



## FOCI

Future-proof Criteria for Innovative European Education

### D3.2 – Analytical report on the application of European degree label criteria to joint programmes

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**Analytical report  
on the application of  
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## List of abbreviations

EA	European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes
EC	European Commission
ECTS	European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes
EGM	Expert Group Methodology
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
QA	Quality Assurance
TNE	Transnational Education



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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Policy context

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. 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.

EU strategy for universities (of January 2022) seeks to take transnational cooperation to a new level of intensity and scope; in this sense, the Council conclusions on EU strategy empowering Higher Education Institutions for the future of Europe invites member States and the Commission to support alliances of Higher Education Institutions to explore common criteria that could lead to a potential European label for joint programmes, and later on (on a voluntary basis) joint degrees at all levels could be envisaged (based on these co-created European criteria).

Hence, the Council recommendation of April 2022 invites the Commission to examine the options and necessary steps towards a possible joint degree based on a common set of co-created European criteria, that could attest learning outcomes achieved as part of a transnational cooperation “combining studies in several EU countries” offered for example within European Universities, and should be easy to issue, store, share, verify and authenticate, recognised across EU.

In this strategic context, the EU Commission launched an initiative (call ERASMUS-EDU-2022-POL-EXP-HE) to pilot the concept of a European degree label, as a first step in the exploration of how joint EU criteria might be used to recognise that certain international joint programmes deliver a distinct quality and European dimension for its students.

### 1.2 FOCI project

FOCI (*Future-proof Criteria for Innovative European Education*) project is a joint endeavour of eight universities representing three different European Universities Alliances: YUFE, ECIU, EPICUR that have synergistic approaches to the European degree (label) concept.



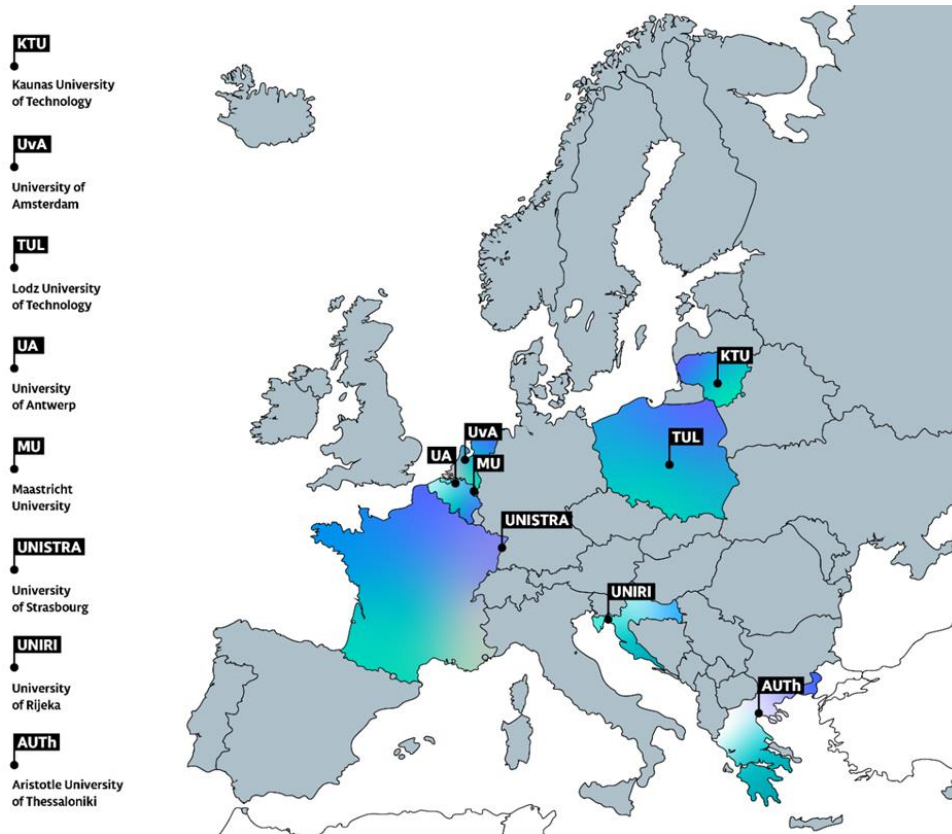


Figure 1: FOCI university partners

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.

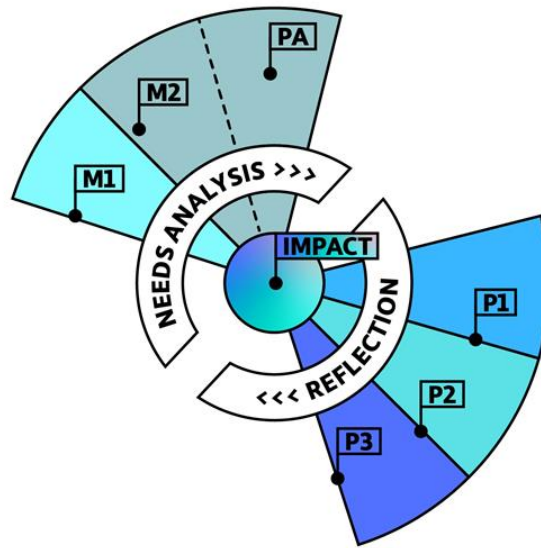


Figure 2: FOCI approach

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



## 1.3 Methodology

The analysis presented in this document is based on the pilot evaluation process conducted within the FOCI project and the resulting document: *Report on the pilot assessment process* (Deliverable 3.1 of the project). This evaluation was conducted in accordance with the pilot evaluation methodology developed specifically for the purpose of the FOCI European degree (label) piloting. Key aspects of this methodology are focus on self-assessment and appreciative approach, explication of criteria in the form of specific indicators and reliance on three-person expert evaluation panels that were composed to simulate an external peer review dimension. Review panels were therefore composed of experts from partner universities and (to a lesser extent) stakeholder partners.

In order to facilitate the pilot evaluation process, FOCI Expert Group Methodology (EGM), which oversaw developing the general methodology of validating the European degree (label) criteria, produced specific indicators for the proposed criteria. Following the self-assessment process based on the suggested FOCI indicators and submitting requested evidence, three-person pilot evaluation teams evaluated the programmes and produced pilot evaluation reports.

Qualitative analysis presented in Section 3 and an overall analysis of levels of compliance presented in Section 4 are mainly derived from pilot evaluation reports produced by these evaluation teams composed for the specific purpose of piloting the evaluation process of the European degree (label). Therefore, pilot evaluation reports are the primary source material for the content of this part of the documents document. Section 5 deals with a more procedural aspects, i.e. with questions of *how* the pilot evaluation procedure was conducted and which are the lessons learned for a future evaluation framework.

## 1.4 Scope of the analysis

FOCI consortium decided to pilot the European degree (label) criteria, and the methodology of their application, on a combination of full degree programmes and short programmes offered by three Alliances involved. Partner universities have therefore nominated 17 programmes in total for participating in the pilot evaluation process. Among those 11 full joint programmes were included, together with 6 short programmes (micro-credentials, flexible learning pathways and similar models) in line with the FOCI's goal of piloting the European degree (label) criteria on smaller units of learning in addition to full joint programmes. Even though it was clear that such models cannot fully comply with the criteria that were specifically developed exclusively for full programmes, the FOCI consortium sees strong added value in detecting specific instances in which criteria are already now applicable to such flexible and innovative models, as well as instances in which the criteria are not yet sufficiently inclusive.

Out of the nominated programmes, 14 were able to complete the self-assessment process, among them 9 full joint programmes and 5 short programmes. Therefore, the pilot evaluation was conducted on the following educational units:



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## *Joint programmes*

- (1) Business and Technology (EQF level 7 – integrated)
- (2) International Joint Research Master Work and Organizational Psychology (EQF level 7)
- (3) European Literary Cultures (EQF level 7) - Erasmus Mundus
- (4) Bilingual primary school teaching in French-German (EQF level 7)
- (5) Leading Vaccinology Education (EQF level 7) - Erasmus Mundus
- (6) European Public Health Master, Europubhealth+ (EQF level 7) - Erasmus Mundus
- (7) European Studies (EQF level 7)
- (8) Governance and Economics in the Public Sector (EQF level 8)
- (9) Applied Ecohydrology (EQF level 7)

## *Short educational units developed within Alliances*

- (10) Micro-module Intercultural competences (ECIU)
- (11) Climate neutral Campus in Europe (ECIU)
- (12) EPIC Mission (EPICUR)
- (13) YUFE Student Journey (YUFE)
- (14) YUFE Minors (YUFE)

Most of the full programmes listed above are master-level programmes, since joint Bachelor studies are much less represented. On the other hand, the FOCI consortium compiled this list taking into account the diversity in terms of geographical distribution, universities/Alliances offering the programme, disciplines and specific innovative characteristics of these programmes. This was done with the aim of ensuring as high transferability as possible considering the limited scope of such a pilot evaluation. Finally, the FOCI consortium sees most value in this kind of an exercise as an initial piloting for the broader validation of the European degree (label) criteria, which implies there is still significant amount of work to be done before the full rollout of the evaluation framework.

## **2. European degree (label) criteria analysis**

In line with FOCI methodology (see FOCI deliverable 2.1), the pilot evaluation was based on the mandatory and optional criteria that are the starting point for all European degree (label) pilot projects, and indicators that were developed by the FOCI project in an effort to further operationalise the criteria and make them more precise.

Mandatory criteria were assessed on a binary scale of “met” and “not met”, while optional criteria had a three-level scale: “met”, “partially met” and “not met”. In addition, in certain cases the criteria were deemed to be unapplicable to a programme in question or the panel was not able to

reach a clear conclusion. Such instances were grouped under the category “other” in the analysis presented below.

## 2.1 Mandatory criteria

The table below presented an overview of all mandatory criteria, elements of criteria (“sub-criteria”) and FOCI-developed indicators.

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Indicators
1 Higher education institutions involved	1.1 The joint programme is jointly designed and delivered by at least 2 higher education institutions from at least 2 different EU Member States.	1.1.1 Number of countries and names of the institutions who signed the formal agreement.
		1.1.2 Existence of an interinstitutional cooperative structure (or body) that designed the programme.
		1.1.3 The programme has been designed engaging (or consulting) several stakeholders, especially student representatives.
2 Transnational joint degree delivery	2.1 The joint programme leads to the award of a joint degree.	2.1.1 Existence of a formal agreement, signed by the partner institutions, explicitly stating the conditions for awarding a joint degree.
		2.1.2 The structure and curriculum of the joint degree reflect the collaborative nature of the programme in a balanced way between the participating HEI.
3 Transparency of the learning outcomes	3.1 The joint programme is described in ECTS points.	3.1.1 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.
		3.1.2 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.
4 Quality assurance arrangements	4.1 Internal and external quality assurance is conducted in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)	3.2.1 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.
		4.2.1 The accreditation or evaluation agency responsible for assessing the programme, study field, or institutions is listed on the EQAR.
4 Quality assurance arrangements	4.2 The programme, the study field or the institutions are	4.1.1 Each HEI involved in the joint programme has a well-defined QA policy and procedures that are explicitly aligned with the ESG.
		4.1.2 Each HEI involved receive external QA reports that assess the compliance with ESG policies (and the joint programme is part of this report).
4 Quality assurance arrangements	4.2 The programme, the study field or the institutions are	4.1.3 There is a specific body at the programme level, composed by representatives of all HEIs, that oversees the internal QA of the joint programme.
		4.2.1 The accreditation or evaluation agency responsible for assessing the programme, study field, or institutions is listed on the EQAR.

		accredited/evaluated by an EQAR-registered agency.	
	4.3	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).	4.3.1 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.
5	Joint policies for the joint programme	5.1 The higher education institutions involved have joint policies for admission, selection, supervision, monitoring, assessment and recognition procedures for the joint study programme.	5.1.1 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. 5.1.2 The selection criteria are fair, consistent, inclusive and do not favour candidates from a specific participating country or institution. 5.1.3 A code of conduct or guidelines for supervision are present in the joint programme.
6	Transnational campus – access to services	6.1 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.	6.1.1 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). 6.1.2 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. 6.1.3 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. 6.1.4 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.
7	Flexible and embedded student mobility arrangements	7.1 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). 7.2 The joint programme includes a total of at least 6 months of physical mobility at another partner institution (including secondment). 7.3 In addition to physical mobility, the joint programme includes opportunities for doctoral candidates to participate in one or more of	7.1.1 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. 7.1.2 Mandatory mobility is supported by appropriate information actions, and by facilitating measures such as grants, access, inclusivity, housing, etc... 7.2.1 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. 7.3.1 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.

