



# FOCI

## **Future-proof Criteria for Innovative European Education**

### **Report on stakeholder needs analysis and developed evaluation methodology**



# FOCI

## Authors

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## Contents

List of abbreviations.....	5
List of figures and tables .....	6
1. Introduction.....	7
2. Stakeholder needs analysis.....	12
2.1. Methodology .....	12
2.2. Executive summary .....	14
2.3. Results: Mixed-mode survey result.....	18
2.3.1. Perspectives on European Dimension of Higher Education.....	18
2.3.2. Relevance of the proposed criteria for the European degree label .....	20
2.3.3. Policy views on the European degree label .....	25
2.3.4. Potential (legal) obstacles for awarding the European degree label .....	28
2.3.5. Final remarks .....	30
2.4. Results: Qualitative interviews .....	31
2.4.1. Ministries interview insights.....	31
2.4.2. Quality Assurance agencies interview insights.....	32
2.4.3. Students’ representatives interview insights .....	33
2.4.4. Civil sector representative interview insights.....	34
2.5. Conclusions and implications for the FOCI pilot evaluation methodology .....	34
2.5.1. Initial conclusions .....	34
2.5.2 Implications for the FOCI pilot programme evaluation methodology .....	36
3. Pilot evaluation methodological guide .....	36
3.1. Purpose and scope of the pilot evaluation.....	36
3.2. Evaluation methodology.....	37
3.2.1. Starting point .....	37
3.2.2. Evaluation process and timeline .....	38
3.2.3. Detailed guidelines .....	38
3.3. Pilot evaluation follow-up.....	39
4. Annexes.....	40
4.1. Annex A: Pilot Evaluation Criteria and Indicators .....	40
4.2. Annex B: Instructions for Programme Self-Assessment .....	51
4.3. Annex C: Evaluators’ Profile .....	55



## List of abbreviations

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EA	European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes
EC	European Commission
ECTS	European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESF	European Social Fund
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
MSCA	Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
QA	Quality Assurance
TNE	Transnational Education



## List of figures and tables

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Figure 1: FOCI university partners.....	7
Figure 2: FOCI approach .....	9
Figure 3: FOCI workplan .....	10
Figure 4: FOCI work packages .....	11
Table 1: FOCI survey respondents.....	14
Table 2: Stakeholder perspective on the added value of transnational higher education .....	18
Table 3: Stakeholder perspective on the relevance of mandatory criteria .....	21
Table 4: Stakeholder perspective on the relevance of optional criteria .....	22
Table 5: Stakeholder perspective on the potential for policy impact.....	25



## 1. Introduction

### Background

The *Future-proof Criteria for Innovative European Education* (FOCI) project is a part of wider policy experimentation initiative with the goal of exploring possibilities and needs for implementation of the European degree label, criteria for awarding this label and compatibility with regulatory frameworks. FOCI project is a joint endeavour of eight universities representing three different European Universities Alliances: YUFE<sup>1</sup>, ECIU<sup>2</sup>, EPICUR<sup>3</sup> that have synergistic and congruent approaches to the European degree label concept.

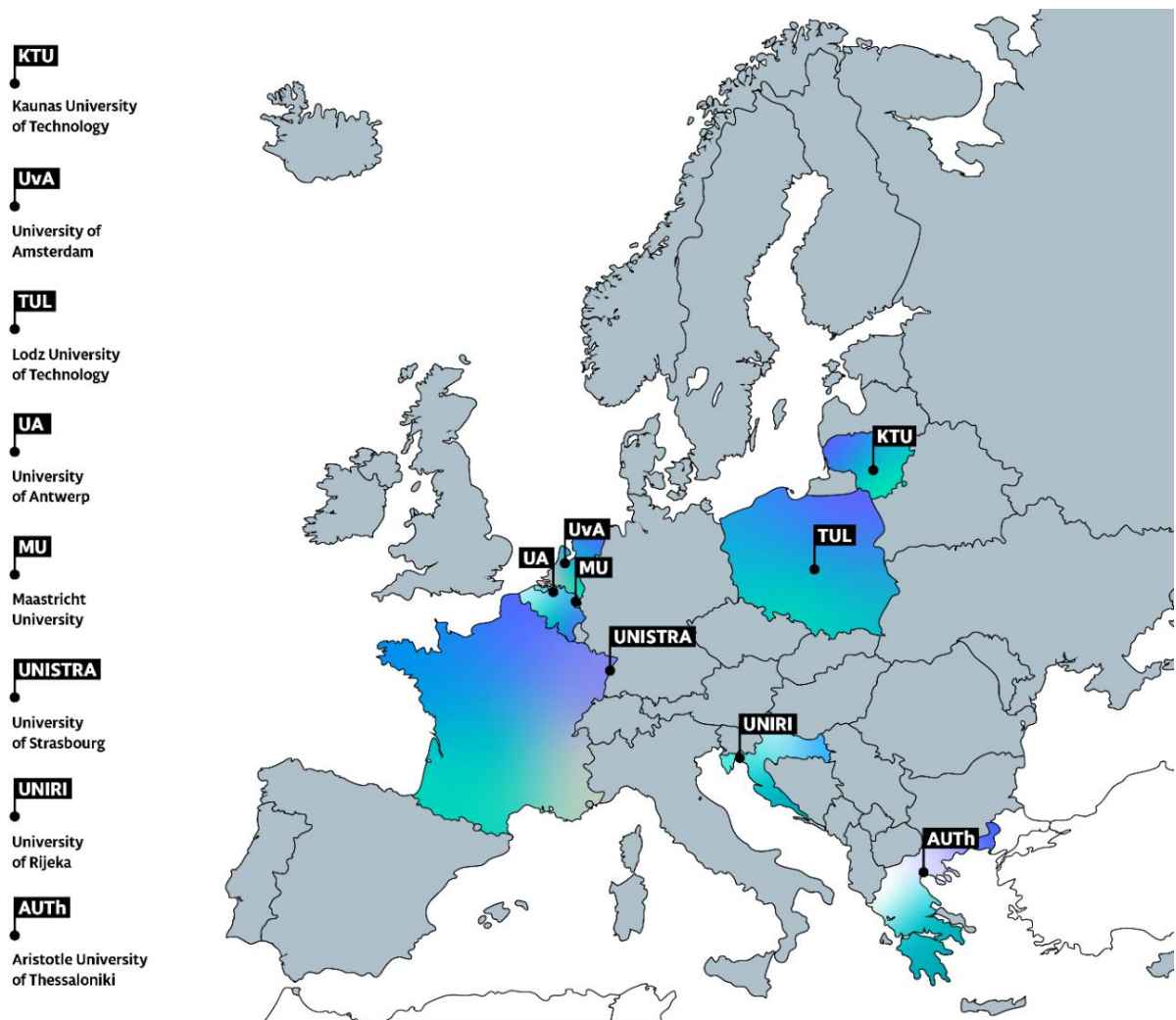


Figure 1: FOCI university partners

<sup>1</sup> <https://yufe.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.eciu.eu/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://epicur.edu.eu/>



## ***Context of the European degree label initiative***

The European degree label initiative is one of the flagship initiatives of the European Commission (EC), aimed at supporting transnational higher education provision and removing potential barriers, strengthening collaboration in delivering joint programmes and generally improving the quality of higher education in Europe. In this context, the European Commission launched in 2022 an initiative to pilot the concept of a European degree label<sup>4</sup>, as a first step in the exploration of how joint European criteria could be used to recognise that certain international joint programmes between different universities deliver a distinct quality and European dimension for its students. Through the Erasmus + programme, the European Commission funded six policy experimentation projects<sup>5</sup>, among them FOCI.

## ***Main characteristics of the FOCI project***

The unique FOCI approach to the concept of a European degree label includes:

1. **Exploring the added value of the European Degree label** through strong stakeholder engagement and stakeholder needs analysis.
2. **Analysing the relevance of the common European criteria** through careful examination of diverse programmes from different educational and regulatory contexts in order to simultaneously suggest revisions to the common European criteria and showcase best ways for programmes to satisfy these requirements.
3. **Focusing on innovative models of higher education** - in addition to full programmes, FOCI is also committed to exploring the principles of the European degree label using other units of learning, such as micro-credentials, modular and flexible learning pathways etc.
4. **Analysing regulatory aspects** through full simulation of the process of issuing the European degree, thereby exploring all the regulatory, procedural and administrative aspects of developing and issuing such a document to students.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/news/new-call-to-test-instruments-to-facilitate-deeper-transnational-cooperation-between-universities-in-europe>

<sup>5</sup> <https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/results-of-the-erasmus-call-for-proposals-on-european-policy-experimentation-in-higher-education-piloting-a-joint-european-degree-label-and-institutionalised-eu-cooperation-instruments>

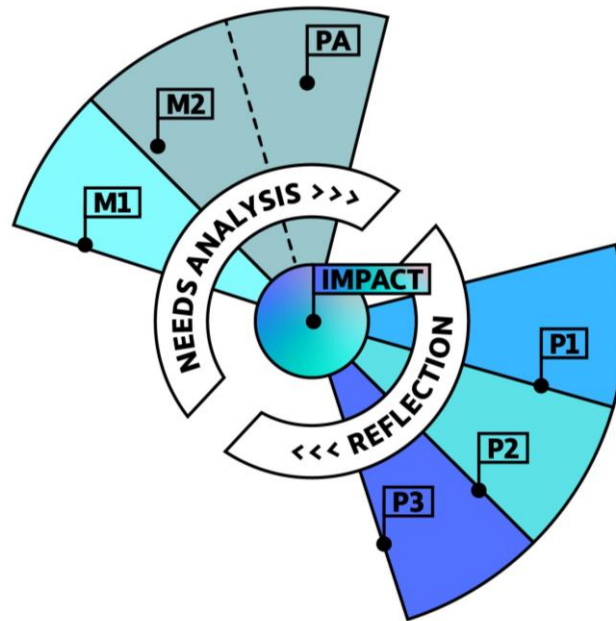


Figure 2: FOCI approach

The end goal of the FOCI project is to produce reliable and applicable policy recommendations for the European Commission and other higher education stakeholders on how the European degree label can be developed and how it can improve the European higher education ecosystem. For this purpose, FOCI partners are engaging higher education stakeholders, such as ministries, student associations, quality assurance (QA) agencies or labour market representatives, from the very beginning of the project. This approach will contribute to the long-term objective of ensuring that the European degree label, as a concept, brings tangible benefits to all the interested parties. In line with this, the following steps are taken within the project:





Figure 3: FOCI workplan

In order to achieve its mission, the project is organised into the following working packages (WP):

1. **WP1 (Project Management)** - This Work Package will provide the coordination and support services needed to ensure that the project runs smoothly and efficiently, i.e., project management, monitoring, financial administration and reporting.
2. **WP2 (Methodology Development)** - This Work Package will be dedicated to developing operational methodologies for applying the European degree label criteria to joint study programmes and for issuing the European degree label. Therefore, the Work Package has two streams of activities supporting the set objectives. The first set (T2.1 –T2.3) deals with the question of how to apply the European degree label criteria, i.e., how to assess the joint programmes against these criteria. This set of tasks is highly complementary and will be conducted in synergy with the (already ongoing) three Alliances’ activities on also applying these criteria to other models and units of learning, e.g., micro-credentials. The second set of tasks (T2.4) deals with the question of which potential legal and procedural barriers are there to issuing the European degree label, and how these barriers can be overcome. Overall, the development of these two types of methodology will contribute to developing a more operational definition of what the European degree label means in terms of the content, certification, position within the legal framework, and potential qualification status.
3. **WP3 (Piloting the European degree label criteria)** - This Work Package will focus on operationalising and implementing the outcomes of Work Package 2, in line with the T2.3. In order to achieve the set objectives, the consortium will prepare a list of joint study programmes on which the methodology developed in T2.2. will be applied. This process will be conducted in synergy with the activities of piloting these criteria on other types of programmes, educational units and models (e.g. micro-credentials), which the three European Universities Alliances plan as an expansion of this project. In order to strengthen the reliability and transferability of conclusions of this pilot assessment, the assessment process will be conducted in two phases; firstly, a broader range of study programmes and



# FOCI

other models (17 of them) will be evaluated against the criteria through desk-based analysis, while secondly, a smaller set of programmes (2-3) will be evaluated through a more in-depth evaluation process, including interviewing different actors and stakeholder groups.

