

14-15th September 2023

II FORUM of European Universities Alliances

THEMATIC SESSION I

Thursday 14th September 15:00h-16:30h

European Degree label: main objectives and added value of pilot projects ED-AFFICHE, EDLab, FOCI, JEDI, ETIKETA and SMARTT

INTRODUCTION

The European Commission's Communication on a [European strategy for universities](#), approved in January 2022, establishes four flagship initiatives to “reinforce transnational cooperation between universities to strengthen their capacities to equip young people, lifelong learners and researchers with the right competences and skills”. One of these is that of a “joint European degree, to be delivered at national level, [which] would attest learning outcomes achieved as part of transnational cooperation among several institutions, offered for example within European Universities alliances, and based on a common set of criteria. A European degree should be easy to issue, store, share, verify and authenticate, and recognised across the EU”.

The subsequent [Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation](#), adopted by the Council on 5 April 2022, furthers this initiative in a step-by-step fashion by recommending that “Member States examine and facilitate the delivery of a joint European Degree label to make it easier for higher education institutions engaged in transnational cooperation to provide joint programmes and award joint degrees”.

PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

Six pilot projects were selected in January 2023 to pilot this concept of a European degree label. These projects involve 21 of the 50 European University alliances, alongside 17 national ministries or authorities and 22 accreditation agencies. Each of these projects is working to further the implementation of the label by variously: analysing and testing the draft criteria developed under the aegis of the European Commission for the issue of the label, analysing the degree to which current programmes meet the criteria, designing the label itself and procedures for its delivery as a complementary certificate to the qualification of students graduating from joint programmes, investigating the international attractiveness of the label, preparing recommendations for the European Commission, national authorities, accreditation agencies and universities.

As we approach the halfway point of the 12-month projects, this session of the Forum will be devoted to sharing the current state of advancement of each of the six, highlighting, on the one hand, the synergies between them, whilst also recognising the rich diversity of approaches adopted.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

A representative of the European Commission and the six projects will address key issues under study in this pilot initiative in order to remove obstacles currently existing in different contexts, to facilitate the recognition of programmes fulfilling shared criteria, to design procedures for the issue of the corresponding certificate, to ensure the perception of the label as bringing added value:

- What is the added value of the European Degree (and ED label at first) concept?: what is the overall purpose and how do stakeholders perceive potential benefits and positive impact of the future label?
- Which type of educational offer is within the scope of this initiative? Is it only for full joint study programmes, or should other types of transnational educational models (e.g. microcredentials) need to be included?
- How do pilot projects and stakeholders (universities, students, alumni, national authorities, quality assurance agencies, employers...) assess the criteria proposed as a basis for the issue of the European Degree Label? Are the criteria measurable in their current form? Are there proposals to modify the criteria? In which way? What should the role of the “optional” criteria be?
- Are the criteria applicable to degrees for the regulated professions such as Medicine or Engineering? What are the specificities of this kind of disciplines with regard to joint programme design and delivery? What implications for the professions?
- Do we already have an idea of how many joint programmes exist in Europe? What percentage of these actually issue joint degrees? What are the major obstacles to the implementation and issuing of joint degrees today? Can we calculate what percentage of existing joint programmes fulfil the criteria as they stand today?

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- As for actual procedures, what recommendations would projects make regarding who should be responsible for applying the criteria finally decided upon? Can we differentiate between the label for programmes and certificates for students? Who would issue the label and/or the certificate? What form should the certificate take? Are there already proposals regarding the design of the certificate to be delivered? A shared template and logo?
- Will the label contribute to eliminating the obstacles to the implementation and issuing of joint degrees? How is the label perceived by students and alumni? How will the label be received by employers and other stakeholders within and beyond Europe?
- How are the pilot projects coordinating with national authorities and QA agencies and what is the feedback so far?
- Have you identified other challenges during your analysis? Is it realistic to imagine that the label will be in place across Europe in the near future?
- The European Universities Initiative was initially seen by many as a competitive exercise offering an opportunity for alliances to obtain a seal of excellence, and there has been a tension between competitive and cooperative approaches. This experimentation exercise is proving to be an interesting experience in inter-alliance cooperation at several levels: the projects themselves for the most part involve a number of alliances, and then the projects are also coordinating. This is a follow-up of course to the working groups in FOR-EU 1 and 2 on joint programmes. How important is this cooperation for your alliance and your pilot? What lessons can you draw from this structured cooperation with other alliances? How does the European Commission see this cooperation impacting on the overall aim of the European Universities Initiative?