		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)			
8	Multilingualism	8.1	During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different EU official languages, language classes excluded.	8.1.1	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
		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.	8.2.1	The joint programme lists all the opportunities and the various contexts of exposure to EU official languages within the period of studies.
				8.2.2	The joint programme offers language support to students and resources to “fill the gap” like language courses, labs, online training platforms, etc.
9	Innovative learning approaches	9.1	The joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinary and/or intersectoral components using student-centred and/or challenged-based approaches.	9.1.1	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).
				9.1.2	The joint programme promotes the acquisition of soft skills.
10	Graduate outcomes	10.1	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.	10.1.1	The joint programme has a system in place to track and monitor the outcomes of its graduates, which collects data and analyses factors such employment rates, further education pursuits, career trajectories, and other relevant indicators.
				10.1.2	Indicators include the adoption of the EUROGRADUATE questions or the incorporation of parts of the QA process.
				10.1.3	The joint programme collaborates with relevant stakeholders to ensure that labour market and societal needs are considered.
11	Inclusiveness and sustainability	11.1	The joint programme commits to wide participation through socially and geographically inclusive admission through tailored measures for all categories of disadvantaged students.	11.1.1	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.
				11.1.2	Scholarship and/or financial support such as grant are provided in order to alleviate financial disadvantage.
		11.2		11.2.1	The recruitment process of researchers is fair and transparent.

	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	11.2.2	The programme adopts measures to minimise the environmental impact of research and promotes sustainable practices.
	the principles of the MSCA Green Charter (only applies to EQF level 8).	11.2.3	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.

Table 1: Stakeholder perspective on the relevance of mandatory criteria

In the analysis below, the results of pilot evaluation are presented in tables per each criterion, with self-assessment input shown in brackets below the panel evaluation results.

### Criterion 1: Higher education institutions involved

Overall	Met	Not met	Other
	10	0	4

#### 1.1: The joint programme is jointly designed and delivered by at least 2 higher education institutions from at least 2 different EU Member States.

		Results of pilot evaluation (number of programmes)		
		Met	Not met	Other
Indicators	1.1.1. Number of countries and names of the institutions who signed the formal agreement.	This indicator relates to the prerequisite of having an international (European) joint programme		
	1.1.2. Existence of an interinstitutional cooperative structure (or body) that designed the programme.	11 (12)	2 (1)	1
	1.1.3. The programme has been designed engaging (or consulting) several stakeholders, especially student representatives.	7 (10)	6 (3)	1

The majority of full programmes and all short programmes meet this criterion. Since the criterion generally functions better as a minimal eligibility requirement, and not a criterion which requires substantial evaluation, FOCI methodology added several qualitative indicators in an attempt to test the possibility of strengthening its added values. Evaluated programmes mainly faced obstacles in providing evidence for indicator 1.1.3 relating to stakeholder engagement.





In a less demanding interpretation of this criterion, none of the evaluated programmes faces serious obstacles in demonstrating compliance - the fundamental international character of the programmes ensures this. Two programmes that do not meet the requirement of the indicator of having an interinstitutional cooperative structure that designed the programme because of their modular design, still have a Consortium Committee in place, which, in a conservative interpretation of the requirement, would be sufficient for demonstrating compliance.

## Criterion 2: Transnational joint degree delivery

Overall	Met	Not met	Other
	9	2	3

### 2.1: The joint programme leads to the award of a joint degree

		Met	Not met	Other
Indicators	2.1.1: Existence of a formal agreement, signed by the partner institutions, explicitly stating the conditions for awarding a joint degree.	8 (8)	2 (1)	4
	2.1.2: The structure and curriculum of the joint degree reflect the collaborative nature of the programme in a balanced way between the participating HEI.	10 (10)	0 (0)	4

Most of the full programmes included in the pilot evaluation process met this criterion, although specific clarifications are required here. Not all these programmes award a joint diploma based on a joint qualification, and the FOCI methodology focused on evaluating whether a joint certificate or other document with a similar function is issued. FOCI analysis has also demonstrated that there are in certain cases serious legal obstacles to issuing a full joint degree (see FOCI deliverable 2.2. *Analytical report on the procedural, organisational and legal aspects of awarding the European degree label*). Additionally, as explained in the introductory sections, the list of evaluated programmes includes short programmes and micro-credentials, which do not result in a full degree.

Evaluation of one full programme raised relevant issues relating to this criterion. In this specific case, no formal joint degree is awarded. Instead, a certificate is issued that includes the names of all partner universities; though the certificate is issued by two of the institutions. The discussion question proposed by the evaluating team was what the difference is between such an “informal joint degree” and a properly formalised joint degree. This point is further connected with another remark raised by a pilot evaluation team. In this case, the panel deemed the programme compliant with the criterion, even though the programme actually issued multiple diplomas, and not one



joint document<sup>1</sup> (REFERENCE:), because they saw the multiple degrees awarded as sufficiently unified on a joint level. This raises a relevant question on the importance and added value of a single document to be awarded.

No evaluated programme had serious obstacles in meeting the requirements of indicator 2.1.2 - although certain programmes were not able to provide all the evidence required, the doubts that pilot evaluation teams had related primarily to the level of “collaborative nature” and especially “balance” that could demonstrated, but all programmes nonetheless exhibit a high level of collaborative partner engagement.

Finally, the results of applying the C2.1 criteria on short programmes shows a variety of responses: with judgements “met”, “not met”, and “not applicable” all being present. This diversity could also be caused by the different interpretations (in spectrum from strict to flexible) of the criteria when applied to programmes other than full programmes. Short programmes by definition do not lead to a degree, so they cannot meet the requirement for the award of a joint degree, but as indicated in one assessment, there could be a formal agreement at alliance level, for example, for the joint award of the certificate, which is comparable to a joint degree for full programmes.

**2.2 (only EQF level 8): Dissertations are co-evaluated by supervisors or a committee with members from at least 2 different institutions located in 2 different countries**

		Met	Not met	Other
Indicator	<i>2.2.1: The evaluation committee includes members from at least two different institutions located in two different countries, and its compositions is balanced among institutions and area of expertise.</i>	1 (7)	0 (2)	0

As it regards the PhD level (EQF level 8) only one programme was evaluated within this pilot and for this programme, the process of co-evaluation of the dissertation was defined in the consortium agreement. Therefore, no obstacles were encountered, neither in terms of the content of the indicator nor in terms of the procedure.

**Criterion 3: Transparency of the learning outcomes**

Overall	Met	Not met	Other
	8	2	4

<sup>1</sup> in accordance with the definition in the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes: “A single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme”



### 3.1: The joint programme is described in ECTS points

		Met	Not met	Other
Indicators	3.1.1: 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.	11 (13)	3 (0)	0
	3.1.2: 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.	10 (13)	3 (0)	1

Most of the full programmes involved in the pilot fulfil this criterion. With the exception of two such programmes, indicator 3.1.1 was generally fulfilled in all other cases. Two programmes did not meet the indicator due to a lack of information provided on learning materials or resources, learning outcomes, teaching methods and mode of delivery, and assessment criteria. Indicator 3.1.2 was met for all full programmes except one for which no evidence was provided.

For the short programmes, indicator 3.1.1 was met for four out of five programmes. In case of one short programme for which the indicator requirement was not met, such judgement was reached due to lack of evidence submitted via the self-assessment process. Regarding indicator 3.1.2 for short programmes, two programmes met the indicator requirement, two did not meet it because evidence was insufficient (especially on the grading scales was unclear, and one programme fell between “not applicable” and “met” because no multi-level grading scale is used as the modules are only graded as pass/fail.

### 3.2: A joint Diploma Supplement is issued to the student at the end of the joint study programme

		Met	Not met	Other
Indicators	3.2.1: 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	9 (8)	3 (3)	2



	<i>the students regarding their participations in activities described in the optional criteria 8.</i>			
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Criterion 3.2 was met for most of the full programmes, not met for one and between “met” and “not met” for one. The in-between category was introduced in this case because the self-assessment states that the diploma supplement complies with the European standards, but it is not listed in the annexes of the self-assessment.

Regarding the short programmes, two met the criteria, two did not and one is between “not applicable” and “met”. The diploma supplement is not mandatory to issue for such programmes, as only full programmes are required to issue it, so different interpretations and contextualisation were applied by the panels in the review. For short programmes this criterion is strictly speaking not applicable, but if programmes provide documents like the diploma supplement, i.e. with some detailed information about courses and/or activities, the criterion could be deemed met. In the case of a programme that was evaluated between “not applicable” and “met”, the panel stated that the module information could be included in the diploma supplement.

#### Criterion 4: Quality assurance arrangements

Overall	Met	Not met	Other
	7	5	2

#### Criterion 4.1: Internal and external quality assurance is conducted in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

		Met	Not met	Other
Indicators	4.1.1: <i>Each HEI involved in the joint programme has a well-defined QA policy and procedures that are explicitly aligned with the ESG.</i>	8 (9)	4 (2)	2
	4.1.2: <i>Each HEI involved receive external QA reports that assess the compliance with ESG policies (and the joint programme is part of this report).</i>	7 (9)	4 (1)	3
	4.1.3: <i>There is a specific body at the programme level, composed by representatives of all HEIs, that oversees the internal QA of the joint programme.</i>	7 (11)	5 (2)	2



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Overall, all indicators' requirements were met in more than 50% of the full programmes. Five out of nine programmes fulfilled all indicators, while one programme fulfilled all but one. On the other hand, three programmes did not meet a single indicator and one programme was in between clear judgements, with two indicators' requirements met and two not met. From pilot evaluation notes it is clear that evidence on QA procedures and responsibilities can be improved.

With short programmes, the situation is less clear. Only one such programme fulfilled all the above indicators, while in four cases programmes met only some of the indicators or judgement was not possible due to lack of evidence. This clearly demonstrates that meeting these requirements is a challenge for smaller, more flexible learning units, although that should not be problematic if requirements are interpreted as functioning on an institutional (educational provider) level. In one evaluation, the panel made reference to the self-assessment which states that the criteria are not applicable, yet the panel questions this as they believe that the indicators relating to the joint internal quality assurance and QA policies and procedures of involved HEI can also be applied to smaller learning units.

One surprising finding from this pilot evaluation was that four programmes do not meet the requirements of indicator 4.1.2, which refers to a basic level of functioning of each higher education unit. This result can only be interpreted as the programmes not being clearly involved in institutional-level external QA and therefore not receiving such reports. This is of course only applicable for those programmes that did not undergo accreditation based on the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes.

**Criterion 4.2: *The programme, the study field or the study institution are accredited by an EQAR-registered agency.***

		<b>Met</b>	<b>Not met</b>	<b>Other</b>
Indicators	4.2.1: <i>The accreditation or evaluation agency responsible for assessing the programme, study field, or institutions is listed on the EQAR.</i>	7 (9)	4 (3)	3

In case of programmes that did not get accredited nor externally evaluated via the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes it was not completely clear to which quality assurance organisations this criterion would refer to. Assuming that this would mean that all partner universities would have to be accredited by an EQAR-registered agency, this led to four programmes being non-compliant, in part also because they involve partner universities from outside of Europe. When it comes to short programmes, in three cases it was difficult to assess whether the criterion is met or not met, since it is not fully clear which external quality assurance system such programmes would fall under. However, understood in a narrower manner, the criterion should not present significant obstacles to such programmes because institutional level quality assurance of partner universities is mainly conducted by EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies.