4. **WP4 (Impact, policy and path forward)** - This Work Package builds on outputs towards the achievement of key outcomes of the project – namely, policy recommendations of different scope and content regarding the European degree label initiative. Two crucial elements of these policy recommendations are based on the needs analyses and evaluation of the pilot assessment process and applicability of the European degree label criteria. Based on these two analyses, overall policy recommendations will be developed.
5. **WP 5 (Communication, Dissemination and Outreach)** - In order to maximise impact of the project, the consortium works on developing both short-term and mid-term dissemination tools and mechanisms which will ensure connection with policymakers and higher education stakeholders, and long-term sustainability and impact tools which will ensure transferability of conclusions and deeper impact on the development of the European degree label.

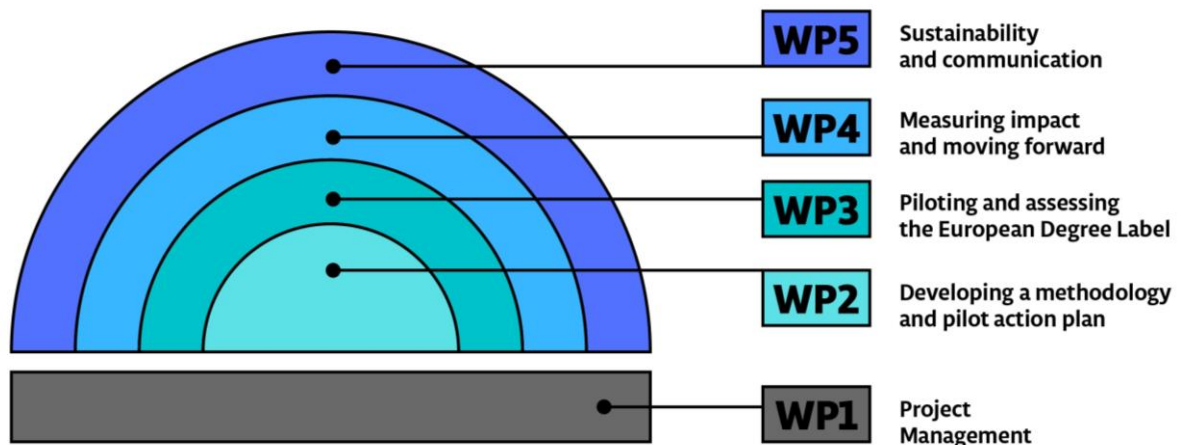


Figure 4: FOCI work packages

## **Document purpose and structure**

As outlined above, the fundamental purpose of this document is to present the results of two major clusters of tasks in the first phase of the FOCI project: stakeholder needs analysis and pilot evaluation methodology based on the European degree label criteria. Therefore, the document encompasses the outcomes of three first steps of the FOCI workload (Figure 3).

In line with this, Section 2 of the document contains results of mixed method surveying of FOCI associated partners and other cooperating stakeholder organisations on the relevance of proposed European degree label criteria, potential legal obstacles, and potential benefits of internationalisation of higher education in general and of the European degree label in particular.



Section 3 builds on the stakeholder needs analysis by presenting a unique FOCI methodology to applying the European degree label criteria to programmes that will be involved in the pilot. This methodology is further elaborated in three annexes: Pilot Evaluation Criteria and Indicators (central document), Instructions for Programme Self-Assessment and Evaluators' Profile.

Although certain parts of this document will be updated as the project progresses (e.g. the evaluation methodology will be further refined), it is our hope that this document will contribute to the wider European policy discussions, provide guidance for the FOCI policy recommendations drafting phase and complement the results of similar analyses conducted by other European degree label projects.

## 2. Stakeholder needs analysis

In line with the approach described in the Introduction, one of FOCI's first and most important results is a stakeholder analysis on the proposed European degree label. The analysis aims to understand the interests of different stakeholders partnered with the FOCI project and gain insight into their perspective on this policy initiative using a quantitative and qualitative survey. Through analysis of stakeholders' needs, the project team seeks to identify their key concerns, priorities, and expectations from the European degree label. These insights will enable the team to develop solutions that meet stakeholders' needs, utilize the insights and results from the survey to evaluate the proposed criteria and ultimately provide the European Commission with relevant and meaningful recommendations. Therefore, for the FOCI project partners, this is a vital step towards realizing the long-term goals of the three European Universities Alliances involved and ensuring that stakeholders benefit from high-quality education that meets their needs and aspirations.

### 2.1. Methodology

FOCI stakeholder needs analysis utilised a mixed-method survey approach to gather data from stakeholders. The survey included both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments through the following formats:

- rating scale questions online survey – especially relevant to identify the relevance of the core and optional criteria proposed by the European Commission.
- open text questions online survey – an opportunity for respondents to elaborate on their rating and add their specific perspective.
- one-on-one interviews – open conversation to further develop the insights necessary to complete the full picture of stakeholder understanding and needs related to the project topic.

By using both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments, our survey could provide a more complete picture of the research question. The project team opted for this



methodology as our research question is complex and multifaceted and requires a more in-depth understanding. Our mixed-method survey aims to help our team gain a more complete picture of the question by providing both numerical and non-numerical data that can be analysed using different methods. The quantitative data were analysed using basic descriptive statistical methods to identify trends and patterns, while the qualitative data was analysed using content analysis to identify themes and patterns. It should be noted that the interviews were conducted only with the stakeholders who self-nominated for a personal meeting to provide the project team with a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions. Primary target groups for the FOCI stakeholder needs analysis were the associated partners and other supporting organisations of the FOCI project, which included:

- a) National/regional Ministries responsible for higher education – for their understanding of how the European degree label would potentially intersect with national policies requirements.
- b) Quality assurance agencies – for the role they play in assessing and implementing quality standards in the higher education sector.
- c) Labour market organisations – as stakeholders that directly provide employment in recognition of graduates’ competences, skills and knowledge and work on developing the labour market and competency profiles of employees.
- d) Student organisations – as a stakeholder directly impacted by the outcomes of the label in terms of new educational offerings and added value of European dimension of higher education.
- e) Civil sector organisations – as representative European-level organisations and societal participants of the European education landscape.

Besides the ministries responsible for higher education<sup>6</sup> and quality assurance agencies<sup>7</sup> which are rather homogenous groups, other stakeholder groups demonstrate significant diversity. In the category of labour market organisations and businesses, FOCI surveyed the Adecco Group, a large multinational human resources company and three smaller businesses linked with higher education and innovation (Van Kemenade ACT, Almi företagspartner Östergötland AB and d-teach). Among student organisations, FOCI surveyed the European Students Union (an umbrella organisation of student unions in Europe), regional or national student unions in Flanders and Lithuania, Erasmus Student Network (main student organisation supporting and developing student exchange), and a student body of one of the European Universities Alliance (YUFE Student Forum). Finally, the category of civil sector organisations included three different organisations: European University Association as the largest association of higher education institutions (HEI) in Europe, Institute for Development of Education from Croatia as a policy hub for various higher education reforms and innovation on the European level, and *Entente des*

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<sup>6</sup> Ministries from Netherlands, Flanders, Greece, Croatia and Poland

<sup>7</sup> QA agencies from Netherlands, Flanders, Croatia and Greece



*Génération pour l'Emploi et l'Entreprise (EGEE)*, an association from France that works intensively on linking higher education with the labour market and innovation initiatives.

Table 1: FOCI survey respondents	
Stakeholder organisation	Count
Ministry responsible for higher education	5
Quality assurance agency	4
Labour market organisation or business	4
Student organisation	5
Civil sector organisation	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>

Taking into account the scope of the analysis, it is important to note that it does not aspire to provide a general comprehensive analysis of European stakeholder views on the relevant matter (since that would not be feasible within the scope of the project), but rather to systematically analyse input of stakeholder organisations engaged with the FOCI project. This also implies that the results of this analysis are best taken in conjunction with similar results of other European degree label pilot projects, since that will enable the initiative to have input from a broader range of perspectives in terms of organisational type, geographical scope and higher education context.

In addition to stakeholder organisations' perspective, FOCI has also collected responses from other HEIs. These are not included in this analysis since its aim is to present exclusively the stakeholder view, but all collected input will be used in the policy recommendations drafting phase.

## 2.2. Executive summary

This section presents a summary of the results obtained from the survey. Key findings have been highlighted to provide an overview of the responses received, with the aim of providing a concise and easily understandable representation of the survey results, allowing readers to quickly grasp the main insights from the data.

For a more detailed and comprehensive view of the survey results, sections 2.3 and 2.4 will present the complete data and analysis. These sections will provide a thorough examination of the responses, including breakdowns by stakeholder groups. Readers interested in delving deeper into the data are therefore encouraged to review these sections for a full understanding of the survey findings.

In total, 21 stakeholder organisations filled out the FOCI survey and 8 participated in the structured interviews. In the survey, respondents were asked to use a 1-5 scale to assess



relevance of specific European degree label criteria and to rate their expectations from the European degree label initiative and internationalisation of higher education in general. They were also asked to provide their input on potential legal and administrative barriers, through open questions.