SESSION OUTCOMES

- The panel was pleased to hear the news that the European Degree has been included as a key priority for the European Commission in 2024, in the letter of intent submitted by the President of the EC in her State of the Union address.
- The added value of the European Degree and the Label is multi-faceted, varying for different stakeholder groups, with a potentially strong impact on employability. A plea is made for the initiative to cover not only full-cycle degree programmes, but also the shorter, more innovative forms of learning, such as micro-credentials, which are in increasing demand from both the labour market and society at large. Similarly, initial results seem to indicate that the Label alone, without the full European Degree, would have only limited impact.
- Degrees preparing for the regulated professions bring an added level of complexity to the concept of the European Degree and Label, and whilst the criteria proposed as they stand are applicable, they are most probably insufficient for this type of degree, where further work on professional competences will be required.
- The criteria for the award of the European Degree Label, co-created by stakeholders and universities under the aegis of the European Commission, for the moment seem to be feasible on the whole, although there is need for some reformulation for clarification and, in particular, for concrete, clear definitions of all the concepts used. The pilot projects have detected considerable diversity in interpretation, which needs to be avoided for the roll-out stage to ensure homogeneity of application and an even playing field. Similarly, there is a need for a well-defined methodology both for the validation of the criteria themselves and for the future roll-out of an evaluation process.

SESSION OUTCOMES

- The pilot projects have surveyed a large number of existing joint programmes, in some cases over 400, and come to the conclusion that only a small number (less than 10%) currently fulfil all the criteria as they stand. This points firstly to divergent interpretations of what a joint programme is or can be, but also especially to the many and diverse obstacles to the awarding of joint degrees in different national contexts, hence to the need for legislative change, for example to fully implement hitherto under-exploited Bologna tools such as the European Approach.
- There is a clear need to differentiate between, on the one hand, the award of the label to programmes, where external evaluation is almost certainly the path to follow, whether it be national or regional QAAs belonging to EQAR or a European-level body ensuring rigorous and homogeneous application of the criteria and, on the other hand, the award of a certificate to individual graduates from programmes holding the label, which could potentially be done at programme level. This is further connected to a broader question of whether the European degree (label) should be awarded based on evaluation of each specific programme, or should there rather be an evaluation of an entity (e.g. European University) which delivers the programme and which would then be granted the authority to award the European degree (label). The latter option would provide flexibility of scope, simplicity and synergy with the European Universities Initiative as a whole.
- The pilots are testing potential logos and templates which of course must be shared across Europe and easily recognisable for all stakeholders. The certificate should in the future be digital and linked to other EU initiatives such as the European Student Card, the European digital identity and personal digital, but for the initial stages paper-based or pdf versions will be proposed.

PARTICIPANTS

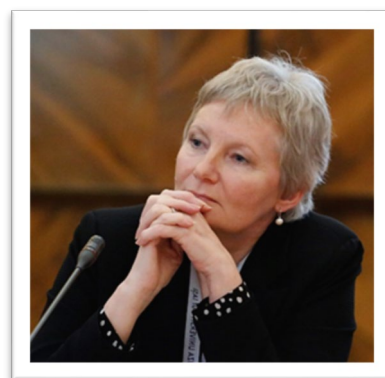
MODERATOR

Dorothy Kelly, Coordinator. ARQUS Alliance

Dorothy Kelly is a professor of Translation at the University of Granada (Spain), where she was also Vice Rector for Internationalization from 2008 to 2023.