**Criterion 4.3: 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).**

		Met	Not met	Other
Indicators	4.3.1: <i>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.</i>	5 (6)	4 (3)	5

Five full programmes met this criterion, two did not. Two full programmes fulfilled this criterion, one could not be evaluated, and one programme is between “not possible to evaluate” and “not met”.

In the formulation of this criterion, there is a degree of unclarity due to the word “preferably” being included. Therefore, it was not easy to see in which scenarios a programme could be deemed not compliant with this criterion. Nonetheless, FOCI pilot evaluation panels analysed whether programmes have actually been accredited via the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes or not. This analysis showed that five of the included programmes underwent this type of accreditation.

This criterion is not applicable to short programmes, and evaluation panels had difficulties judging whether this should be evaluated as not meeting the criterion or whether there is an interpretation in which the logic of the criterion can be extended to short programmes as well.

### **Criterion 5: Joint policies for the joint programme**

Overall	Met	Not met	Other
	7	2	5

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

	<b>Results of pilot evaluation (number of programmes)</b>
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		Met	Not met	Other
Indicators	5.1.1: <i>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.</i>	10 (11)	2 (2)	2
	5.1.2: <i>The selection criteria are fair, consistent, inclusive and do not favour candidates from a specific participating country or institution.</i>	9 (13)	3 (0)	2
	5.1.3: <i>A code of conduct or guidelines for supervision are present in the joint programme.</i>	4 (2)	7 (3°)	3

This criterion was one of the proposed criteria which the FOCI Expert Group Methodology deemed most open-ended and subject to interpretation. Therefore, three specific indicators were developed in an attempt to operationalise the criterion (see FOCI deliverable 2.1). Out of the three criteria, first and second one scored highest results in terms of compliance, with an interesting outcome of four out of five short programmes being evaluated as compliant with these indicators. Indicator 5.1.3 proved more problematic, with only four programmes (two full programmes and two short programmes) meeting the requirement. This is likely a result of this indicator being highly specific, since not all learning models require supervision.

An important lesson learned from the pilot evaluation against this criterion is the importance of either being very explicit in describing the criteria, or including certain interpretative and contextual documents which would help the evaluators apply the criterion to specific programmes and their contexts.

### Criterion 6: Transnational campus – access to services

Overall	Met	Not met	Other
	7	4	3

**6.1: *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.***



		Results of pilot evaluation (number of programmes)		
		Met	Not met	Other
Indicators	6.1.1: 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).	8 (7)	4 (4)	2
	6.1.2: 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.	9 (10)	4 (3)	1
	6.1.3: 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.	6 (5)	4 (0)	4
	6.1.4: 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.	7 (9)	4 (3)	3

This was a criterion for which many of the evaluated programmes had issues providing substantial evidence. Therefore, for three full programme this criterion could not be properly evaluated by the pilot evaluation teams. Out of the remaining full programmes, five met the criterion and in one instance, no evidence was provided, so the panel concluded that the programme did not meet the criterion.

The three inconclusive pilot evaluation results also include an example in which, although the programme met all indicators, the panel judged that the criterion was not met because it is not





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clear whether students in this joint programme have access to all services, as the websites listed contain only general information about student access to services at participating higher education institutions. Similarly, another panel stated that little information was provided on this criterion, and although three of the four indicators were met, the panel noted that there was a lack of common agreement in relation to access to services and sometimes a lack of information on whether access is provided. Finally, a third examples refers to a situation in which a programme met the requirements of only two out of four indicators because the consortium agreement includes provisions on two types of services, but no evidence of the other two types of services included in the FOCI indicators.

The majority of the short programmes (three out of five) expectedly did not meet the criterion. Since these are not full programmes, many student services are not provided jointly, although the pilot evaluation panels did not judge this as not applicable – the implication here being that consortia (and especially considering these are European Universities Alliances) providing a joint support structure for students is a realistic expectation even for short programmes.

In the case of short programmes that meet the criterion, the note is made about the limitation (the services are only available at the partner universities at which the students are taking a course or activity).

## Criterion 7: Flexible and embedded student mobility arrangements

Overall	Met	Not met	Other
	8	2	4

### **7.1: 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).**

		Met	Not met	Other
Indicators	7.1.1: 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.	7 (9)	2 (1)	5
	7.1.2: Mandatory mobility is supported by appropriate information actions, and by facilitating measures such as grants, access, inclusivity, housing, etc.	8 (12)	1 (2)	5



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

		<b>Met</b>	<b>Not met</b>	<b>Other</b>
Indicators	7.2.1: 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.	7 (7)	3 (3)	4

This criterion has the strongest observed discrepancy between full programmes and short programmes, in line with initial expectations about the criterion focused on mobility periods. Most of the full programmes (7 out of 9) had no issues in demonstrating compliance with this criterion, while only in two cases there were doubts about the quality of evidence provided. In one case, the panel expressed such doubts because evidence was provided for some aspects of the student mobility support (e.g. accommodation and other practical issues at a university) and not for others (e.g. facilitation of grant administration). However, clearly all these programmes involve a strong mobility dimension.

For short programmes, on the other hand, the minimum number of ECTS or the duration of the stay abroad is typically not applicable due to the smaller volume and duration of such programmes. This is not the case of all short programmes however, as some do integrate a significant mobility period, although it is clear that this criterion needs to be revised if it is to be applied to smaller, more flexible units such as micro-credentials.

**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).**

		<b>Met</b>	<b>Not met</b>	<b>Other</b>
Indicators	7.3.1: 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	1 (1)	0 (4)	0



	research specific projects and joint research publications and how; the participation in these activities is encouraged, accessible and effective.			
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Similarly to other full programmes, the doctoral programme included in the pilot evaluation did not face specific obstacles in fulfilling this criterion. Programme self-evaluation clearly demonstrates that all students can take advantage of mobility opportunities and support, and participate in all activities at partner universities.

### Criterion 8: Multilingualism

Overall	Met	Not met	Other
	7	3	4

#### **8.1: During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different EU official languages, language classes excluded.**

		Met	Not met	Other
Indicators	8.1.1: 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.	8 (9)	5 (3)	1

Six out of nine full programmes met the requirements of this criterion, while two out of six short programmes did so. This indicator was very clearly described, so there was only one instance in which the pilot evaluation panel doubted whether the indicator is applicable, based on the self-assessment of the programme which claimed that this criterion cannot be fulfilled for such a programme. However, the panels mainly deemed this to be feasible for all types of programmes, including micro-credentials of the type that was included in the pilot evaluation.

In cases where the requirements of this indicator were not met, the teaching is done primarily or exclusively in English, which is intentional and by design of the programme.

#### **Criterion 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.**

		Met	Not met	Other
Indicators	8.2.1: The joint programme lists all the opportunities and the various contexts of exposure to EU official languages within the period of studies.	5 (6)	6 (3)	3
	8.2.2: The joint programme offers language support to students and resources to “fill the gap” like language courses, labs, online training platforms, etc.	6 (7)	6 (2)	2

Similarly to the indicator 8.1.1, these two indicators which further operationalise the criterion had roughly half of the programmes meeting the requirements and half not meeting the requirements. Three cases in which there were doubts about applicability or level of compliance (the panel could not decide clearly whether the requirements is met or not met), were all about the short programmes. Significant differences were once again observed between full programmes and short programmes, as the former had a significantly higher level of compliance than the latter.

Programmes that did not meet the criterion deliver all courses only in English and/or do not mention language support in the self-assessment form, as panels have observed.

### **Criterion 9: Innovative learning approaches**

Overall	Met	Not met	Other
	11	1	2

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

		Met	Not met	Other
Indicators	9.1.1: 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	11 (13)	2 (0)	1



	learning approaches, such as collaborative learning, challenge-based learning, project-based learning, or inquiry-based learning methods (list is not exhaustive).			
	9.1.2: The joint programme promotes the acquisition of soft skills.	11 (12)	1 (0)	2

Overall, this criterion is met for 11 programmes, which marks a very high level of compliance – almost all programmes (both full and short) successfully demonstrated fulfilling the requirements of both indicators. In two cases, no sufficient evidence of student-centred learning (policies) was provided, while in one case, the panel weighed the first indicator as more important, which affected the overall assessment of the criterion. In general, no significant differences were observed between full and short programmes, as both had a high level of compliance with the criterion.

However, it should be noted that even with specific indicators developed, this criterion remained fairly subject to interpretation. Therefore, the programmes were free to provide diverse types of evidence through the self-assessment process, and it was extremely difficult to assess whether the learning and teaching approaches truly are innovative and student-centred via the remote and desk-based analysis. This is something to be taken into account in the ensuing refinement of the European degree (label) criteria).

### Criterion 10: Graduate outcomes

Overall	Met	Not met	Other
	3	7	4

**10.1: 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.**

		Results of pilot evaluation (number of programmes)		
		Met	Not met	Other
Indicators	10.1.1: The joint programme has a system in place to track and monitor the outcomes of its graduates, which	4 (6)	7 (5)	3



	collects data and analyses factors such as employment rates, further education pursuits, career trajectories, and other relevant indicators.			
	10.1.2: Indicators include the adoption of the EUROGRADUATE questions or the incorporation of parts of the QA process.	0 (1)	11 (9)	3
	10.1.3: The joint programme collaborates with relevant stakeholders to ensure that labour market and societal needs are considered.	9 (12)	3 (1)	2

Overall, the level of compliance with this criterion was low, with only three programmes (full programmes) meeting the criterion and seven not meeting it. Among the evaluated programmes, none of the short programmes met the criterion, which is understandable considering that such programmes typically do not frame their completed students as “graduates”. Among the full programmes a high level of diversity was encountered, with three programmes meeting the criterion and five not meeting it. The latter were unable to demonstrate clear evidence or even relevant references (for example mention of a survey in the student outcomes documents), while the websites in some cases included only alumni testimonials, which the panel did not find enough. Indicator 10.1.2 referring to the EUROGRADUATE survey was the most problematic one, with none of the evaluated programmes using this tool for graduate monitoring.

On the other hand, for short programmes the pilot evaluation panels had a variety of interpretations, ranging from “not met”, to “not applicable”, to “between not met and met”. The judgement of being not applicable is clear and to be expected in certain cases, as short, flexible modules do not have (nor should they be expected to have) overarching graduate monitoring mechanisms. Some evaluated short programmes, however, did have certain tools of monitoring their graduates’ outcomes, but this was not sufficient for the panels to judge this as undoubtedly compliant.

### Criterion

Overall	Met	Not met	Other
	3	2	9

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



		Met	Not met	Other
Indicators	11.1.1: 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.	3 (6)	7 (6)	4
	11.1.2: Scholarship and/or financial support such as grant are provided in order to alleviate financial disadvantage.	7 (7)	5 (3)	2

Overall, this was the criterion with the highest number of “not applicable” or “between met and not met” judgements by the pilot evaluation panels. Only three programmes fulfilled both the indicators and can be deemed to meet the criterion. These are three full programmes. Short programmes, on the other hand, clearly expressed doubts about the applicability of this indicators, but the pilot evaluation panels did consider this relevant also for short programmes, yet they could not confirm a sufficient level of evidence.

This is further complicated by the fact that this is another instance of a criterion (and even specific indicators) being highly subject to interpretation, meaning that expectations were not always clear to evaluated programmes. Differences between levels of compliance can also be observed between the two indicators, as it is clear that a higher number of programmes awards financial support than it establishes a more general support structure for inclusivity, which is likely a consequence of the first indicator being much broader than the second one.