According to our respondents:

<b>Top 3 perceived benefits of internationalisation of higher education are:</b>	<b>Average score between all respondents</b>
Exchange of best practices between higher education institutions and dissemination of successful models in education, research and societal engagement	4,48
Ensuring automatic recognition of qualifications and study periods by European higher education institutions	4,38
Upscaled mobility and international experience of graduates leading to intercultural competences	4,32
<b><i>All three benefits mentioned here were highly rated by all stakeholders, but the first one was least favoured according to the labour market organisations' needs.</i></b>	

<b>Bottom 3 perceived benefits of internationalisation of higher education are:</b>	<b>Average score between all respondents</b>
Embedded multilingualism	3,65
Harmonisation of higher education systems in Europe	3,55
Stronger stakeholder engagement	3,35
<b><i>The benefits highlighted here were rated low, but the first one was still popular among students and civil sector.</i></b>	

<b>Top 3 rated mandatory proposed criteria of European degree label:</b>	<b>Average score between all respondents</b>
Internal and external quality assurance is conducted in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).	4,95
If external quality assurance is required at programme level in the countries involved, the transnational programme should be accredited/evaluated preferably using the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA).	4,83



The programme, the study field or the institutions are accredited/evaluated by an EQAR-registered agency.	4,74
<b><i>The top 3 criteria received high scores from all respondents, indicating strong belief in their importance and understanding that these criteria are perceived as mandatory and essential.</i></b>	

Bottom 3 rated mandatory proposed criteria of European degree label:	Average score between all respondents
The joint programme has a system to monitor graduate outcomes.	4,10
The joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinary and/or intersectoral components using student-centred and/or challenged-based approaches.	4,05
During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different EU official languages, language classes excluded.	3,05
<b><i>Many of the mandatory criteria that received the lowest ratings still had relatively high scores. It is worth noting that the two criteria with the lowest ratings were scored particularly low by the QA agencies.</i></b>	

Top 3 rated optional proposed criteria of European degree label:	Average score between all respondents
The joint programme supports future labour market needs and/or includes cooperation with businesses and sectors in its curriculum.	4,15
The joint programme offers the opportunity to build a multicultural degree profile by combining smaller learning experiences gained in different European universities.	4,00
The joint programme provides opportunities for international professional internships/work-based learning recognised through the award of ECTS.	4,00
<b><i>In general, the optional criteria did not score so strongly with respondents. Especially the QA agencies believed that most of them were not highly relevant, rating them at a level of 3.00 or lower.</i></b>	



Bottom 3 rated optional proposed criteria of European degree label:	Average score between all respondents
For PhD programmes, the joint programme includes a career development plan devised with the candidate and/or exposure to the non-academic sector (such as internships, seminars, networking).	3,75
The joint programme includes components and actions related to the development of high-level digital skills of students, it offers high quality digital education content, as well as assessment of student skills.	3,70
The higher education institutions offering the joint study programme conducts joint promotion and awareness raising activities to ensure visibility of the joint programme and provide the necessary information about it for students and other relevant stakeholders such as future employers.	3,58
<b><i>It is worth noting that even though these were the lowest scoring optional criteria, both the ministries and the civil sector still perceived them as relevant from their perspectives when compared to the other groups.</i></b>	

Top 3 specific policy goals expected to be achieved by the European degree label:	Average score between all respondents
Strengthening the European dimension of higher education institutions.	4,25
Achieving the Bologna Process goals, e.g. application of the European Approach, use of the ECTS system, automatic recognition etc.	3,94
Increasing visibility of specific programmes which have a strong European dimension.	3,90
<b><i>According to the feedback from stakeholders, only the first one out of the twelve potential policy impacts presented in the survey for the European degree label received a rating higher than 4.00.</i></b>	





Bottom 3 specific policy goals expected to be achieved by the European degree label:	Average score between all respondents
Harmonising national higher education systems.	3,25
Broadening the accessibility of joint degree to students with a socially diverse background, with a focus on disadvantaged students.	3,20
Differentiating between specific joint programmes (e.g. in terms of public financing).	3,20
<b><i>Although these three expected policy impacts overall scored the lowest with all stakeholder groups, the first two were particularly lower rated by the QA agencies.</i></b>	

## 2.3. Results: Mixed-mode survey result

### 2.3.1. Perspectives on European Dimension of Higher Education

The first part of the survey focuses on the expectation of the added value of transnational higher education where the stakeholders had the opportunity to rate provided expected benefits on a scale from 1 (low importance) to 5 (very high importance).

The table below provides average scores by stakeholder group:

Added Value	Average	Ministries	QA agencies	Labour market	Students	Civil Sector
Harmonisation of higher education systems in Europe	3,55	3,40	2,75	3,67	3,60	4,67
Exchange of best practices between higher education institutions and dissemination of successful models in education, research and societal engagement	4,48	4,80	4,75	3,75	4,60	4,33
Ensuring automatic recognition of qualifications and study periods by European higher education institutions	4,38	4,60	4,75	4,75	3,80	4,00
Enhanced relevance of the curriculum through international content	4,10	4,00	4,25	3,67	4,80	3,33
Strengthened European perspective, identity and sense of belonging of graduates, contributing to active European citizenship	3,95	4,00	4,00	3,50	4,60	3,33



Added Value	Average	Ministries	QA agencies	Labour market	Students	Civil Sector
Stronger stakeholder engagement (if so, please explain if this refers to specific stakeholders)	3,35	4,00	3,33	3,00	3,75	2,33
Embedded multilingualism	3,65	3,60	3,25	2,33	4,40	4,33
Upscaled mobility and international experience of graduates leading to intercultural competences	4,32	4,40	4,25	4,00	4,00	5,00
Stronger labour market relevance of qualifications	4,00	4,20	4,25	4,25	3,67	3,33
Creation of flexible and tailor-made learning pathways for the acquisition of qualifications in more than one higher education institution	4,24	4,20	4,50	4,25	4,20	4,00
Stronger emphasis and enhanced relevance of skills within the graduates' competency profiles	3,76	4,00	4,00	3,75	3,60	3,33
Increased international (worldwide) competitiveness of European higher education institutions	4,05	4,40	4,00	4,33	3,20	4,67

In this section, stakeholders were also asked **one open question**:

*What is the most important expectation of added value that you have from transnational higher education provision, in comparison with the national higher education?*

According to the **ministries**, the aim of transnational higher education cooperation is to make European educational systems more compatible and remove obstacles for students and graduates who want to move between them. The ministries see enhancement of educational quality as the main advantage of this cooperation. They also stress the importance of visibility and partnerships, as well as sharing of knowledge and expertise, for creating a comprehensive educational programme for students.

According to the responses of **quality assurance agencies**, there are several benefits to transnational higher education. These include improving the international and intercultural competences of students and staff, increasing educational and research cooperation between HEIs in different countries, and using transnational networks to link stakeholders in different regions. Such initiatives contribute to both inclusion and excellence, while also increasing awareness of European values and identity.

Moreover, transnational higher education provision offer an easier approach to cooperation and joint work, thereby ensuring the quality of the study programmes and recognition. The most important added value of transnational higher education is that it equips students with



the skills to cope with an increasingly globalised workplace, whether in academia or practice. International experience is highly beneficial in this regard.

The gatekeeping and silo mentality that is observed in many national educational systems, including industry leaders, are effectively undone with a transnational approach. This integral element adds to education provision for students by providing them with the proficiency to adapt and excel in a wider international cultural and educational context.

However, one QA Agency called out that in their point of view the term "transnational education" is not accurate in this context. According to the respondent: "*transnational education (TNE) refers to education provided in a country other than where the awarding institution is based. For example, students in Country Y studying for a degree from a university in Country Z. However, this survey is about joint programmes and degrees, which are different. It pertains more to international cooperation and cross-border higher education. "Real" transnational education is challenging to achieve in our country and is unlikely to change soon*".

The **labour market organisations** responses suggest that a curriculum should be created to address common qualification needs and skills in a particular area that are shared across multiple countries. This could also aid in the recognition of skills and competences on a transnational level and be the real added value to the offering.

According to the **student organisations**, transnational higher education offers personal, professional, and intercultural growth that national education cannot provide alone. It also provides better outcomes for students by offering accessible and intercultural opportunities for international arrangements. This broadens their understanding of their studies and helps them become global citizens. Joint programmes, Erasmus+ opportunities, and interdisciplinary approaches to education are highly needed. Facilitating student and staff mobility is essential for bringing people together and solving societal challenges.

For the **civil sector** organisations, they see exploring new cultures and gaining international experience as valuable benefits. Additionally, they believe that this experience can help develop critical thinking skills, promote independence, and enhance early career development.

### **2.3.2. Relevance of the proposed criteria for the European degree label**

The second part of the survey addressed the perceived relevance of the criteria that the European Commission is presently suggesting as a means of identifying particular joint programmes that fulfil the conditions of the European degree label.

The stakeholders were asked to rate each criterion on a scale from 1 (not relevant at all) to 5 (fully relevant). The below table provides the average score by stakeholder group:



Table 3: Stakeholder perspective on the relevance of mandatory criteria						
Mandatory Criteria	Average	Ministries	QA agencies	Labour market	Students	Civil Sector
The joint programme is jointly designed and delivered by at least 2 higher education institutions from at least 2 different EU Member States.	4,63	4,80	4,75	4,50	4,40	4,67
The joint programme leads to the award of a joint degree.	4,42	4,20	4,00	4,50	5,00	4,33
For PhD programmes, dissertations are co-evaluated by supervisors or a committee with members from at least 2 different institutions located in 2 different countries.	4,63	5,00	5,00	4,50	4,00	4,67
The joint programme is described in ECTS	4,68	4,60	4,75	4,50	4,80	4,67
A joint Diploma Supplement is issued to the student at the end of the joint study programme.	4,60	4,80	4,75	3,33	4,80	5,00
Internal and external quality assurance is conducted in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).	4,95	5,00	5,00	4,50	5,00	5,00
The programme, the study field or the institutions are accredited/evaluated by an EQAR-registered agency.	4,74	5,00	5,00	4,00	4,80	4,33
If external quality assurance is required at programme level in the countries involved, the transnational programme should be accredited/evaluated preferably using the EA.	4,83	4,80	5,00	4,50	4,75	5,00
The higher education institutions involved have joint policies for admission, selection, supervision, monitoring, assessment and recognition procedures for the joint study programme <sup>8</sup>	4,11	4,20	3,75	4,00	4,50	4,00
The joint programme provides enrolled students, regardless of their location, with seamless and free access to the participating HEIs' services <sup>9</sup> .	4,63	4,75	4,75	4,00	5,00	4,33

<sup>8</sup> These policies ensure that students have all the necessary competences for successfully starting the programme (including language competences) and all the necessary support to successfully complete it.

<sup>9</sup> Such as for example: IT services, shared infrastructure and facilities, (online) library services, faculty development and support, academic guidance and psychological counselling, career advice/mentoring, alumni systems.



