beginning of a broader, more ambitious reform process.** In order to unlock its full potential and ensure long-term impact, the following steps are recommended:

1. Prioritise national-level legislative alignment:

It is crucial for Member States to begin aligning their national legal and accreditation frameworks with the proposed European criteria. While the European Degree Label can help build momentum, meaningful change requires reforms in national laws to enable full recognition and integration of joint degrees.

2. Provide clear, flexible guidelines for implementation:

The European Commission should accompany the label with detailed and adaptable guidance that allows higher education institutions to implement the criteria within their own national and institutional contexts. This will help ensure coherence without compromising academic diversity.

3. Invest in capacity building and administrative support:

Universities, especially smaller or less internationally experienced ones, need practical support to navigate complex joint programme logistics. Dedicated EU funding and technical assistance should be made available to reduce administrative burdens and foster institutional cooperation.

4. Establish a European Degree Lab and Forum as a collaborative hub:

As planned for 2025, the European Degree Lab and Forum should become a space for open dialogue, exchange of best practices, and policy coordination among national authorities, QA bodies, and universities. This forum must also include student and staff perspectives to ensure that the Degree remains inclusive and fit for purpose.

5. Promote the European Degree globally as a High-quality brand:

To raise its international credibility and attract global talent, the European Degree should be promoted as a symbol of academic excellence, mobility, and shared values. Strategic communication campaigns and global partnerships can help build its visibility and prestige.

6. Ensure equitable access and avoid a two-speed Europe

The design and implementation of the European Degree Label must reflect students' perspectives. That includes built-in guarantees for recognition of learning mobility, flexible learning pathways, and the presence of student representation in all programmes and quality assurance bodies. This ensures that the label supports inclusion and academic value, not just institutional prestige.

7. Guaranteeing student involvement

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As the Erasmus Student Network, we are committed to supporting the development of the European Degree Label, recognising it as an important step towards a more student-centred and flexible approach to higher education. On the 12th of May, the Erasmus Student Network launched the [XVI ESNsurvey](#), inviting students to share their views. We included two questions specifically related to the European Degree, engaging the student community and gathering their insights on the future of international higher education.

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