**Criterion 11.2: *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).***

		Results of pilot evaluation (number of programmes)		
		Met	Not met	Other
Indicators	11.2.1: The recruitment process of researchers is fair and transparent.	0 (5)	1 (0)	0
	11.2.2: The programme adopts measures to minimise the environmental impact of research and promotes sustainable practices.	0 (5)	1 (1)	0



	11.2.3: 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.	0 (0)	1 (3)	0
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Since this element of Criterion 11 refers only to the EQF level 8 programmes, only one programme was evaluated against this set of indicators. The pilot evaluation panel’s explanation refers to the lack of mention of diverse groups or students in the documents, focusing on only one specific group (that of disabled students), and general lack of (direct) proofs.

## 2.1 Optional criteria

Within the FOCI pilot evaluation process, it was clearly detected that the optional criteria did not receive the same level of attention within the self-assessment process when it comes to the detail level and amount of evidence provided. Evaluated programmes and FOCI Expert Group Methodology also had methodological questions about the use and impact of the optional criteria – if there is a minimal threshold to be reached for awarding a European degree (label) then how do the optional criteria factor in?

FOCI project further developed a methodology through which the optional criteria were operationalised (and made more precise) via determining multiple indicators per each criterion. Although this explicated the criteria, it also led to increasing the burden on the participating programmes in terms of providing evidence. As a result, some of the programmes were not able to submit a sufficiently reliable level of supporting materials. Therefore, the pilot evaluation testing of optional criteria was more tentative and general than this is the case with mandatory criteria.

In the following tables, the results of the self-assessment will be shown in brackets below the results of the evaluation conducted by the panels (only for the Met/Partially met/Not met responses).

**Optional criterion 1: *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.***

		Met	Partially met	Not met	Other
Indicators	1.1: <i>The number and percentage of online/blended courses or modules offered as part of the joint programme.</i>	3 (6)	0 (2)	5 (4)	5





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	1.2: <i>The number of intensive courses or modules offered as part of the joint programme (workshops, seminars, inquiry-based brainstorming, fieldwork...).</i>	5 (9)	1 (1)	3 (2)	5
	1.3: <i>The availability and participation rates in summer/winter schools as part of the joint programme.</i>	1 (2)	2 (3)	5 (4)	6
	1.4: <i>The number and nature of collaborative online projects conducted with partner institutions (group assignments or projects).</i>	3 (6)	2 (3)	3 (3)	6
	<b>Overall</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>

Overall, level of compliance with this criterion was relatively low, though this was clearly due to the combination of the difficulty in demonstrating (proving) compliance and the status of the criterion as optional. In general, it was quite demanding for the programmes to fulfil all four indicators developed within the FOCI methodology. The (full) programmes that did not meet this criterion do not offer online/blended courses/modules, intensive courses or they did not provide the information on online participation in the course description on the website, or the intensive nature of the courses was not mentioned.

For one full programme that partially met the criterion, the panel noted that not enough information was submitted and there is uncertainty about the usefulness of this criterion, as they assume that the programme under review has implemented certain forms (online, blended and intensive courses, collaborative projects, etc.) in view of the specific profile of their field of study and their students.

For full programmes that could not be assessed, the panels found only one online course for the programme, noted that the optional criterion only applies to EQF 6 and 7, therefore it is not relevant for reviewed doctoral programme or faced general lack of substantial evidence.

Short programmes had a relatively lower number of “not met” judgements, although the pilot evaluation teams again faced obstacles in analysing sufficient evidence for analysing all four indicators. The only programme deemed to comply with this criterion is a short programme, while another short programme was judged as partially compliant. The pilot evaluation review panel noted that the programme is based on online collaborative learning, but it has not met the indicator regarding availability and participation rates in winter/summer schools.



**Optional criterion 2: *The joint programme offers the possibility to take language classes so as to enhance the command of multiple European languages.***

		<b>Met</b>	<b>Partially met</b>	<b>Not met</b>	<b>Other</b>
Indicators	<i>2.1: The number of classes offered in an EU language as part of the joint programme or extra-curricular activities.</i>	5 (4)	1 (4)	6 (6)	2
	<i>2.2: Language classes offered for different proficiency levels (students can improve their demand of EU languages regardless of their initial proficiency).</i>	5 (6)	3 (3)	5 (5)	1
	<i>2.3: The availability of language learning resources, such as multimedia resources, online materials, (virtual) language laboratories.</i>	4 (5)	1 (3)	6 (6)	3
	<i>2.4: The joint programme offers cultural immersion activities so that students can practice the language skills in authentic environments (eventually tandem activities among pairs).</i>	4 (5)	3 (5)	5 (4)	2
<b>Overall</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>

This criterion was largely considered in combination with the corresponding mandatory criterion on multilingualism, and this caused a certain level of confusion within the evaluation process. Several programmes encountered difficulties in providing requested information and evidence.

Pilot evaluation process also encountered scenarios in which the programmes themselves were stricter in the interpretation of the criteria than the evaluators. For example, although one self-assessment claimed that the programme in question does not provide special activities, and thus does not (fully) meet the criterion, the panel found that some activities that are being offered might actually be sufficient to support the conclusion of the criterion being met.

Due to their nature and scope, short programmes are typically very specific and smaller in volume, so most of the short programmes included in the pilot evaluation had difficulties in complying with this criterion. Given the nature of these programmes, it would even be justified to state that this



criterion is hardly applicable to short programmes in general (with a few expected exceptions, in terms of the structure and content of the programmes).

**Optional criterion 3: *The joint programme ensures that future labour market needs are considered and/or includes cooperation with businesses and sectors in its curriculum.***

		<b>Met</b>	<b>Partially met</b>	<b>Not met</b>	<b>Other</b>
Indicators	3.1: <i>The joint programme ensures that future labour market needs are considered and/or includes cooperation with businesses and other sectors in its curriculum.</i>	3 (8)	7 (5)	2 (1)	2
	3.2: <i>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.</i>	3 (5)	3 (4)	7 (5)	1
	3.3: <i>The programme is able to identify emerging labour market needs.</i>	3 (5)	0 (5)	7 (4)	4
	3.4: <i>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.</i>  <i>Employers give feedback about competences of hired students (and/or internship).</i>	1 (2)	3 (4)	9 (8)	1
	3.5: <i>The programme created an alumni office/service who can advise students about job opportunities, career</i>	2 (4)	2 (2)	9 (8)	1



	<i>progression, and entrepreneurship in alignment with labour market needs.</i>				
<b>Overall</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>

Within this criterion, it was once again difficult for the programmes to meet the requirements of all indicators developed. Two programmes that do meet the criterion are full programmes who were able to demonstrate strong ties with the labour market. On the other hand, none of the short programmes was able to fulfil all the indicators, as some review panels noted that this was impossible to evaluate at a programme level for such small models e.g. the signing of the formal agreement by the programme), while institutional or consortium-level information was not always available for this pilot evaluation process. Encountering difficulties in providing evidence was not exclusively an obstacle for short programmes however, since three full programmes also did not submit enough evidence for the pilot evaluation panel to reach a clear decision.

**Optional criterion 4: *The joint programme provides opportunities for international professional internships/ work-based learning recognised through the award of ECTS.***

		<b>Met</b>	<b>Partially met</b>	<b>Not met</b>	<b>Other</b>
Indicators	<i>4.1: 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.</i>	5 (4)	0 (2)	7 (8)	2
	<i>4.2: Regardless the duration, the ECTS allocation is guaranteed for international internship and work-based learning placements.</i>	5 (4)	0 (1)	7 (9)	2
	<i>4.3: The programme has established a learning agreement between the different actors involved (students,</i>	7 (6)	0 (1)	5 (7)	2



	<i>hosting organisations, the programme itself).</i>				
	<i>4.4: 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.</i>	4 (6)	1 (2)	6 (6)	3
	<i>4.5: Students have the opportunity to give feedback on the internship itself, the missions, the quality of supervision, etc.</i>	4 (5)	1 (1)	6 (8)	3
	<i>4.6: The international internship is reported in the diploma supplement.</i>	4 (6)	1 (2)	7 (6)	2
	<b>Overall</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>

For this criterion, a relatively high number of indicators was developed – six in total. Out of these six indicators, the third one was least problematic for evaluated programmes: all together five full programmes and two short programmes managed to demonstrate compliance with indicator requirements. On the other hand, other indicators, especially 4.4 - 4.6 demonstrated a lower level of compliance, especially among full programmes – only two of such programmes were deemed to meet the requirements of all three indicators.

Analysing the applicability of the criterion to short, flexible and open models involved in this pilot evaluation, it is of interest to note that some of these programmes clearly have the potential to meet the criterion if it is interpreted flexibly. For example, one programme within an evaluated micro-module offers students all the opportunities that the criterion specifies, while another short programme includes a lot of practical learning, albeit not in the form of a structured internship.

**Optional criterion 5: *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).***

This criterion is only applicable to EQF level 8 – PhD programmes. One PhD programme analysed within the FOCI pilot evaluation did not meet this criterion.



**Optional criterion 6: *The joint programme includes components and actions related to environmental sustainability and implements measures to minimise the environmental footprint of its activities.***

		<b>Met</b>	<b>Partially met</b>	<b>Not met</b>	<b>Other</b>
Indicators	6.1: <i>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.</i>	1 (2)	1 (2)	8 (10)	4
	6.2: <i>The programme integrates environmental sustainability topics and principles into its curriculum, by offering dedicated and mandatory modules.</i>	4 (6)	2 (2)	4 (6)	4
	6.3: <i>The programme promotes awareness among students, faculty, and staff about environmental sustainability issues and promote sustainable behaviours (through workshops, seminars, campaigns, educational materials).</i>	3 (4)	2 (3)	5 (7)	4
	6.4: <i>The programme collaborates with sustainability organizations or initiatives that can facilitate its commitment to environmental sustainability.</i>	3 (3)	1 (1)	6 (10)	4
	6.5: <i>The programme has specific support measures to facilitate green travel to the mobility destination, and keeps track of</i>	3 (3)	1 (2)	7 (9)	3



	<i>the students using sustainable travel.</i>				
Overall		<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>

Overall level of compliance for this criterion is relatively low, especially for the first indicator relating to having defined an environmental policy and sustainability strategy. Due to the general lack of evidence provided, it was difficult for the pilot evaluation panels to draw reliable conclusions in case of most of full programmes. Even when some documents were provided, the evidence provided did not specifically relate to the criterion as it is described and operationalised.

With regard to the short programmes, one pilot evaluation team noted that this criterion is difficult to apply due to their relatively small scale, and practically the only way a programme can meet the criterion is if the programme in question is about sustainability. On the other hand, it was also noted that any programme using Erasmus+ mobility scheme meets the indicator of facilitating green travel.

**Optional criterion 7: *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>Met</b>	<b>Partially met</b>	<b>Not met</b>	<b>Other</b>
Indicators	<i>7.1: 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.</i>	4 (6)	2 (5)	4 (3)	4
	<i>7.2: 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.</i>	7 (9)	1 (3)	3 (2)	3
	<i>7.3: The programme offers training and development</i>	3 (5)	0 (1)	8 (8)	3



	<i>opportunities for faculty members to enhance their digital skills in T&amp;L.</i>				
	<i>7.4: 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).</i>	3 (2)	0 (2)	9 (10)	2
Overall		<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>

Two full programmes met the criterion and the panel noted that the courses contain digital components, linked to the applying digital models, digitisation, digital tools in business and manufacturing and that the websites refer to various components and actions related to the development of high-level digital skills of students in the partner institutions.

Three full programmes did not meet the criterion, with the explanations relating to the curriculum and course descriptions not including details on digital skills or insufficient evidence of student digital skills development.