Mandatory Criteria	Average	Ministries	QA agencies	Labour market	Students	Civil Sector
For Bachelor and Master programmes, the joint programme includes at least 1 period of student physical mobility at another partner institution of at least 30 ECTS (i.e. 750-900hours, or a full semester of workload).	4,19	4,40	3,25	4,00	4,80	4,33
For PhD programmes, the joint programme includes a total of at least 6 months of physical mobility at another partner institution (including secondment).	4,16	4,60	2,67	3,75	5,00	4,33
During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different EU official languages, language classes excluded.	3,05	3,00	1,50	3,33	4,40	2,67
The joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinary and/or intersectoral components using student-centred and/or challenged-based approaches.	4,05	4,20	3,67	4,50	4,60	2,67
The joint programme has a system to monitor graduate outcomes.	4,10	4,00	4,50	4,33	4,60	2,67
The joint programme commits to wide participation through socially and geographically inclusive admission through tailored measures for all categories of disadvantaged students.	4,43	4,60	4,25	4,50	4,80	3,67
For PhD programmes, the joint programme commits to respect the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers and commits to the principles of the MSCA Green Charter.	4,44	4,40	4,67	4,33	4,75	4,00

**Table 4: Stakeholder perspective on the relevance of optional criteria**

Optional Criteria	Average	Ministries	QA agencies	Labour market	Students	Civil Sector
The joint programme offers more learner-centred, accessible and inclusive learning to people with more diverse profiles and needs.	3,95	3,60	3,00	4,00	5,00	4,00



Optional Criteria	Average	Ministries	QA agencies	Labour market	Students	Civil Sector
The joint programme creates flexible and customised learning pathways to gain qualifications in more than one institution.	3,86	4,00	3,00	4,25	4,60	3,00
The joint programme offers the opportunity to build a multicultural degree profile by combining smaller learning experiences gained in different European universities.	4,00	4,60	3,50	3,50	4,00	4,00
In addition to physical mobility, the joint programme includes additional formats of transnational learning activities with partner higher education institutions (e.g. online or blended, in the format of regular or intensive courses, summer/winter schools).	3,95	4,00	3,50	4,25	4,00	4,00
The joint programme offers the possibility to take language classes so as to enhance the command of multiple European languages.	3,85	4,00	3,50	3,67	4,20	3,67
The joint programme supports future labour market needs and/or includes cooperation with businesses and sectors in its curriculum.	4,15	4,60	3,50	4,75	3,50	4,33
The joint programme provides opportunities for international professional internships/work-based learning recognised through the award of ECTS.	4,00	4,00	3,50	4,67	4,20	3,67
For PhD programmes, the joint programme includes a career development plan devised with the candidate and/or exposure to the non-academic sector (such as internships, seminars, networking).	3,75	4,50	3,00	3,67	3,33	4,00
The joint programme includes components and actions related to environmental sustainability and implements measures to minimise the environmental footprint of its activities.	3,80	4,20	3,25	4,25	4,25	2,67
The joint programme includes components and actions related to the development of high-level digital skills of students, it offers high quality digital education content, as well as assessment of student skills.	3,70	4,40	2,50	3,67	3,80	4,00



Optional Criteria	Average	Ministries	QA agencies	Labour market	Students	Civil Sector
The joint programme offers the possibility for students to participate in activities promoting democratic values and addressing societal needs of the local community(ies), including volunteering, and to receive ECTS for it.	3,80	4,20	2,75	4,25	3,50	4,33
The higher education institutions offering the joint study programme conducts joint promotion and awareness raising activities to ensure visibility of the joint programme and provide the necessary information about it for students and other relevant stakeholders such as future employers.	3,58	4,20	2,50	3,33	3,75	4,00

In this section, stakeholders were also asked **three open questions**:

1. *Are there any optional criteria that you would strongly suggest are included in the testing?*

Collectively the respondents added that if considering additional criteria, it may be beneficial to include not only mobility for students, but also for administrative and teaching personnel, whether optional or mandatory. In order to obtain a European degree, it may be important for teachers and administrators to demonstrate their status as "European citizens" or having international training.

However, overall, all agreed it is not advisable to increase the number of criteria, but rather to clarify the meaning of optional criteria and reduce the number of mandatory criteria. It would be helpful to differentiate between criteria for the institution and the programme, and to develop a reasonable score for optional criteria. This approach would help institutions focus on quality enhancement and profiling, rather than simply checking boxes. Ultimately, the goal should be to build a system of trust and transparency. Some respondents felt that optional criteria requiring cooperation with businesses and civic engagement elements should be limited in order to avoid overwhelming institutions.

If additional optional criteria should be considered, these could possibly include student feedback procedures, financial management schemes for joint programmes, and international links and partnerships beyond the EU.

2. *Are there any other criteria that you would suggest being included in the list? If yes, please briefly describe why.*

We have received an overwhelming response from stakeholders on the contrary, who suggested reducing the number of criteria and making them more flexible to include the future needs of students. Additional criteria were deemed not necessary on top of the mandatory criteria and are perceived mainly as a potential for increased administrative burdens.



3. *Are there any criteria that you would suggest being removed from the list? If yes, please briefly describe why.*

When discussing the removal of criteria, a few stakeholders expressed concerns about the challenges of creating a joint degree programme with partners in different countries while meeting all requirements and simultaneously offering a strong, cohesive program. They also noted that students may struggle to adapt to different academic cultures. Any additional criteria not typically found in higher education, such as cooperation with the private sector or participation in charity work, could deter programmes participation or lead to mere lip service. Although, as shown in the Executive Summary, the optional criterion requiring cooperation with business was one of the more highly rated ones (especially among labour market organisations and ministries), these respondents felt that in order to encourage academic cooperation, it is best to stay close to the regular academic culture.

It was also suggested that the existing mandatory criteria would likely work well, but the project could consider low-scoring criteria as candidates to be redefined or removed. Also, some of the language requirements could be optional, not mandatory.

On the other hand, some stakeholders believe that the current diversity of criteria is beneficial, and all are relevant to achieving the European degree label's goal of distinguishing joint study programmes with unique added value.

### 2.3.3. Policy views on the European degree label

The third part of the survey addressed the expected benefits of the potential European degree label in terms of contributing to various policy goals listed in the table below.

The stakeholders were asked to rate the potential of the European degree label to contribute to a specific policy goal on a scale from 1 (very little or no impact) to 5 (strong impact).

The below table provides the average score by stakeholder group:

Table 5: Stakeholder perspective on the potential for policy impact						
Policies impact	Average	Ministries	QA agencies	Labour market	Students	Civil Sector
Strengthening the European dimension of higher education institutions.	4,25	4,60	4,00	4,00	4,20	4,33
Broadening the accessibility of joint degree to students with a socially diverse background, with a focus on disadvantaged students.	3,20	3,60	2,75	3,00	3,25	3,33
Strengthening the European spirit and building a common European identity.	3,67	4,00	3,50	3,25	3,40	4,33





Policies impact	Average	Ministries	QA agencies	Labour market	Students	Civil Sector
Achieving the Bologna Process goals, e.g. application of the European Approach, use of the ECTS system, automatic recognition etc.	3,94	4,20	3,75	4,00	3,50	4,33
Increasing visibility of specific programmes which have a strong European dimension.	3,90	4,20	4,25	3,75	3,75	3,33
Differentiating between specific joint programmes (e.g. in terms of public financing).	3,20	3,50	3,33	3,50	3,00	2,67
Harmonising national higher education systems.	3,25	3,00	2,50	3,67	3,20	4,33
Upscaling student mobility.	3,62	3,40	3,25	3,75	3,80	4,00
Enhancing the quality of European higher education.	3,89	3,80	4,00	4,00	3,75	4,00
Promoting a high level of skills and training of graduates and their adaptability to labour market needs.	3,75	3,60	4,00	4,33	3,40	3,67
Fostering labour markets that are forward-looking and responsive to economic change.	3,26	3,40	3,00	4,00	2,75	3,00
Labour or professional mobility.	3,42	3,60	3,25	3,67	3,50	3,00

In this section, stakeholders were also asked **two open questions**:

1. *Which are the most significant benefits (if any) of the potential European degree label in your view?*

The **ministries** have found the European degree label could be highly beneficial in terms of increasing visibility of cooperation in higher education across Europe. It would be crucial to prioritise the goal of establishing a system of trust and transparency within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which is why the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA) and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) were developed, and it is essential that countries follow through on their commitment to implementation.

The European degree label serves as an effective tool for directing HEIs towards implementing the measures outlined in the 2022 Recommendation on Building Bridges for Effective European HE and the Conclusions adopted by the EU Council of Ministers of Education. It also enhances the global visibility of joint study programmes and degrees in Europe and attracts talent from third countries, particularly in high-demand disciplines in the European labour market.

However, certain ministries highlighted that they consider the use of a checklist as a step in the wrong direction. Currently, they do not see the added value of a degree label (which is a position



shared by the HEIs in their country), although they would appreciate hearing any compelling arguments in favour of it.

**Quality assurance agencies** believe that the European degree label provides multiple benefits, including increased visibility for transnational European cooperation inside and outside the EU. The label has reputational value for joint programmes, such as Erasmus Mundus, and signals the European dimension to students and stakeholders. If European Universities Alliances have significant numbers of European degree labels, it can enhance their status and attract more students and staff to joint programmes. The reputation of the European degree label can also help eliminate national legal and administrative barriers for joint programmes and European Universities. The European degree label could provide uniqueness, recognition, standardization, mobility, multiculturalism, added value, important and competitive skillset, and synergies.

For one country, however, the EA is an effective way for their agency to evaluate joint programmes. It is a recognition of the jointness of a programme and internationally acknowledged accreditation. Because of that, this country sees no real added value. They recognise that the label may have added value for other countries that cannot use EA, but if the criteria for EA cannot be met, they anyway cannot meet the criteria that are currently proposed.

As per the **student organisations**, the European degree label offers different benefits such as the ability to combine courses from different education systems and languages. However, predicting these benefits can be difficult compared to anticipating potential challenges. If the label's criteria are well-designed and appealing to HEIs, it can improve the overall quality of degrees in the HE system. The label also offers a unified approach to higher education and facilitates joint degree programmes. Moreover, it enhances students' international experiences and encourages them to contribute to society, thus promoting innovative elements that can benefit the entire Higher Education sector.

*2. Which are the most significant challenges or negative effects (if any) stemming from potential European degree label in your view?*

The **ministries** highlighted several potential challenges regarding the European degree label. One of the main concerns is that many countries already have regulations in place for joint programmes, so there is uncertainty as to why a new label is necessary. Additionally, there are concerns about whether the implementation of a new label or qualification will create additional administrative burdens for institutions. If a more comprehensive policy is put in place, it is important to monitor who will issue the certificates and what this means for accreditation. Another challenge could be the potential misconception that joint degrees without the European label are of lower quality, which could create a divide among European joint degrees.

For the **quality assurance agencies**, the potential challenges with the European degree label worth noting were that the criteria proposed are stricter than those for EA, which feels like a step back. One agency believes that EA could be the backbone, as it works well. However, there



is a need to be more involved in these issues. The agencies do not want the administrative burden to increase; instead, they hope to be more flexible to meet the rapidly changing needs of students and their learning paths.

Moreover, a risk of a national political backlash against the label was also mentioned, as it may be perceived as a reduction of national sovereignty over higher education. Additionally, employment opportunities, regulatory conflicts, universal acceptance, and cultural differences need to be considered to ensure the label's success.

From the perspective of **student organisations**, the European degree label faces several potential challenges. The most significant concern is accessibility and equality, which must be ensured for all students and institutions to prevent significant differences between them. Unfortunately, many smaller institutions are not part of the European Universities Alliances, and even among those that are, only a minority of students participate in the Alliances' activities.

Another significant challenge is administrative implementation. While the European degree label is a great initiative, it must also be practically feasible for HEIs, which are often underfunded. This could also contribute to a higher administrative-to-teaching staff ratio.

National regulations that allow joint programmes only via the lowest common denominator can also be detrimental to students. Poorly designed criteria for the European degree could worsen the HE system or serve as a means of legitimizing programmes without actual improvements in quality.

To overcome these challenges, the following steps could be taken: applying the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance, developing multilingualism, ensuring high-quality physical mobility periods, providing financial support for disadvantaged students, and including democratically elected student representatives in decision-making bodies.

Lastly, there is a concern that the European degree label may have little real impact and serve merely as a nice brand.

#### **2.3.4. Potential (legal) obstacles for awarding the European degree label**

In the last part of the survey the project asked the stakeholders **three open questions** related to the potential legal impacts of the European degree label.

- 1. Are you aware of potential legal or administrative limitations or obstacles that may arise in issuing the European degree label? If yes, please elaborate on the nature of the obstacle and, if applicable, from which level of legislation (national, regional, university or programme-level) it originates.*
- 2. If applicable, what is required to overcome these obstacles?*



In response to these questions, the **ministries** stated that the main concern was whether it would comply with national regulations on joint programmes. Another issue was who would be responsible for ensuring that all criteria were consistently met.

As an example, in the Netherlands educational institutions have a lot of independence, which is crucial for maintaining educational quality. However, some countries have not incorporated the EA into their legislation, which could be a hindrance.

Implementing the European degree label on joint diplomas may necessitate changes to national legislation or internal policies of HEIs, or both.

For the ministries to overcome these obstacles, it was suggested that countries that have not done so should consider implementing the EA. Also, ongoing support from national education authorities will be necessary for piloting the European degree label and for discussing the models developed through these pilots (such as FOCI) in the Education Committee of the Council of the EU.

Ultimately, it will be important to consider both tradition and law when implementing these changes.

For the **quality assurance agencies**, it was identified that the national or university regulations may prevent the awarding of the label, or the label may be given without national recognition, rendering it useless outside of the awarding universities. Discrepancies in accreditation bodies can also arise between public and private institutions.

To tackle these challenges the QA agencies proposed some viable solutions. One suggestion is to introduce changes in national legislation in line with what is currently done for the EA.

Another idea is to establish a European Statute that acknowledges European degree labels and possibly links it to a legal statute for European Universities Alliances. However, getting EU member states to approve this European Statute could be difficult. Additionally, it was recommended to have common accreditation criteria in place.

From the **student organisations'** point of view, they see several potential issues, including language laws in different countries. Many countries require higher education to be taught in their national language, which could be a problem. This can make it difficult to combine institutions from different countries.

Additionally, some countries have regulations on admissions, tuition fees, language requirements, and budget, which may not align with the EA and European degree label criteria.

For them the success of the European degree label will depend on agreement between stakeholders from different countries, and the need for quality assurance regulations and governmental legislation to adapt. However, if the label is clearly defined, it should be recognised as of a certain quality standard without any legal challenge.

They also highlighted how important it will be to consider the under-funding of HEIs in some countries and the administrative workload of implementing the label.



In order to address these challenges, the student representatives suggested the need for increased funding and resources. They also proposed changes in national laws, as well as coordination at the European level to streamline reform processes for higher education.

Additionally, they emphasised the importance of a common understanding and approach that takes into account the unique needs of each country.

*3. Considering the current legal and administrative context, what is the ideal timeframe to start issuing the European degree label?*

Opinions varied on the ideal timing for implementing the European degree label. Some believed it should occur promptly, with input from national governments and EU promotion. Others favoured waiting until 2025/2026, after pilot testing and European agreement had been reached.

One respondent expressed that the timeline depends on politics and could require several years of preparation due to numerous issues that must be addressed. Another respondent suggested issuing the label after fulfilling the Bologna commitments and devising strategies to overcome obstacles.

A few individuals recommended waiting for pilot results, while others advocated for issuance by 2024/2025. One respondent proposed that it should occur within three years of national regulations being harmonized, while another suggested it should coincide with the start of the next Erasmus+ and ESF+ program.

All agreed that planning was essential and that it should take place as soon as possible.

### **2.3.5. Final remarks**

At the end of the survey the respondents were given an opportunity to provide their final remarks on the topic. Below is a summary of the overall responses:

- One respondent suggested promoting the HE quality as ESG standards require and including the sustainability dimension for the programmes themselves. They also mention that planning is crucial and that an array of stakeholders should be engaged. This respondent suggests that institutions could be paired or joined on an invitation basis, based on perceived benefits in joining certain systems, degrees, or disciplines.
- Several respondents emphasised the importance of involving students and their representatives in the piloting, development, and implementation of the European degree label. They suggest involving student councils, boards, and representatives of partner alliances of the pilot projects. Additionally, they recommend involving accreditation organisations and organisations evaluating HEIs and programmes in various stages of development.
- One respondent suggested using blockchain technology.



- Respondents also highlighted the importance of clear communication from the European Commission on its long-term vision for European Universities Alliances and European Degrees. They suggest obtaining support from member states to reduce national barriers and allocating sufficient time for consultation and discussion. One respondent mentions that sector-wide discussion might be more valuable than having a label done quickly.
- Respondents emphasised the importance of evaluating the impact of a European degree label on students' career prospects. They suggest ensuring that a European degree label needs to provide benefits for both students and HEIs.
- One respondent mentioned considerations of the trickle-down effect and experimenting for the whole HE sector, with aspects such as civic engagement, embedded mobility, intercultural learning, and others becoming the norm.

## **2.4. Results: Qualitative interviews**

The project team conducted one-on-one interviews with stakeholders who volunteered to engage with us in person for an open-ended opportunity to further develop and express their thoughts regarding the European degree label. Each meeting lasted approximately 30 minutes and was an open conversation guided only by simple prompts, allowing participants to freely speak about the topics they considered most important from their unique perspective.

The following sections present the recorded responses.

### ***2.4.1. Ministries interview insights***

One respondent to our call for one-on-one interviews was from a ministry office for higher education. They had positive sentiment towards the European degree label (54%).

The respondent believes that this label could be significant for future higher education policies and emphasises the need for collaboration between ministries or member states representatives in these projects.

Their major reservation about the European degree label was about its added value as there are already numerous joint courses and diplomas on offering.

If the European Commission's goal is to increase the visibility of European higher education, particularly outside Europe they suggest that a label could serve this purpose if the right criteria are chosen, which should define a unique kind of higher education programme that stands out from others.

This particular country's higher education system is fully flexible, allowing students to choose how many ECTS they enrol in each year. They suggest that this system essentially consists of micro-credentials, which could be a consideration for the European degree label more broadly to help overcome challenges in building inter-countries partnerships, which often results in limited opportunities for students.



*“If well developed and implemented the benefits of the label for the students will be enormous because they will have much more mobility in Europe. They will have transferability of their credits, they will have the possibility to access the best offerings of every university.”*

## **2.4.2. Quality assurance agencies interview insights**

Three respondents to our call for one-on-one interviews were from a higher education quality assurance agency. They had the most positive sentiment towards the European degree label (61% average) from all the interviewees.

Similarly to previous covered groups of respondents, there was consensus that the added value of the European degree label needs to be better articulated.

*“The concept of a European degree is overloaded with expectations, and I suggest prioritising what the degree or label should highlight. The label should add something additional, not just meet the minimum level of quality standard.”*

These representatives also highlighted the challenges in establishing joint degrees and advocated for more flexibility. They suggest micro-credentials as a potential solution. They also acknowledge the complications arising from different policies and grading systems in different countries on implementing criteria at European level.

One respondent questioned what the difference between the European degree label and Europass credentials would be for students, while even suggesting that the Europass, which includes all qualifications, might be more beneficial. They also propose the recognition of smaller units of study in the Europass.

Other recurring topics mentioned by all participants in this group were:

- hopes that the progress of the label may bring back to the forefront conversations related to the Bologna Process and help its implementation more broadly across the European Union.
- concerns that the establishment of the label will add another layer of bureaucracy towards accreditation, regulatory requirements, and quality assurance processes to an already overburdened system. Preference is given to the label criteria to accept and recognise existing national and/or European mechanisms already in place.

*“There is scepticism of the ministries about this label. If you want to see it as something transformative, we must be careful members states would not be too defensive about it.”*

- perception that the European degree label could potentially have a high reputational value, similar to the Erasmus Mundus program. This could incentivise universities to strive for the label and use it to distinguish themselves. However, there was not unanimous clarity if the value of the label would be recognised by employers and students.



*“The European degree label could potentially offer more flexibility for students and employers in the face of AI disruption. This could include considering micro-credentialing as part of the label. However, we must be careful against watering down its distinctiveness to appeal to a broader market.”*

One participant also suggested that the key point of a European degree should be joint provision, joint design of the international component and integrated mobility, as well as other forms of internationalisation built into the program. To address that in a more manageable way they propose the idea of sublabels, such as an accessible European degree label or a special multilingual label.

### **2.4.3. Students’ representatives interview insights**

Three respondents to our call for one-on-one interviews were student representatives: one from Erasmus Student Network, one from a national student union and one from the European Student Union.

Overall, their sentiment toward the European degree label was positive (53% average). All three of them expressed that the major benefit of the label would be for it to become a tool to facilitate and better enable recognition of prior learning by offering more flexibility and broadening credit recognition between universities.

The other recurring topics mentioned by the three students were:

- hope that by establishing this European degree label will increase advocacy and policy changes in Member States to develop common quality criteria for accreditation of programmes.
- need for better articulation and communication of the benefits, and what ultimately is the added value of the label for the students. More specifically how is this label different from other offerings already out there?

One of the respondents specifically called out:

*“This proposal sounds as just a new name to existing offerings. An offering that could comprise of micro-credentials of interdisciplinary approach from learning coming from all over the EU would be more revolutionary and impactful.”*

- concerns on how the label will effectively ensure quality and innovative education that delivers on recognisable competences aligned to the requirements of the labour market,

*“There are enough instruments/policies from EU (e.g. Bologna Process) to allow for competences recognition for both academic and work purposes. They have not been fully implemented for years and most of the conversations are disconnected. It will be important to link those discussions including graduates’ mobility and labour practice.”*

- desire to have more student input and involvement in the creation of programme offerings,





*“It would be great for students to have a seat at the table in these discussions, be more involved. I know its common practice in some countries but should be included everywhere.”*

#### **2.4.4. Civil sector representative interview insights**

One respondent to our call for one-on-one interviews was from a representative of the civil sector. They had a neutral sentiment towards the European degree label (49%).

This person works on an NGO related to education in Europe. Their institute focuses on the social dimension of higher education, aiming to eliminate educational inequalities and promote community engagement. They work on both policy and individual levels, collaborating with universities, policymakers, students, and teachers. They are closely involved in the Bologna Process Follow Up Group.

They see a standardised set of criteria for institutions and a quality guarantee for students as the major potential benefits of the European degree label.

They also consider that the label could also be advantageous for employers, and it suggests that employer feedback should be included in the label's design and evaluation. This could enhance its quality and recognition validating the holder's skills in the labour market.

In a previous role, this respondent was unable to complete a project for a joint degree programme due to accreditation issues and they find establishing joint degrees extremely complex and challenging. They emphasise the need for more flexibility and see potential in micro-credentials as a solution to the challenges faced in establishing joint degrees. They could provide a more flexible learning path for students while still meeting quality standards. However, they acknowledge there are other potential implementation challenges:

*“National policies can make it very difficult to establish joint degrees. In some places nearly impossible. Accreditation can be very hard when involves different countries even if you have a lot good will, you still cannot make cooperation possible.”*

## **2.5. Conclusions and implications for the FOCI pilot evaluation methodology**

### **2.5.1. Initial conclusions**

After conducting this stakeholder needs analysis, it has become even clearer to the FOCI project team that the implementation of the European degree label will involve dealing with a multitude of complexities. These complexities include both organisational and legislative challenges, as well as addressing the subjective perspectives of individual stakeholders.