For short programmes, one programme met the criterion, as the panel determined from analysis of the module description and syllabus that the programme facilitates the acquisition of digital skills through an online format, while training and development opportunities are ensured through institutionalised practises. For one programme that partially met the criterion the panel assumed that that in order to participate in specific activities, students, as well as academics, have access to training and education in the relevant digital tools. In these cases, the pilot evaluation panels exhibited a high level of flexibility in their interpretations.

**Optional criterion 8: *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>Met</b>	<b>Partially met</b>	<b>Not met</b>	<b>Other</b>
Indicators	<i>8.1: The programme recognises and facilitates students' engagement and participation in activities that promote democratic values and address societal needs, like student representation civic engagement</i>	2 (3)	1 (2)	9 (9)	2





	<i>initiatives, volunteering, human rights, community service projects; this engagement is reported in the diploma supplement, event when ECTS credits are awarded.</i>				
	<i>8.2: 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...</i>	2 (3)	2 (4)	8 (7)	2
	<i>8.3: The programme incorporates the principles of democratic values, social justice, and active citizenship into the curriculum.</i>	4 (6)	1 (4)	6 (4)	3
Overall		<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>

For the full programme that met the criterion, the explanation is that the programme is designed so that graduates apply the competencies of mechanical engineering in the context of different societal needs. The majority of the full programmes, five out of nine, did not meet the criterion. No documents were submitted or, in the opinion of the panels, no information on a particular topic was provided on the listed website. The full programme that partially met the criterion met one indicator (out of three indicators) referenced and demonstrated partnership with external entities (organisations, NGOs, etc.). One panel noted that the Erasmus+ programme itself promotes democratic values, social justice and citizenship to all Europeans, even though the programme under pilot review did not ultimately meet the criterion.

One short programme met the criterion, two partially met it and two did not meet it. More detailed explanation was provided for the programmes that partially met the criterion. This programme, as the pilot evaluation panel states, closely relates to community engagement through its content and structure. However, a formalised partnership with local entities was not established in this programme due to the short duration of the programme and the decision to focus on internationalisation. For the other programme, which also partially met the criterion, the explanation is that there is clear evidence of student involvement on the website, but not enough to warrant judgement of full compliance.

**Optional criterion 9: *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>Met</b>	<b>Partially met</b>	<b>Not met</b>	<b>Other</b>
Indicators	9.1: <i>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.</i>	9 (12)	1 (1)	2 (1)	2
	9.2: <i>The participating HEI institutions organise information sessions and webinars to provide prospective students and other stakeholders with detailed information and Q&amp;A sessions.</i>	6 (11)	1 (0)	4 (3)	3
	9.3: <i>The participating HEI institutions develop joint promotional materials, such as brochures, websites, or prospectuses, which provide comprehensive information about the joint programme, its objectives, curriculum, admission requirements, and potential career opportunities.</i>	7 (12)	2 (2)	1 (0)	4
	9.4: <i>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.</i>	7 (11)	3 (1)	2 (2)	2
	9.5: <i>The participating HE institutions organise open days or campus visits specifically for</i>	5 (6)	2 (2)	4 (6)	3



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	<i>the joint programme, allowing prospective students to visit the campus and meet faculty staff and students.</i>				
Overall		<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

Overall, this was the optional criterion with the highest level of compliance among the evaluated programmes. Most of the full programmes, five out of nine, met the criterion, two partially met it, and one did not meet it. In case of programmes deemed to meet the criterion, the following good practices were recognised: the programme has supervisors coordinating joint activities, including promotion; all documents and web links provided show that the programme is visible to all relevant stakeholders; and stakeholder cooperation is included in joint policies and agreements. For the programmes that partially met the criterion, the explanation is that the website is attractive and provides details on the programme, written materials are also available, but no details about information session are provided, campus visits are not reported.

All short programmes met at least one indicator of the criterion, or in other words, they met the criterion to some degree: two fully met it, three partially met it. One panel examined the joint information sessions and promotional materials from the website, but this could not be confirmed from the submitted materials. Another panel noted that one programme conducts some of the promotional activities at the level of involved HEIs and others are joint responsibility, but overall there is joint planning on external communication and dissemination, and materials are jointly developed. In such cases judgement of partial compliance was reached.

Finally, the pilot evaluation panels did note that evaluating some indicators was difficult due to a lack of supporting evidence provided – this was most notably the case for indicators 9.2 and 9.3

## 3. Overview of pilot evaluation results

### 3.1. General overview

Aggregated results of the FOCI pilot evaluation process point to interesting comparisons and conclusions that can be highly relevant for improving the European degree (label) criteria and accompanying evaluation methodology.

#### ***Mandatory vs. optional criteria***

For programmes involved in the FOCI pilot evaluation, mandatory criteria are easier to meet than optional criteria. There is however one exception: joint promotion and awareness-raising activities is met more often than four mandatory criteria. There are several potential interpretations of this finding. Firstly, it has been observed that the mandatory criteria were perceived by programmes to be clearer, more objective and more focused, in comparison with optional criteria which were perceived as more open-ended and subject to interpretation to a higher degree. Secondly, it is possible that in an effort to submit all relevant materials and supporting evidence, the evaluated programmes took mandatory criteria more seriously and invested more effort in demonstrating



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compliance with these criteria. This is especially important in light of the very clear feedback received from the programmes that this pilot evaluation required a fairly high level of workload from their side. Thirdly, it is possible that the mandatory criteria were well developed and well targeted, in the sense that they successfully capture the core elements of joint programmes' European dimension and quality, which then leads to these characteristics being more present among the joint programmes.

Ranking	Criterion	% met
1	C9 Innovative learning approaches	82,1
2	C1 Higher education institutions involved	71,4
3	C2 Transnational joint degree delivery	64,3
4	C3 Transparency of the learning outcomes	60,7
5	C7 Flexible and embedded student mobility arrangements	57,1
6	C8 Multilingualism	53,6
7	C4 Quality assurance arrangements	50,0
8	C5 Joint policies for the joint programme	50,0
9	C6 Transnational campus – access to services	50,0
10	OC9 Joint promotion and awareness-raising activities	50,0
11	C11 Inclusiveness and sustainability	35,7
12	OC2 Language classes in multiple European languages	28,6
13	C10 Graduate outcomes	25,0
14	OC4 Opportunities for international professional internships/ work-based learning	21,4
15	OC7 High-level digital skills	21,4
16	OC3 Consideration of future labour market needs	14,3
17	OC6 Environmental sustainability	14,3
18	OC8 Promoting democratic values and addressing societal needs	14,3
19	OC1 Additional formats of transnational learning activities	7,1

*Table 2: Percentage of programmes meeting individual criteria*

The performance rates of programmes against the criteria relating to quality assurance arrangements (C4) and joint policies for the joint programme (C5) appear problematic in this analysis, as only 50% of the programmes meets these criteria. This warrants a further analysis on whether the criteria need to be reformulated in order to be truly valid, or the evaluated programmes need to improve in order to meet the criteria.

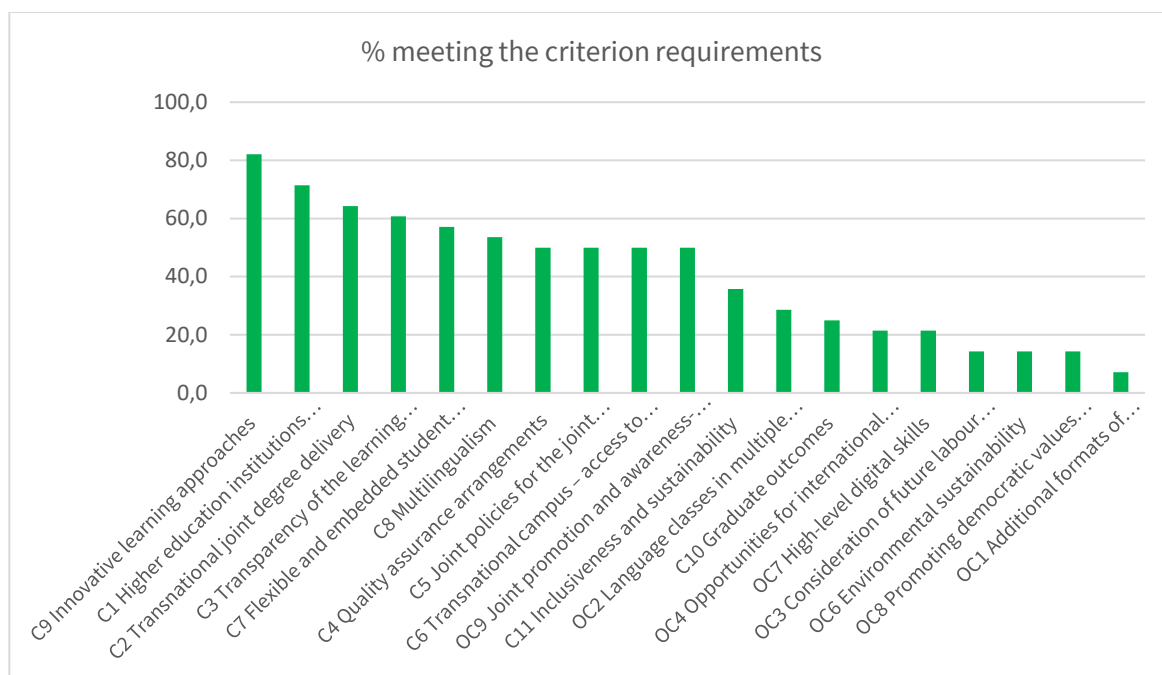


Figure 4: Percentage of programmes meeting individual criteria

### **Feasibility of assessment**

FOCI pilot evaluation also invested effort in analysing how feasible are the criteria in their current format for evaluating compliance in practice. The list below includes those criteria for which more than 20% of the programmes were judged as not possible to evaluate:

Mandatory criteria:

- C1 Higher education institutions involved (21,4%)
- C5 Joint policies for the joint programme (21,4%)
- C6 Transnational campus – access to services (21,4%)
- C11 Inclusiveness and sustainability (28,6%)

Optional criteria:

- OC1 Additional formats of transnational learning activities (42,9%)
- OC2 Language classes in multiple European languages (21,4%)
- OC3 Consideration of future labour market needs (42,9%)

In the cases of criteria listed above, the evaluated programmes found it especially difficult to provide relevant evidence and conducted self-assessment, while the evaluation panels had difficulties in reaching a clear judgement. This finding signals that these criteria are in need of reformulation, or at least supplementing the criteria with additional explanations and evaluation guidelines.

### **Full programmes vs. short programmes**

In the context of FOCI consortium's strong belief that the principles and methodology of the European degree (label) should be expanded onto other, innovative and flexible models of higher



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education provision that are not full programmes, it was relevant to analyse levels of compliance of full programme as opposed to these other models (termed here “short programmes” for brevity).

The analysis shows that full programmes performed better than short programmes: 58,1 % vs. 47,3 % for mandatory criteria and 23,6 % vs. 17,5 % for optional criteria. This difference is below initial expectations, and considering how different and internally diverse these programmes are, this does not signal a highly significant difference. This finding should also be considered in conjunction with the feedback from pilot evaluation panels which often suggested ways in which criteria and/or indicators could be (re)interpreted in a way which would make them applicable to a more diverse set of higher education models.

### ***Detailed overview***

Taking into account that the above table only shows the percentage of programmes that are deemed to clearly meet the criteria, tables below demonstrate percentage of programmes deemed to clearly not meet the criteria, but also the percentage of cases in which pilot evaluation pilots could not accurately assess the level of compliance or the criterion was deemed not applicable to the programme. This information is always to be taken and analysed in conjunction.