While the idea of awarding a common qualification or certificate seems attractive to all the stakeholders interviewed, a number of items need to be addressed in order to ensure that all stakeholders feel fully involved in the process.



A fundamental task that should be the starting point for any such effort is to clearly define the nomenclature used and to distinguish clearly between terms such as “European label” and “European degree” and their respective added value. The respondents made it very clear that the different terms can be interpreted in vastly different ways. It is important to note that educational systems and terminologies can vary from one country to another and that certain terms can have different meanings in different contexts. In order to be able to talk about a common approach to the awarding of qualifications or issuing of common certificates of competence by multiple institutions, standardised definitions for certain tools and solutions need to be adopted.

After analysing the ratings provided by the respondents for the proposed criteria, it can be concluded that the majority of mandatory criteria were considered relevant by all stakeholders. However, the ratings for the optional criteria showed a discrepancy in terms of their relevance. QA agencies rated them as least relevant while other stakeholder groups (particularly the ministries), rated them with a score above 4.00.

Significant challenges raised by the stakeholders to the proposed European degree label relate to the development of tools that are compatible with national accreditation systems. The survey clearly showed a somewhat reduced optimism on the part of accreditation agencies (responsible also for developing quality assurance policies in higher education at the national level) towards the label implementation. The relatively low scores given by representatives of this stakeholder group in the survey are probably due to concerns about the need to safeguard national regulations.

A need to develop a European standard for the awarding of qualifications of different levels was also identified. It would be important to promote discussions to identify the absolutely necessary regulations that cannot be dispensed with for a given country, even for qualifications awarded at transnational level. On the basis of such a set of common guidelines, it would be possible to develop a very general standard which could serve as a pillar for the development of common forms of education at transnational level. The process of discussing a pan-European qualification standard in this way would give individual national agencies a sense of security and the opportunity to influence the shape of the transnational standard.

Another important aspect noted is the promotion of the European degree or European degree label as a parallel offer to the standard educational offer of European universities. The awarding of a joint degree or certificate by more than two HEIs should increase the attractiveness of education in Europe. However, it should not compete with national qualifications systems and regular educational offer.

One highlighted aspect of the European degree label is to become a promoting mechanism for employers to recognise transnational qualifications or certificates. It seems crucial to spread awareness about these non-traditional qualifications and establish recognition mechanisms, as it can drive development and progress in Europe. However, implementing transnational certificates or qualifications from multiple institutions may be challenging if they do not hold



market value or increase competitiveness in the job market. This could pose problems for their widespread implementation across many European countries.

Lastly, an interesting opportunity raised in the study and discussed with stakeholders, especially during the interviews, was the development of a new qualification standard that could be more flexible and based on short forms of education, the so-called micro-credentials. One possible approach to implementing this solution is to utilise the mechanisms already established by the Bologna system for accumulating, transferring, and recognising qualifications. Taking an approach of awarding a common European level based on micro-credentials should not present significant organizational or administrative challenges. This solution could serve as a strong foundation for advancing the European degree label and subsequently the European degree as a fully recognised qualification at the transnational level within the European Higher Education Area.

The initial conclusions and main takeaways listed above will be further validated and refined through stakeholder engagement in the next phases of the FOCI project.

### ***2.5.2 Implications for the FOCI pilot programme evaluation methodology***

FOCI Expert Group Methodology (EGM), tasked with developing the pilot programme evaluation methodology, took into account the results of the stakeholder needs analysis by:

- using policy views of the responding stakeholder organisations to contextualise the criteria and indicators used
- using relevance ratings for mandatory and optional criteria to explore mutual relationship between different criteria and discuss their relative importance and impact on the European degree label fundamental idea (i.e. European dimension of higher education provision)
- using relevance rating for specific criteria to refine the indicators included in the pilot methodology

In the next phase of the FOCI project, stakeholder views will serve a starting point for the development of FOCI policy recommendations, which will then be further refined and developed in close consultation with partner stakeholder organisations, in line with the FOCI methodological approach (Figure 2).

## **3. Pilot evaluation methodological guide**

### **3.1. Purpose and scope of the pilot evaluation**

The pilot evaluation conducted within the FOCI project will be used to test the proposed European degree label criteria and assess its applicability, relevance, and feasibility within the scope of an evaluation process. Once the evaluation phase has been completed, and in combination with the results of the stakeholders' survey, the FOCI Steering Committee will analyse the relevance of the common European criteria through careful examination of diverse programmes from different educational and regulatory contexts. Thus, feedback in the form of



policy recommendations will be given for future revision of the common European criteria as well as showcase the best ways for programmes to satisfy these requirements.

This methodological guide is intended for HEIs who – as organisers of joint programmes – have agreed to participate in the FOCI project, experts involved in the evaluation and all those interested in the FOCI approach to applying the European degree label criteria to programmes.

The methodological guide (including the annexes) will introduce:

- specific approach of the FOCI project
- pilot evaluation methodology adopted
- different criteria and indicators used in the evaluation
- methods of participation in the evaluation of the joint programme and the expected results

## **3.2. Evaluation methodology**

### **3.2.1. Starting point**

As stated in Section 1 of this document, FOCI Work Package 2 (WP2) is in charge of establishing a methodology for applying the European degree label criteria to joint programmes, as well as analysing potential legal and procedural barriers for issuing such a degree. Work Package 3 (WP3) will implement the outcomes of WP2 work, by – among other tasks – preparing a list of joint study programmes on which the developed methodology will be tested.

In order to carry out its tasks, FOCI project set up two groups of experts already at the very start of the project: Expert Group Methodology (EGM), and the Expert Group Legal (EGL). EGM, the group primarily responsible for developing the pilot evaluation methodology, is composed of experts coming from HEI participating in the FOCI project (and the three European Universities Alliances they are members of) and representatives of stakeholders, in a balanced composition. Fundamental task of the EGM was to develop a pilot evaluation methodology fit for the purpose of this policy experimentation project. The methodology developed by EGM envisages to test the mandatory and optional proposed criteria of the European degree label, and at the same time develop the indicators that will make these criteria explicit.

As a general guideline, the FOCI project promotes self-assessment of participating programmes against the identified criteria and indicators, as well as a constructive dialogue between the managers of joint programmes and expert evaluators appointed by the FOCI Steering Committee.

At the same time, taking into account stakeholder involvement in the development of the methodology, the FOCI project aims – through the combination of external and internal (self) evaluation – to provide relevant feedback to the European Commission and concomitantly useful insights for the joint programmes that voluntarily agreed to contribute to the project.



### 3.2.2. Evaluation process and timeline

FOCI pilot evaluation will be conducted in two phases. First phase, running in September 2023 will be organised as a desk-based analysis of 11 joint programmes and 6 other, innovative educational models. This will include evaluation against the proposed European degree label criteria based on the self-assessment tool and expert review. In the second phase, running in October 2023, FOCI will conduct an in-depth evaluation of a smaller set of select programmes, as a follow-up to the desk-based analysis.

Evaluation will be conducted by three-person teams consisting of experts with extensive experience in curriculum design, internal and external quality assurance and educational innovation. List of selected evaluators includes academic and non-academic staff of partner universities, students and QA agencies' staff in order to have of diverse stakeholder perspectives present in the evaluation teams. Detailed profile of these evaluators is provided in *Annex C: Evaluators' Profile* of this document.

The programmes and other models of higher education will deliver the self-assessment survey and supporting documents in line with the detailed instructions contained in *Annex A: Pilot evaluation criteria and indicators* and *Annex B: Instructions for the Evaluation Report*.

Timeline for the pilot evaluation is as follows:

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| ▪ Final list of programmes/other models confirmed for piloting   | <b>13 July 2023</b>      |
| ▪ Request for self-assessment and supporting documents delivered | <b>31 July 2023</b>      |
| ▪ List of evaluators prepared                                    | <b>31 July 2023</b>      |
| ▪ Self-assessment and supporting documents delivered             | <b>18 September 2023</b> |
| ▪ Desk-based analysis completed and review reports produced      | <b>13 October 2023</b>   |
| ▪ In-depth analysis completed and review reports produced        | <b>17 November 2023</b>  |
| ▪ Overall report finalised and submitted                         | <b>30 November 2023</b>  |

In order to support the programmes and other models included in the pilot evaluation, two guidance sessions will be organised in early September and offered to the participating programme managers.

At the same time, a training workshop will be organised for the experts that will form the evaluation teams, so as to ensure that the evaluators are prepared for this specific task with a particular end goal of contributing to the policy discussions on the European degree label.

### 3.2.3. Detailed guidelines

Detailed guidelines and instructions for conducting the pilot evaluation can be found in the annexes to this methodological guide.

*Annex A: Pilot Evaluation Criteria and Indicators* contains the foundation of the pilot evaluation process. This list of criteria and indicators developed by FOCI EGM forms the basis of the FOCI methodology for applying the proposed European degree to specific joint programmes and other educational models. The criteria presented in the document are mainly derived from the



list of proposed criteria contained in the Project Call, with minimal additions. Indicators on the other hand were specifically developed by the FOCI EGM to further explicate and elaborate the criteria.

*Annex B: Instructions for Programme Self-Assessment* provides guidance to participating programmes on how to use the digital self-assessment tool to deliver information and supporting evidence that is fit for purpose, clear, relevant, and aligned with the overall FOCI approach in order to ensure comparability between different programmes.

*Annex C: Evaluators' Profile* is intended to help partners in selecting experts to participate in the FOCI pilot evaluation. It provides guidelines on evaluators background, competences and expected input in order to ensure that the evaluation teams function at the highest level.

### **3.3. Pilot evaluation follow-up**

The results of the external evaluation will be provided in a written form, and any comments or remarks will indicate ways to improve the joint programme against the evaluated criteria. In this way, particular attention will be given to the impact of potential improvements for the joint programmes.

With the aim of piloting the European degree label award process from start to end, the FOCI consortium will consider awarding special certificates to programmes that are deemed to meet the European degree label criteria. The exact format and content of such a certificate will be developed by November 2023, but the basic intention is for this award process to serve as a simulation of potential European degree label award process in the future. This entails that the final step of the award process will contain both the substantive dimension, i.e. how well do the programmes meet the proposed criteria and how suitable the proposed criteria are for such an evaluation, and the formal dimension, i.e. which are the legal, administrative and procedural prerequisites for awarding the European degree label.

In this regard, the FOCI team will cooperate with evaluated programmes in further refining the evaluation methodology as the project progresses. One question that will be in specific focus is that of the European degree label award criteria in terms of minimal threshold, i.e. whether a programme should have to meet all the requirements and should these requirements be weighed the same. Policy recommendations on this topic will be co-created with stakeholders and evaluated programmes.

The conclusions of the FOCI pilot evaluation will feed directly into the process of developing the FOCI policy recommendations, in strong cooperation with stakeholder organisations. In this way, FOCI will realize its cyclical methodological approach (Figure 2) of starting from the stakeholder needs analysis, moving to pilot evaluation whose conclusions feed into initial policy recommendations, and finally engaging with stakeholders to refine these initial recommendations in order to produce the final version which will be directed towards the European Commission and all other relevant stakeholders and policymakers in European higher education.



## 4. Annexes

### 4.1. Annex A: Pilot Evaluation Criteria and Indicators

This annex lists the proposed European degree label criteria and, for each criterion, a set of indicators that the FOCI Expert Group Methodology (EGM) has developed to further explicate and explain these criteria.

The criteria are classified into two categories: **mandatory**, which will be evaluated on a binary scale: *Not met / Met*, and **optional**, which will be evaluated using a three-level rubric: *Not met, Partially met, Met*<sup>10</sup>. Mandatory criteria also have fixed indicators, while optional criteria have “potential indicators”, meaning that programmes are not obliged to submit materials for all of the indicators proposed by the FOCI team, and they can also propose their own indicators supporting specific criteria.

The Joint Programme Digital Assessment Tool (presented in Annex B) is strictly based on the elements provided in this annex and will be integrated with the criteria for the award of the label.

#### LEGEND:

- Mandatory criteria are numbered (C1 stands for criterion number 1), with a sub-number in case of sub-criteria (like in C2.1). Please note that some sub-criteria only apply to a specific EQF level.
- Optional criteria are numbered in the same way, but preceded by the letter O (OC1 stands for Optional criterion 1)
- Indicators are intended for both self-assessment and external evaluation: the evaluated programmes are invited to provide evidence for every indicator here identified. The list of demanded evidence will be available in the Digital Assessment Tool (Annex B)

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<sup>10</sup> In addition to the evaluation scales, evaluation teams will also have an option of judging a specific criterion as „non applicable”, which will be a specific point of feedback regarding relevance of the proposed European degree label criteria.



## **SECTION A: MANDATORY CRITERIA**

**C1: Higher education institutions involved:** The joint programme is jointly designed and delivered by at least 2 higher education institutions from at least 2 different EU Member States.

### **INDICATORS**

Number of countries and names of the institutions who signed the formal agreement.

Existence of an interinstitutional cooperative structure (or body) that designed the programme.

The programme has been designed engaging (or consulting) several stakeholders, especially student representatives.

**C2: Transnational joint degree delivery:**

C2.1 The joint programme leads to the award of a joint degree.

### **INDICATORS**

Existence of a formal agreement, signed by the partner institutions, explicitly stating the conditions for awarding a joint degree.

The structure and curriculum of the joint degree reflect the collaborative nature of the programme in a balanced way between the participating HEI.

C2.2 Dissertations are co-evaluated by supervisors or a committee with members from at least 2 different institutions located in 2 different countries (only applies to EQF level 8).

### **INDICATORS**

The evaluation committee includes members from at least two different institutions located in two different countries, and its composition is balanced among institutions and area of expertise.

**C3: Transparency of the learning outcomes**

C3.1 The joint programme is described in ECTS points.

### **INDICATORS**

The description of each course or module within the joint programme includes ECTS allocated based on a common procedure, as well as a description of contents, learning materials or resources, learning outcomes, teaching methods and modes of delivery, assessment criteria.

The grading scales used for assessing student performance are converted establishing a clear equivalence with the system in use in the other partner institutions; the related





procedure is based on public documents and resources (as the last ECTS users' guide, or Egracons) and available for all participants.

C3.2 A joint Diploma Supplement is issued to the student at the end of the joint study programme (only applies to EQF 6 and 7 levels).

## INDICATORS

A Diploma Supplement is delivered (in the languages of the participant institutions and in English) along with the degree certification; it clearly states that the programme achieved is a joint study programme, specifying the involvement of multiple institutions, the mobility done during the programme, the involvement of the students regarding their participations in activities described in the optional criteria 8.

## C4: Quality assurance arrangements:

C4.1 Internal and external quality assurance is conducted in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

## INDICATORS

Each HEI involved in the joint programme has a well-defined QA policy and procedures that are explicitly aligned with the ESG.

Each HEI involved receive external QA reports that assess the compliance with ESG policies (and the joint programme is part of this report).

There is a specific body at the programme level, composed by representatives of all HEIs, that oversees the internal QA of the joint programme.

C4.2 The programme, the study field or the institutions are accredited/evaluated by an EQAR-registered agency.

## INDICATORS

The accreditation or evaluation agency responsible for assessing the programme, study field, or institutions is listed on the EQAR.

C4.3 If external quality assurance is required at programme level in the countries involved, the transnational programme should be accredited/evaluated preferably using the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA).

## INDICATORS

The programme follows (and is compliant with) the EA of Joint Programmes; guidelines and standards are specifically developed to assess the quality considering the unique characteristics and challenges of the evaluated programme.



**C5 Joint policies for the joint programme:** The higher education institutions involved have joint policies for admission, selection, supervision, monitoring, assessment and recognition procedures for the joint study programme.

## INDICATORS

The participating institutions have jointly developed an admission policy that outlines the criteria, requirements, and procedures for selecting students into the joint study programme, and this policy is publicly available.

The selection criteria are fair, consistent, inclusive and do not favour candidates from a specific participating country or institution.

A code of conduct or guidelines for supervision are present in the joint programme.

**C6 Transnational campus – access to services:** The joint programme provides enrolled students, regardless of their location, with seamless and free access to the participating HEIs services such as e.g. IT services, shared infrastructure and facilities, (online) library services, faculty development and support, academic guidance and psychological counselling, career advice/mentoring, alumni systems.

## INDICATORS

Enrolled students have effective access to IT services provided by each participating HEIs (such as learning platforms, online libraries (see above), hybrid/virtual classrooms, and other digital tools necessary for their studies).

The joint programme ensures that enrolled students can access the libraries of participating HEIs, either physically or through online services; online access means that each participant institution provides free access to digital resources, e-books, academic journals, and other materials needed for study purposes and research.

The joint programme provides psychological services to support students' well-being; for the period of studies abroad, those services are guaranteed at the same level of quality that students would find in their home institutions.

Enrolled students have access to the Alumni networks of all participating institutions, allowing them to enhance employment opportunities and career prospects in every country of the participant institutions.

**C7 Flexible and embedded student mobility arrangements:**

C7.1 The joint programme includes at least one period of student physical mobility at another partner institution of at least 30 ECTS (only applies to EQF 6 and 7 levels).



## INDICATORS

A formal agreement between participating institutions specifies the minimum number of credits (at least 30 ECTS) to be earned during the mobility period; this number of ECTS earned abroad is mandatory in order to obtain the joint diploma.

Mandatory mobility is supported by appropriate information actions, and by facilitating measures such as grants, access, inclusivity, housing, etc...

C7.2 The joint programme includes a total of at least 6 months of physical mobility at another partner institution (including secondment).

## INDICATORS

A formal agreement between participating institutions specifies the minimum duration of the mobility period (at least 6 months); at least one a mobility period of this duration is mandatory in order to obtain the joint diploma.

C 7.3 In addition to physical mobility, the joint programme includes opportunities for doctoral candidates to participate in one or more of these activities at another partner institution: teaching activities, international events, international conferences, joint research scientific projects between partner institutions, joint research publications with researchers from partner institutions (only applies to EQF 8 level)

## INDICATORS

The agreement between participating institutions describes which kind of activities are proposed to doctoral candidates, such as teaching activities, attending international events and conferences, opportunities of joint research specific projects and joint research publications and how; the participation in these activities is encouraged, accessible and effective.

## C8 Multilingualism:

C8.1 During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different EU official languages, language classes excluded.

## INDICATORS

The joint programme clearly states that courses or modules are taught in different EU official languages; students have the opportunity to take courses, or other learning activities, in at least two different EU official languages throughout the programme.

C 8.2 Exposure to EU official languages can take place in active and/or passive use of language(s), at any level in teaching and/or learning activities, examinations, research activities, professional or civic engagement activities and during mobility periods, including by



going on mobility to a country where a different EU official language is predominantly used in daily life.

## INDICATORS

The joint programme lists all the opportunities and the various contexts of exposure to EU official languages within the period of studies.

The joint programme offers language support to students and resources to “fill the gap” like language courses, labs, online training platforms, etc.

**C9 Innovative learning approaches:** The joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinary and/or intersectoral components using student-centred and/or challenged-based approaches.

## INDICATORS

The joint programme prioritises student-centred learning approaches, compliant with the ESG statements, in most of the courses and modules. T&L activities are based on innovative learning approaches, such as collaborative learning, challenge-based learning, project-based learning, or inquiry-based learning methods (list is not exhaustive).

The joint programme promotes the acquisition of soft skills.

**C10 Graduate outcomes:** The joint programme has a system to monitor graduate outcomes. This system can be at the level of the programme or institutional level(s). If possible, the content is aligned to the survey content of EUROGRADUATE.

## INDICATORS

The joint programme has a system in place to track and monitor the outcomes of its graduates, which collects data and analyses factors such as employment rates, further education pursuits, career trajectories, and other relevant indicators.

Indicators include the adoption of the EUROGRADUATE questions or the incorporation of parts of the QA process.

The joint programme collaborates with relevant stakeholders to ensure that labour market and societal needs are considered.

## **C11 Inclusiveness and sustainability:**

C11.1 The joint programme commits to wide participation through socially and geographically inclusive admission through tailored measures for all categories of disadvantaged students.



## **INDICATORS**

Specific interventions or support programmes are clearly established for disadvantaged students, in order to facilitate their access, participation, inclusion and achievement of the studies, for any kind of disadvantage.

Scholarship and/or financial support such as grant are provided in order to alleviate financial disadvantage.

C11.2 The joint programme commits to respect the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers and commits to the principles of the MSCA Green Charter (only applies to EQF level 8).

The recruitment process of researchers is fair and transparent.

The programme adopts measures to minimise the environmental impact of research and promotes sustainable practices.

A monitoring and reporting mechanism is in place, allowing the self-assessing of adherence to EU Charter for Researchers, Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers and MSCA Green Charter.

## **SECTION B: OPTIONAL CRITERIA**

OC1: In addition to physical mobility, the joint programme includes additional formats of transnational learning activities with partner higher education institutions (e.g. online or blended, in the format of regular or intensive courses, summer/winter schools) – only applies to EQF 6 and 7.

### **POTENTIAL INDICATORS**

The number and percentage of online/blended courses or modules offered as part of the joint programme.

The number of intensive courses or modules offered as part of the joint programme (workshops, seminars, inquiry-based brainstorming, fieldwork...).

The availability and participation rates in summer/winter schools as part of the joint programme.

The number and nature of collaborative online projects conducted with partner institutions (group assignments or projects).

OC2: The joint programme offers the possibility to take language classes so as to enhance the command of multiple European languages.

### **POTENTIAL INDICATORS**

The number of classes offered in an EU language as part of the joint programme or extra-curricular activities.



Language classes offered for different proficiency levels (students can improve their demand of EU languages regardless of their initial proficiency).
The availability of language learning resources, such as multimedia resources, online materials, (virtual) language laboratories.
The joint programme offers cultural immersion activities so that students can practice the language skills in authentic environments (eventually tandem activities among pairs).