<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Criterion</b>	<b>% not met</b>
1	C10 Graduate outcomes	57,1
2	OC8 Promoting democratic values and addressing societal needs	50,0
3	OC4 Opportunities for international professional internships/ work-based learning	42,9
4	OC6 Environmental sustainability	42,9
5	C4 Quality assurance arrangements	35,7
6	OC3 Consideration of future labour market needs	35,7
7	OC7 High-level digital skills	35,7
8	C6 Transnational campus – access to services	28,6
9	C8 Multilingualism	28,6
10	OC2 Language classes in multiple European languages	28,6
11	C11 Inclusiveness and sustainability	25,0
12	C3 Transparency of the learning outcomes	21,4
13	OC1 Additional formats of transnational learning activities	21,4
14	C2 Transnational joint degree delivery	14,3
15	C5 Joint policies for the joint programme	14,3
16	C7 Flexible and embedded student mobility arrangements	14,3



17	C9 Innovative learning approaches	10,7
18	OC9 Joint promotion and awareness-raising activities	7,1
19	C1 Higher education institutions involved	0,0

*Table 3: Percentage of programmes not meeting individual criteria*

As outlined above, for a certain number of criteria the pilot evaluation panels could not reach a reliable judgement. This includes cases in which there was insufficient evidence to reach clear judgement or the criterion was deemed not applicable. Such instances are grouped together in the category below.

<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Criterion</b>	<b>% other</b>
1	OC1 Additional formats of transnational learning activities	71,4
2	OC3 Consideration of future labour market needs	50,0
3	C11 Inclusiveness and sustainability	42,9
4	OC2 Language classes in multiple European languages	42,9
5	OC6 Environmental sustainability	42,9
6	OC7 High-level digital skills	42,9
7	OC9 Joint promotion and awareness-raising activities	42,9
8	C5 Joint policies for the joint programme	35,7
9	OC4 Opportunities for international professional internships/ work-based learning	35,7
10	OC8 Promoting democratic values and addressing societal needs	35,7
11	C1 Higher education institutions involved	28,6
12	C7 Flexible and embedded student mobility arrangements	28,6
13	C2 Transnational joint degree delivery	21,4
14	C6 Transnational campus – access to services	21,4
15	C3 Transparency of the learning outcomes	17,9
16	C8 Multilingualism	17,9
17	C10 Graduate outcomes	17,9
18	C4 Quality assurance arrangements	14,3
19	C9 Innovative learning approaches	7,1

*Table 4: Percentage of programmes with insufficient evidence or criteria not applicable*

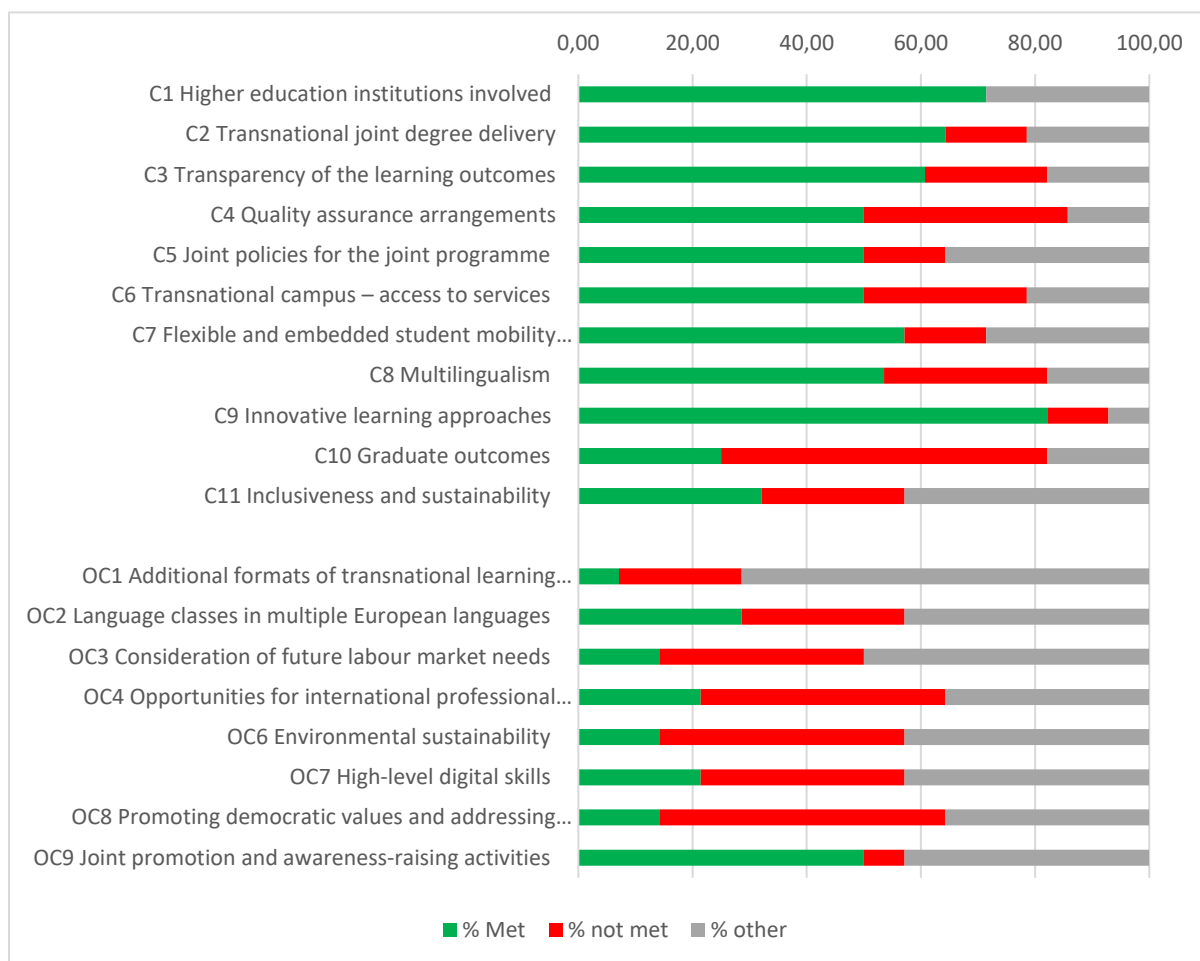


Figure 5: Evaluation results for individual criteria

### 3.2. Results of the self-assessment

In addition to the data presented together with the results of the evaluations conducted by the panels, below is presented an overview for the results of the self-assessment.

For this table, which details the sub-criteria and indicators, the "not applicable" responses were excluded and only included those that, according to the respondents, clearly met or not met the criteria and indicators. Hence, a limited number of responses is considerate (displayed in the last column) and only the percentage of met indicators is presented.

Moreover, only the mandatory criteria are here taken into account (for which, given the wording of the question, it was possible to exclude the answer "not applicable"); despite this limitation, there are significant differences compared to the evaluation conducted by the panels, that could lead to relevant insights.





Criteria/ indicators		% met	Answers considered (out of 14)
1.1.2	Existence of an interinstitutional cooperative structure (or body) that designed the programme	91,67	12
1.1.3	The programme has been designed engaging (or consulting) several stakeholders, including student representatives	76,92	13
2.1.1	Existence of a formal agreement, signed by the partner institutions, explicitly stating the conditions for awarding a joint degree	88,89	9
2.1.2	The structure and curriculum of the joint degree reflect the collaborative nature of the programme in a balanced way between the participating HEIs.	100,00	10
2.2.1	The evaluation committee includes members from at least two different institutions located in two different countries, and its compositions is balanced among institutions and area of expertise	77,78	9
3.1.1	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 ways of delivery, assessment criteria	100,00	13
3.1.2	The grading scales used for assessing student performance are converted establishing and 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	100,00	13
3.2.1	A Diploma Supplement is delivered (in the languages of the participant institutions and in English) along with the degree certification	72,73	11
4.1.1	Each HEI involved in the joint programme has a well-defined QA policy and procedures that are explicitly aligned with the ESG	81,82	11
4.1.2	Each HEI involved receives external QA reports that assess the compliance with ESG policies (and the joint programme is part of this report)	90,00	10
4.1.3	There is a specific body at the programme level, composed by representatives of all HEIs, that oversees the internal QA of the joint programme	84,62	13
4.2.1	The accreditation or evaluation agency responsible for assessing the programme, study field, or institutions is listed on the EQAR	75,00	12
4.3.1	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	66,67	9



5.1.1	The participating institutions have jointly developed an admission policy that outlines the criteria, requirements, and procedures for selecting students	84,62	13
5.1.2	The admission selection criteria are fair, consistent, inclusive and do not favour candidates from a specific participating country or institution	100,00	13
5.1.3	A code of conduct or guidelines for supervision are present in the joint programme	40,00	5
6.1.1	Enrolled students have effective access to IT services provided by each participating HEI	63,64	11
6.1.2	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	76,92	13
6.1.3	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	41,67	12
6.1.4	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	75,00	12
7.1.1	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	90,00	10
7.1.2	Mandatory mobility is supported by appropriate information actions, and by facilitating measures such as grants, access, inclusivity, housing, etc. This indicator is:	85,71	14
7.2.1	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	70,00	10
7.3.1	The agreement between participating institutions describes which kind of activities are proposed to doctoral candidates, such 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	20,00	5
8.1.1	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	75,00	12



8.2.1	The joint programme lists all the opportunities and the various contexts of exposure to EU official languages within the period of studies.	66,67	9
8.2.2	The joint programme offers language support to students and resources to “fill the gap” like language courses, labs, online training platforms, etc.	77,78	9
9.1.1	The joint programme prioritises student-centred learning approaches, compliant with the ESG statements, in most of the courses and modules	100,00	13
9.1.2	The joint programme promotes the acquisition of soft skills	100,00	12
10.1.1	The joint programme has a system in place to track and monitor the outcomes of its graduates, which collects data and analyses factors such employment rates, further education pursuits, career trajectories, and other relevant indicators	54,55	11
10.1.2	Indicators of the survey include the adoption of the EUROGRADUATE questions or the incorporation of parts of the QA process	10,00	10
10.1.3	The joint programme collaborates with relevant stakeholders to ensure that labour market and societal needs are considered	92,31	13
11.1.1	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	50,00	12
11.1.2	Scholarship and/or financial support such as grant are provided in order to alleviate financial disadvantage	70,00	10
11.2.1	The recruitment process of researchers is fair and transparent	100,00	5
11.2.2	The programme adopts measures to minimise the environmental impact of research and promotes sustainable practices	83,33	6
11.2.3	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	0,00	3

*Table 5: Programme self-assessment results*

The analysis of this table, in comparison with those presented above, clearly shows that the percentages of "met" responses are higher in the self-assessment than in the evaluation conducted by the panels (even though the scales were slightly different).

The reasons for this difference can be differ: high level of precision and detail of the requested evidence, for which the respondents assumed that they had satisfied the criterion or indicator, even though they could not prove it; the lack of time to find evidence; the different interpretation of the indicators; the aforementioned difference in considering the answers.

These possible factors will be further explored in the sections dedicated to the analysis of the in-depth evaluations and feedback received from programmes representatives.



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However, despite differences in percentages, there are nevertheless some results that are consistent from the comparative analysis of the self-assessment and the panel's evaluation: for example, the highest rated criterion is in both cases the “Innovative learning approach” (100% vs. 80,77%), and similar considerations can be made for the other criteria.

The same results are presented in the table below, with the percentages of "met" responses sorted in descending order.