OC3: The joint programme ensures that future labour market needs are considered and/or includes cooperation with businesses and sectors in its curriculum.

<b>POTENTIAL INDICATORS</b>
The joint programme ensures that future labour market needs are considered and/or includes cooperation with businesses and other sectors in its curriculum.
The programme signed agreements for collaboration and partnership with relevant stakeholders of the participating countries (industries, public sector and governmental services, regional and local governance) allowing students to be engaged in real-world projects with relevant partners.
The programme is able to identify emerging labour market needs.
The programme conducts surveys in order to calculate the percentage of students that find relevant employment or career development opportunities soon after earning the joint degree.
Employers give feedback about competences of hired students (and/or internship).
The programme created an alumni office/service who can advise students about job opportunities, career progression, and entrepreneurship in alignment with labour market needs.

OC4: The joint programme provides opportunities for international professional internships/work-based learning recognised through the award of ECTS.

<b>POTENTIAL INDICATORS</b>
The programme offers a wide range of high-quality international internship or work-based learning placements in various industries and sectors like NGOs, business, international organisations, Community Service Learning; its duration is appropriate to provide students with valuable experience.
Regardless the duration, the ECTS allocation is guaranteed for international internship and work-based learning placements.
The programme has established a learning agreement between the different actors involved (students, hosting organisations, the programme itself).
The programme has planned some forms of evaluation of students' performance and achievements during the internship and the work-based learning. Hence, meaningful feedback will be provided to the students.



Students have the opportunity to give feedback on the internship itself, the missions, the quality of supervision, etc.
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The international internship is reported in the diploma supplement.
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OC5: The joint programme includes a career development plan devised with the candidate and/or exposure to the non-academic sector (such as internships, seminars, networking).

<b>POTENTIAL INDICATORS</b>
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The programme has a process/service for offering personalised career development plans for each student/candidate.
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Students/candidates are guided in outlining their career goals, identify necessary skills and competences, as well as prior knowledge needed.
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The programme facilitates exposure to the non-academic sector through various means: seminars and workshops, networking events and open days, internship and work-based opportunities (in collaboration with Industry Partners).
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The programme offers a job placement support which may include: assistance with resume writing, interview preparation, connecting candidates with potential employers, showing success stories...
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OC6: The joint programme includes components and actions related to environmental sustainability and implements measures to minimise the environmental footprint of its activities.

<b>POTENTIAL INDICATORS</b>
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The programme has defined an environmental policy and sustainability strategy that outlines its commitment to environmental stewardship through sustainable practices. This can include sensitisation, efforts to moving toward physical sustainable infrastructures and/or carbon neutrality and reduction targets.
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The programme integrates environmental sustainability topics and principles into its curriculum, by offering dedicated and mandatory modules.
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The programme promotes awareness among students, faculty, and staff about environmental sustainability issues and promote sustainable behaviours (through workshops, seminars, campaigns, educational materials).
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The programme collaborates with sustainability organizations or initiatives that can facilitate its commitment to environmental sustainability.
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The programme has specific support measures to facilitate green travel to the mobility destination, and keeps track of the students using sustainable travel
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OC7: The joint programme includes components and actions related to the development of high-level digital skills of students, it offers high quality digital education content, as well as assessment of student skills.



<b>POTENTIAL INDICATORS</b>
The programme integrates digital skills development across its curriculum, ensuring that students receive training and education on relevant digital tools, technologies, and practices applicable to their field of study. This can include prior analyses of skills gap and personalised training offer.
The programme encourages the use of digital technologies and tools in teaching and learning activities like learning management systems, collaborative online platforms and web services, virtual labs, simulation software.
The programme offers training and development opportunities for faculty members to enhance their digital skills in T&L.
The programme provides opportunities for students and staff to earn digital skills certifications or badges, indicating their proficiency in specific digital tools, software, or technologies (like DIGCOMP or others).

OC8: The joint programme offers the possibility for students to participate in activities promoting democratic values and addressing societal needs of the local community(ies), including volunteering, and to receive ECTS for it.

<b>POTENTIAL INDICATORS</b>
The programme recognises and facilitates students' engagement and participation in activities that promote democratic values and address societal needs, like student representation civic engagement initiatives, volunteering, human rights, community service projects; this engagement is reported in the diploma supplement, event when ECTS credits are awarded.
The programme has established partnerships with local community organizations, NGOs, or institutions to facilitate meaningful engagement opportunities for students in different forms like forums, events, guest lectures...
The programme incorporates the principles of democratic values, social justice, and active citizenship into the curriculum.

OC9: The higher education institutions offering the joint study programme conduct joint promotion and awareness-raising activities to ensure visibility of the joint programme and provide the necessary information about it for students and other relevant stakeholders such as future employers.

<b>POTENTIAL INDICATORS</b>
The joint programme has a dedicated website where students and stakeholders can easily access core information about the programme and other relevant information like partner institutions, values, contact information for inquiries.
The participating HEI institutions organize information sessions and webinars to provide prospective students and other stakeholders with detailed information and Q&A sessions.
The participating HEI institutions develop joint promotional materials, such as brochures, websites, or prospectuses, which provide comprehensive information about the joint





# FOCI

programme, its objectives, curriculum, admission requirements, and potential career opportunities.

The joint programme maintains active social media presence across relevant platforms to reach a wider audience. Social media can be used to share programme updates, student testimonials, events, and other relevant information.

The participating HEU institutions organise open days or campus visits specifically for the joint programme, allowing prospective students to visit the campus and meet faculty staff and students.



## 4.2. Annex B: Instructions for Programme Self-Assessment

### 1. Communication template for the participating programmes

*Welcome to the digital evaluation procedure of the FOCI project which aims to contribute to policy discussions on the European degree label. One of the crucial steps in achieving this aim is to pilot the proposed European degree label criteria by testing their applicability and relevance on a range of joint programmes and other models of transnational higher education.*

*The objective of this self-assessment tool is to collect information necessary for evaluating whether your programme fulfils the proposed criteria and can therefore be a candidate for obtaining the aforementioned pilot label that the FOCI project will potentially issue in fall of 2023. Further, this tool will also help us propose improvements and refinement of the proposed criteria.*

*The questionnaire consists of 20 criteria, of which 11 are mandatory and 9 are optional. Depending on the type of programme, not all of the criteria are relevant (for example, some of them only concern a specific level of the EQF). As you will see, the criteria have been further explicated through a list of indicators, for each of which you are invited to provide evidence demonstrating their presence, or if absent, to explain the reasons for their absence (or their non-pertinence). While the optional criteria are more open and are expressed with a three-level rubric (met, partially met, not met), the mandatory criteria are more directive, and the relative scale is binary (met or not met).*

*Furthermore, for each of the criteria and indicators to which they refer, you will be able to provide feedback on its relevance and the difficulties encountered in finding the evidence. This feedback is not mandatory, but it is important for us to be able to improve the evaluation procedure and globally the pilot phase of the European degree label FOCI project.*

*Hoping that this effort will be mutually beneficial, we sincerely thank you for your contribution to the FOCI project.*



## 2. Self-assessment digital tool template

MANDATORY CRITERIA				
Criteria (C)		Indicators (I)	Supporting evidence <sup>11</sup> (E)	Comments and feedback
C1: Higher education institutions involved	C1	I1 I2 I3	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
C2: Transnational joint degree delivery	C2.1	I1 I2	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
	C2.2	I1	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
C3: Transparency of the learning outcomes	C3.1	I1 I2	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
	C3.2	I1	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
C4: Quality assurance arrangements	C4.1	I1 I2 I3	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
	C4.2	I1	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
	C4.3	I1	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
C5 Joint policies for the joint programme:	C5	I1 I2 I3	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
C6 Transnational campus – access to services	C6	I1 I2 I3 I4	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
C7 Flexible and embedded student mobility arrangements	C7.1	I1 I2	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
	C7.2	I1	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
	C7.3	I1	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
C8 Multilingualism	C8.1	I1	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
	C8.2	I1 I2	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
C9 Innovative learning approaches	C9	I1 I2	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
C10 Graduate outcomes	C10	I1	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	

<sup>11</sup> Although programmes will be free to provide any evidence that they deem relevant, in certain cases specific evidence will be suggested or requested.



		I2 I3		
C11 Inclusiveness and sustainability	C11.1	I1 I2	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
	C11.2	I1 I2 I3	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	

OPTIONAL CRITERIA			
Optional Criteria (OC)	Potential Indicators (PI)	Supporting evidence (E)	Comments and feedback
OC1: Additional formats of transnational learning activities	PI1 PI2 PI3 PI4	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
OC2: Language classes in multiple European languages	PI1 PI2 PI3 PI4	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
		[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
OC3: Consideration of future labour market needs	PI1 PI2 PI3 PI4 PI5	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
		[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
OC4: Opportunities for international professional internships/work-based learning	PI1 PI2 PI3 PI4 PI5 PI6	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
		[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
		[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
OC5: Career development plan (PhD)	PI1 PI2 PI3	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
OC6: Environmental sustainability	PI1 PI2 PI3 PI4 PI5	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	



# FOCI

OC7: High-level digital skills	PI1	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
	PI2	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
	PI3	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
	PI4	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
OC8: Promoting democratic values and addressing societal needs	PI1	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
	PI2	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
	PI3	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	
OC9: Joint promotion and awareness-raising activities	PI1 PI2 PI3 PI4 PI5	[E1...E <sub>n</sub> ]	



## 4.3. Annex C: Evaluators' Profile

The FOCI Expert Group Methodology established the following evaluator profile to carry out the external evaluation process:

- **Language skills:** English mandatory, proficiency in at least a language of the evaluated programme
  - Strong verbal and written communication skills.
  - Specific proficiency in at least one of the related topics (higher education, quality assurance, accreditation).
- **Experience in Educational Programmes Evaluation** (either as assessor or the assessed)
  - Deep understanding of the evaluation process, justified by an active participation in assessing (or participation in such a process as recipient or representative of the assessed institution) the goals, quality, outcomes, effectiveness of an education programme.
  - Ability to assess curriculum design, teaching and assessment methods and quality (contents, level and rubrics) and their consistency with students' workload, as well as other relevant factors such as (international) students support service, access to IT services and digital facilities.
  - Disciplinary expertise in the topics of the evaluated programmes is an asset.
- **Very strong knowledge of Higher Education policies and good knowledge of the EHEA main principles commitments and tools**
  - Specific documents such ECTS Users' Guide, Qualifications Framework of the EHEA, Lisboa Recognition Convention etc.
- **Education:** Master Degree at least, PhD preferably.
- **Knowledge of QA Framework at EHEA level**
  - Good knowledge of the European Standards and Guidelines.
  - Good knowledge of European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.
  - Good knowledge of Legal/Regulatory Requirements needed for accreditation and certification.
- **Experience in international collaboration**, especially in HEI
  - Experience in inter-institutional cooperation at different levels: visiting lecturer, guest researcher, co-building of international programmes, etc.
- **Analytical skills**
  - Ability to analyse data, documentation, evidence provided by the evaluated programmes.
- **Skills in communication and reporting**
  - Cross-cultural communication.
  - Providing guidelines for improving the evaluation system.
  - Problem-solving in an international context.