Criteria/ indicators		% met
2.1.2	The structure and curriculum of the joint degree reflect the collaborative nature of the programme in a balanced way between the participating HEIs.	100
3.1.1	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 ways of delivery, assessment criteria	100
3.1.2	The grading scales used for assessing student performance are converted establishing and 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	100
5.1.2	The admission selection criteria are fair, consistent, inclusive and do not favour candidates from a specific participating country or institution	100
9.1.1	The joint programme prioritises student-centred learning approaches, compliant with the ESG statements, in most of the courses and modules	100
9.1.2	The joint programme promotes the acquisition of soft skills	100
11.2.1	The recruitment process of researchers is fair and transparent	100
10.1.3	The joint programme collaborates with relevant stakeholders to ensure that labour market and societal needs are considered	92,31
1.1.2	Existence of an interinstitutional cooperative structure (or body) that designed the programme	91,67
4.1.2	Each HEI involved receives external QA reports that assess the compliance with ESG policies (and the joint programme is part of this report)	90,00
7.2.1	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	90,00
2.1.1	Existence of a formal agreement, signed by the partner institutions, explicitly stating the conditions for awarding a joint degree	88,89
7.1.2	Mandatory mobility is supported by appropriate information actions, and by facilitating measures such as grants, access, inclusivity, housing, etc. This indicator is:	85,71
4.1.3	There is a specific body at the programme level, composed by representatives of all HEIs, that oversees the internal QA of the joint programme	84,62
5.1.1	The participating institutions have jointly developed an admission policy that outlines the criteria, requirements, and procedures for selecting students	84,62
11.2.2	The programme adopts measures to minimise the environmental impact of research and promotes sustainable practices	83,33
4.1.1	Each HEI involved in the joint programme has a well-defined QA policy and procedures that are explicitly aligned with the ESG	81,82



2.2.1	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	77,78
8.2.2	The joint programme offers language support to students and resources to “fill the gap” like language courses, labs, online training platforms, etc.	77,78
1.1.3	The programme has been designed engaging (or consulting) several stakeholders, including student representatives	76,92
6.1.2	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	76,92
4.2.1	The accreditation or evaluation agency responsible for assessing the programme, study field, or institutions is listed on the EQAR	75,00
6.1.4	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	75,00
8.1.1	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	75,00
3.2.1	A Diploma Supplement is delivered (in the languages of the participant institutions and in English) along with the degree certification	72,73
7.2.1	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	70,00
11.1.2	Scholarship and/or financial support such as grant are provided in order to alleviate financial disadvantage	70,00
4.3.1	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	66,67
8.2.1	The joint programme lists all the opportunities and the various contexts of exposure to EU official languages within the period of studies.	66,67
6.1.1	Enrolled students have effective access to IT services provided by each participating HEI	63,64
10.1.1	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	54,55
11.1.1	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	50,00
6.1.3	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	41,67
5.1.3	A code of conduct or guidelines for supervision are present in the joint programme	40,00
7.3.1	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	20,00



10.1.2	Indicators of the survey include the adoption of the EUROGRADUATE questions or the incorporation of parts of the QA process	10,00
11.2.3	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	0

Table 6: Programme self-assessment results (ordered)

### 3.3. Report of the in-depth evaluation

In addition to the evaluations conducted by the panels, in-depth evaluations were carried out for three of the programmes analysed, of which two were full degrees and one a short programme.

The latter was chosen based on its characteristics of “minor” autonomous unit, whose structure has its own internal coherence suitable for inclusion in a full degree.

As regards the two full programmes, were chosen those which had the best correspondence with the criteria and indicators: the in-depth analysis therefore had the objective of understanding why certain criteria were not satisfied, and which obstacles prevented the complete meet of the criteria.

Furthermore, for one of these programmes, the in-depth evaluation was the opportunity to complete the self-assessment, that could not be completed due to a technical problem.

The in-depth evaluations were organised as online interview between programmes representatives and two evaluators; the main points and findings are presented below.

#### **Short programme “YUFE Minors”**

Two representatives of the programme attended the online interview; their main claim regarding the evaluation process is that criteria are clearly intended for full degrees purposes, but with small adaptations of terminology they could also be applied to short programmes. For example, criterion 3.2 (Diploma supplement) cannot be applied literally to short programmes, but by calling it "certification" (or others equivalent concepts), they could have met the criterion. Furthermore, the two interviewees pointed out that many criteria are met at the level of the participating institution, such as the Graduate survey (criterion 11), Digital skills (optional criterion 7), Exposure to academic and the link with civil society (optional criterion 5) and so on; they responded in these cases that the criteria were not met even if they indirectly offered such activities through their home universities, and not at the joint structure level. An adaptation of the criteria and indicators was therefore suggested, so that short programmes can also obtain the label.

#### **Master programme “Business and Technology”**

The evaluators focused on the criteria that were difficult to meet and the related obstacles. Among these, QA requirements criteria (criterion 4) were judged difficult to meet at programme level (suggesting that they should be simplified) and, for the other not met criterion, programme representatives admitted that they do not use the EUROGRADUATE model for their surveys (criterion 10.4).



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Several optional criteria were not met, precisely because their policy is not compliant with:

- Additional forms of mobility (online/blended).
- Exposure to two 2 EU languages in addition to class languages (they would meet the multilingualism criteria if that was limited to the languages of instruction).
- Environmental policy and sustainability strategy (not met at the programme level).

The conclusion is that with a simplification of the mandatory criteria and establishing threshold for the optional ones (which would allow not to respect all of them) this programme could be a good candidate to obtain the label.

### ***Master programme “European Public Health” (Erasmus Mundus)***

Even this programme reported difficulties in meeting the QA requirements (criterion 4), as they are currently formulated: in fact, they do not have a joint quality assurance (only at the level of the participating institutions) although they have an external quality consulting service (but from an agency not present in the EQAR list). A simplification of this criterion would allow the programme to meet it.

The same consideration must be made for the criterion 10 and the use or incorporation of the EUROGRADUATE survey.

The programme cannot guarantee that student services (psychological support, for example) are of the same level everywhere, as required by an indicator in criterion 6: every partner offer services to students, but the evidence of the quality of these services will be very difficult to find.

Regarding the not met optional criteria, as numbered:

- OC1: there is no online course offering, hence virtual mobility is not available (although other online activities are offered to students).
- OC2: multilingualism depends on the educational offer and the policy of the participating institutions, and a synthesis cannot be made (or evidence not provided) at the programme level.
- OC6: actions related to environmental sustainability and implementation of measures to minimise the environmental footprint are currently under reflection.
- OC7: digital skills actions depend on the educational offer and the policy of the participating institutions.
- OC8: even the promotion of democratic values is not planned at the joint level.

The conclusion is the same as for the previously analysed programme: in case of simplification of the mandatory criteria and establishment of a threshold for the optional ones (which would allow not to respect all of them) this programme could be a good candidate to obtain the label.

Furthermore, the representative of the programme pointed out that being an Erasmus Mundus master's degree, certain criteria as formulated in the self-assessment tool do not make sense for



this type of programme, for example the concept of "home university"; similar claims have been made by another Erasmus Mundus programmes.

## 4. Analysis of the pilot evaluation process

One of the important objectives of the pilot evaluation was to collect relevant feedback on the evaluation process itself, including the self-assessment tool that has been used, and the indicators proposed by the Expert Group Methodology and used in the evaluation process.

Feedback comes from the two essential categories of the pilot evaluation: the representatives of the evaluated programmes, and the members of the evaluation panels.

More precisely, in the online tool used, the programme representatives had fields available to express their feedback: one for each criterion, and a final one on the overall evaluation process.

In addition, the three programmes chosen for the in-depth evaluation had the opportunity to further express their point of view on every aspect of the evaluation process, through interviews carried out using a videoconference platform.

The evaluators, for their part, also had the opportunity to give feedback on the evaluation process, using a specific field in the form that they used.

Furthermore, specific ad-hoc meetings were organized with both categories: in this way, the FOCI project was able to collect quantitatively and qualitatively significant feedback, which will be shown below, and used to produce the final recommendations.

### 4.1. Feedback from programmes

The relevance of the requested evidence was the subject of feedback from the examined programmes, and in many cases this issue can explain the gap between the results of the self-assessment and the evaluation carried out by the panel.

At the same time, problems of interpretation have been raised; in these cases, by filling out the self-assessment form, many programmes have preferred to stick to a strict interpretation of what was established by the criteria, which is a further explanation of the overall results obtained.

List below includes the main points highlighted from the feedback received:

- Concerning the first criterion (Joint design of a joint programme) for the indicators 2 (Existence of an interinstitutional cooperative structure or body that designed the programme) and 3 (The programme has been designed engaging (or consulting) several stakeholders, especially student representatives) it was argued that the programmes could have informal contact with stakeholders (student representatives, NGOs and civil society) that actually contributed to the design of the programme by providing feedback and advices, in a way that is difficult to prove. Furthermore, some programme representatives highlighted the difference (not present in the indicator description) between *designing* and *running* a programme; even if the initial design was established only by the participating institutions (as requested by the indicator), its





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revisions and continuous improvement actions were agreed with various stakeholders, thus respecting the spirit of the criterion, although not being able to justify it.

- With reference to the criterion 3.2 (A joint diploma supplement is issued to the student at the end of the joint study programme) it has been highlighted that in case of double degree programme, each participating institution provides its own diploma supplement; even in this case, the intention of the criterion is respected, but the strict interpretation of the text is misleading.
- The criterion 4 dedicated to quality assurance requirements posed several issues: in particular, the jointness and the compliance with the ESG principles. This is particularly true when in the consortium there are English or Irish universities, which could possibly request consulting services to external or independent agencies, or even universities outside the EHEA as in the case of Erasmus-Mundus programmes including participants coming from other continents and therefore not subject to ESG principles.
- The level of service for students (criterion 6) gave rise to various significant feedback. First, it is difficult to know at an aggregate level (and especially for joint degrees involving a large number of participants) what services exist in each partner, for example psychological ones, and how much they are actually used. Precisely, the indicator about psychological support asked to show that students were guaranteed the same level of quality in all participating institutions, which was very difficult to prove without having precise data on the actual use of these services. Additionally, the same kind of issue was reported for the access to IT services.
- Concerning the criterion 7 (minimal requirement for physical mobility) one respondent pointed out that, even if mandatory mobility is an essential reason and component of the programme, the length may depend on the length of the programme; hence, the requirements established by the criterion (30 ECTS and 6 months) should be proposed in a more flexible way.
- Regarding multilingualism (mandatory criterion 8 and optional criterion 2) it was highlighted that in fact English is the language of instruction in many cases, so even passive exposure to two other European languages is not guaranteed; despite this difficulty, many programs have implemented facilitation actions for the students coming from abroad.
- As highlighted by the results of the self-assessment and panel examination, it is interesting to note that almost all programmes offer student-centred learning activities (criterion 9).
- From what emerges from the analysis of the responses, and confirmed by the in-depth evaluations, the main difficulty for criterion 10 is the explicit reference to the EUROGRADUATE survey; most full programmes (6 out of 9) conduct such surveys, but only 1 uses this framework as a model or inspiration.
- An issue which results from the analysis of the feedback given to criterion 11 (“Inclusive admission through tailored measures for all categories of disadvantaged students” even if other criteria are also concerned) is the difficulty of distinguishing between actions that cannot be ensured at a joint level but are nevertheless ensured by the participating institutions. In fact, if strictly related to the joint programme, these kinds of actions are difficult to demonstrate, although they are ensured by the participating institution.



This kind of issue can also be found analysing the optional criteria 6 (Components and actions related to environmental sustainability) and 7 (Development of high-level digital skills).

- As regards the first optional criterion (Alternative forms of mobility), the programmes have highlighted that at the moment they give priority to physical mobility; certain complementary activities are still offered in online/blended way of delivery, and in this case, they must also deal with the regulatory/legislative constraints, which could make these activities not fully recognised for the award of ECTS.
- The most part of the examined programmes did not meet the optional criteria 4 (Opportunities for international professional internships or work-based learning recognised through the award of ECTS), 5 (Career development plan devised with the candidate and/or exposure to the non-academic sector) and 8 (Promotion of democratic values and addressing societal needs) although activities of this type have been reported; in this case, some representatives claimed that the description of the criteria and/or the indicator is at such a high level of expectation that they preferred to choose a “Not met” or “Partially met” answer. An example could be the indicator 4.3 stating that “Meaningful feedback will be provided to the students” (about international internships) or 4.5 stating that “Students have the opportunity to give feedback on the internship itself, the missions, the quality of supervision”.
- Although the optional criteria 9 (Joint promotion of the joint programme, its visibility and information toward various stakeholders) was globally met, it has been highlighted that sometimes these actions are not carried out publicly but are intended only for interested parties (using an intranet or targeted communication).
- Regarding the analysis of the effort demanded to complete the self-assessment phase, the feedback received points out that this activity was severely time consuming, aggravated by the fact that for practical reasons the respondents had little time available to achieve the proposed online survey. In particular, the search for evidence required a lot of effort, especially where the information sought was not collected in a single place or held by a single representative / partner institution but scattered among the various members and not easily accessible for reasons of confidentiality.

This aspect, together with the usability of the online tools, must be taken into serious consideration for future developments for the possible award of a label.

## 4.2. Feedback from evaluators

Panels used a template for their evaluation activity, at the end of which they had a field available to produce feedback and give their point of view on the evaluation process itself.

Below are reported verbatim the comments received:

- *“The form [evaluation template, ed] is suitable for the evaluation of joint programme”.*
- *“Although the criteria are detailed and clearly stated, it is clear that the self-assessment needed to be written in more detail so that the assessment could be conducted. In addition, it is suggested*



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*that the accrediting bodies invest considerable time in preparing and training the assessors during the assessment, as well as in instructing the universities on how to prepare the required documentation”.*

- *“The criteria as they currently stand are obviously not suitable for a model such as this one [a short programme, ed]. However, with some modifications, the key ideas behind criteria and indicators could be retained while being applied to other models of educational provision. Furthermore, some of the elements are likely provided on an institutional level, but that could not be definitely confirmed. These elements are not specific to the programme in question, but would contribute to fulfilling the criteria.”*
- *“Specific and probably shorter evaluation report should be provided for evaluation of this kind of educational offer [short programme, ed] which is present more and more in EHEA after the formation of European university Alliances.”*
- *“The biggest challenge was to assess the joint programme only on the basis of the agreement concluded by universities and the self-assessment tool as these were our source materials. Even though we have tried to search for additional information on the programme’s official website, it was not enough to carry out a professional assessment and the only thing we could rely on was the self-assessment tool.”*
- *“We could not evaluate the optional criteria because there was no information provided in the self-assessment and in the documents. For each question in the questionnaire, we would have appreciated links to the documents. Several times we felt the need to ask directly questions to the joint programme contact point. In case this programme needs more in-depth analysis, the 3 evaluators are happy to conduct interviews.”*
- *“Such a label is indispensable for the many degrees, new or older, in which students study in several European countries and which promote awareness of Europe and European issues. The questionnaire is definitely not user-friendly: difficult to fill in, to find the correspondences with the self-assessment document (why not use the exact same numbers for the sub-indicators). A better way must be found to combine the reading of the different documents, the references made to underlying documents and the filling in of the form. Communication is messy (we did not have this form in time to make the most of our meeting). Time is an issue: neither the programme coordinator nor us had enough.”*
- *“The tool should give the opportunity to add webpages/links to webpages, not only to upload documents, as a proof of evidence. This possibility exists for some indicators, but not for all. The pdf version of the tool is not reader-friendly. It would be better if the respondents of the self-assessment referred to the evidence in a more detailed manner and add page numbers or chapters/sections.”*
- *“First, the language of the attachments formed an obstacle as not all evaluating members are fluent in French and German. Copying the texts into DeepL did not work very well as some PDF’s were not compiled of text. Second, it would be better if the respondents of the self-assessment referred to the evidence in a more detailed manner and add page numbers or chapters/sections.”*



*Third, the PDF of the self-assessment is not very reader-friendly. Lastly, some weblinks did not work.”*

- *“Working on short deadlines did not ensure a highly satisfactory process, although there were good sources provided to evaluate the pilot programme. Some of the criteria could not be evaluated as there was not enough information provided and we did not want to guess (answers indicated as “not sure”). General remark: there are too many indicators in criteria, some of them duplicating the same question and we feel the evaluation template might be too long, especially evaluating optional criteria.”*
- *“The criteria as they currently stand are obviously not suitable for a model such as this one [short programme, ed]. However, with some modifications, the key ideas behind criteria and indicators could be retained while being applied to other models of educational provision. Furthermore, some of the elements are provided on an institutional level and are not specific to the programme in question.”*
- *“A reduction in the number of criteria might help colleagues to invest further in the evaluation process.”*
- *“Working on short deadlines did not ensure a satisfactory process, especially as the lack of evidence to support the evaluation was a major obstacle. As the evaluated programme is not a joint programme, some of the evaluation criteria were not aligned at all. A general comment is that there are too many indicators in the criteria, some of them duplicate the same question and we think that the evaluation template was too long, especially optional criteria.”*
- *“The evaluation process seems to target degrees rather than additional programs or valorisation of European experience such as this [short programme, ed] which provides important added value to national degrees of partner universities. The very short deadlines did not allow for a satisfactory process: the alliance clearly did not have time to fill the criteria in as efficiently as they could have. Timing evaluation at the beginning of the academic year is not a good idea.”*
- In summary, the feedback produced by the evaluation panels, can be summarised in the following points
  - a. Evaluation of short programs should be done with an adapted version of the framework.
  - b. The evaluation process should be supported by clear, user friendly documents and relevant information.
  - c. An appropriate amount of time should be guaranteed.
  - d. Training and assistance during the evaluation phase should be offered to the assessors.
  - e. Both criteria and indicators are sometimes redundant, their simplification would make the entire process more efficient.
  - f. Eventually, it should be possible to ask programmes’ representatives for additional information (implying direct contact between assessors and assesses).



## 5. Conclusion and next steps

FOCI pilot evaluation process is one of the fundamental project activities for the FOCI consortium. The analysis of resulting pilot evaluation reports and of the pilot evaluation procedure is intended to serve as an analytical foundation of all the key FOCI policy recommendations about the European degree (label). Therefore, the key findings presented above will be directly fed into the process of FOCI policy consultations with diverse stakeholders, in order to inform the deliberation on best paths forward for developing a European degree (label) framework which would bring most value to the European HE sector.

In conclusion, key takeaways and lessons learned from the pilot evaluation analysis are outlined as points of input into the policy recommendations development process:

### **1) Broadened scope of the European degree (label) initiative**

Since its inception, the FOCI consortium stands for broadening the scope of the European degree (label) initiative. Therefore, it was sensible to test this proposal within the context of applying the proposed criteria to diverse programmes and other models of higher education, such as micro-credentials and flexible learning pathways.

As presented in Section 3, the pilot evaluation process demonstrated that the differences in level of compliance were lower than expected, especially considering that the criteria were developed specifically for full joint programmes. Short programmes fared especially well in criteria C1 Higher education institutions involved and C9 Innovative learning approaches, but were also fairly successful in meeting criteria C4 Quality assurance arrangements and C5 Joint policies for the joint programme.

Furthermore, FOCI included in its pilot programme evaluation process programmes of varying levels and modalities of “jointness” of higher education provision. Some of the programmes do not award a single degree, others integrate modular units from other universities, while some are highly structured Erasmus Mundus joint master programmes. Pilot evaluation teams noted that some criteria were restrictive in this regard - e.g. the criterion relating to the issuing of joint degree could only be met by some programmes. On the other hand, criteria such as the one relating to joint policies allowed for a significantly higher level of diversity in terms of meeting the criterion, i.e. different programmes were able to demonstrate compliance in a different way.

These findings tentatively support, contextualise and further direct the FOCI’s goal of contributing to broadening the scope of the European degree (label) initiative.

### **2) Need to further explicate specific criteria and make it more precise**

Certain criteria have proven fairly vague and subject to individual interpretation. Based on the pilot evaluation process, this mainly relates to criteria C9 Innovative learning approaches and C11 Inclusiveness and sustainability. As outlined in Section 3, the expectations of main actors of the pilot evaluation process – evaluation teams and evaluated programmes – varied strongly when it comes to these criteria. This finding will therefore feed into ensuing FOCI consultations through



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the imperative to propose a revised version of these criteria, which would be clearer and leave less room for interpretation.

### **3) Feasibility of evaluating level of compliance**

In addition to the issue outlined above, FOCI pilot evaluation process also demonstrated that certain criteria, although they are not only clear in their requirements, but also very important for the concept of a European degree (label) are still methodologically difficult to assess, at least from a remote, European level. This primarily relates to criteria C8 Multilingualism and C9 Innovative learning approaches, although this was one criterion where the panels typically took a favourable approach in evaluation, as opposed to determine boundary conditions for meeting the criterion.

Generally, FOCI project has been interested in developing a proper in-depth and qualitative methodology of evaluating compliance with the European degree (label) criteria, which entails that the evaluation process should not be based only on merely checking the boxes via an administrative procedure, but that this should be a substantive evaluation of whether a programme meets the criteria. Adopting this type of policy clearly demonstrated to the FOCI consortium the methodological obstacles and limitations in actually implementing such an approach in practice. Simply put, there are significant challenges and difficulties in properly evaluating certain criteria substantively, although this does not mean that additional efforts should not be invested in developing a fit-for-purpose evaluation methodology.

### **4) European degree (label) criteria evaluation methodology**

The findings presented above implies a need to develop a reliable and fit-for-purpose methodology on a European level which will enable all interested parties to reliably evaluate and have confidence in the programmes that meet the criteria. However, this consideration needs to be carefully balanced with another imperative – that of keeping the to-be-established evaluation system as lean, light and simple as possible for everyone involved. Another layer of external evaluation on top of already existing ones would be highly problematic for the European HE sector.

Therefore, any developed methodology needs to be integrated within existing administrative and evaluation frameworks, with as little additional burden as possible. Furthermore, this methodology should contain elements other than criteria themselves – it should also provide guidelines and instructions for evaluation, clear explanation or explication of the criteria, and broader contextualisation and purpose of the adopted set of criteria.

### **5) Operational and organisational support structures**

If these outlined ambitions for a substantive and fit-for-purpose European degree (label) evaluation framework are to be realized, a strong support structures will need to be developed and implemented. As presented in Section 4 of this document, the pilot evaluation process demonstrated the need for a more suitable procedure, training and timeline than it was possible to develop within the timeframe of this project.

One very clear point of feedback was that that the self-evaluation and evidence collection process took a significant amount of time for the evaluated programmes. Therefore, any future evaluation



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methodology will need to establish a timeframe in which it will be feasible for the programmes to provide substantive input, at least if the FOCI ambition to develop an in-depth and qualitative evaluation system is retained.

Another element that will be extremely important for successful implementation of such evaluations in the future is the training of evaluators themselves. Although FOCI selected experts experienced in external quality assurances reviews of institutions and programmes, many of them were still unfamiliar with a completely new set of standards. Therefore, it will be crucial to not only develop a more substantial contextualisation, explanation and explication of the European degree (label) criteria, but also guidelines and instructions for the evaluation process, which can then be translated into specific capacity-building activities aimed at ensuring consistency and proper interpretation on the side of evaluators.

## **6) Role of mandatory vs. optional criteria**

Significant differences were observed between mandatory and optional criteria, as presented in Sections 2 and 3. This points to a clear need to develop a system which will in a way integrate mandatory and optional criteria into a coherent framework. There are several possibilities to be explored here, primarily through the clustering approach. An example would be having multiple clusters with a very high threshold (e.g. 80%) or having one cluster with mandatory criteria and a few clusters with a lower threshold.

These key findings will feed into the next (final) steps of the FOCI project, primarily through two of the FOCI organisational units: FOCI Steering Committee, which will coordinate the final policy consultations with internal and external stakeholders, and FOCI Expert Group Methodology, which will finalise recommendations on how the European degree (label) criteria should ultimately be structured, presented and used.