Her research expertise includes curricular design and delivery in the field of Translation, an area in which she published extensively before devoting her time almost entirely to the internationalization of higher education. In this field, she has extensive experience in joint programme design and delivery, multilateral cooperation, and designing and managing mobility programmes of all kinds. She was Chair of the Executive Board of the Coimbra Group of Universities from 2010 until 2017 and was a member of Spain's national Bologna Experts Team from 2010 to 2013. She has participated intensely in Spanish, European and international advisory boards and events in the field of higher education and in particular its internationalization. She was a member of the Board of the Committee for Internationalization and Development Cooperation at the Spanish Rectors' Conference between 2008 and 2012, and again between 2014 and 2020; from 2018 to 2020 she was Executive Secretary of the Board and until 2023 acted as a special advisor. She is a member of the Advisory Group on Higher Education to the Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU) of the Council of Europe.

Since 2018, she has been the coordinator of Arqus, one of the first 17 European University Alliances to be approved by the European Commission and composed by the universities of Graz, Leipzig, Lyon 1, Maynooth, Minho, Padua, Vilnius and Wrocław, along with Granada.



PARTICIPANTS

PANELISTS

Vanessa Debiais-Sainton, Head of the Higher Education Unit. European Commission

She is Head of the Unit in charge of European higher Education policies and programme at the European Commission's Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. The unit is the lead service for the development and implementation of the European Education Area's higher education dimension, including the European Strategy for Universities presented in January 2022. This includes the development and implementation of flagship initiatives such as: 'European Universities' alliances, a joint European degree, the European student card initiative, a European Approach to Micro-credentials, the automatic recognition of higher education qualifications, tracking graduates and the higher education strand of Erasmus+.

In previous posts in the European Commission, Vanessa has worked in DG Research and Innovation. Before moving to the European Commission in 2006, Vanessa spent eight years working for several chemical companies.

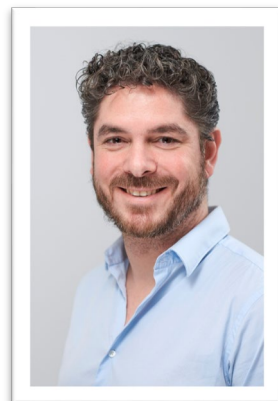


PARTICIPANTS

Mirko Varano, Key Liaison Office. Unite! Alliance, pilot EDAffiche

He serves as Senior Advisor for International Projects at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden. Mirko has been active in the field of internationalization of higher education for the past 30 years. He held various leadership positions at the Polytechnic University of Turin between 1992 and 2008 in the field of international relations. He was appointed coordinator of the CLUSTER network from 2008 to 2010. Previously, he was an internationalization officer at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, where he was a member of the international strategy group from 2013 to 2016.

Currently, he is an advisor for international projects at the same institution, with a focus on Erasmus +, university networks, and Joint Programs. He also serves as the KTH Key Liaison Officer for the Unite! Alliance of European Universities and co-chair of the ForEU 1 subgroup on the Joint European Degree Label. Mirko holds a Master's degree in Political Science with specialization in International Relations and European Studies from the University of Turin, Italy. Mirko was elected President of the EAIE Expert Community on European Collaborative Programmes for the periods 2020-2022 and 2022-2024.



PARTICIPANTS

Andries Verspeeten, Project Manager. ENLIGHT Alliance, pilot EDLab

Andries Verspeeten is Deputy Head of Office at Ghent University's central International Relations Office (Flemish Community of Belgium). He advises professors and colleagues on the development and implementation of joint programmes, with the university currently involved in 15 Erasmus Mundus Master programmes. Andries has also been involved in EU-funded projects sharing practice on joint programmes and from 2016 to 2020 he was a member of the EAIE's Joint Programmes expert network. Within the European University Alliance ENLIGHT, he is involved with work packages dealing with the development of the inter-university system and joint programmes. Currently he is participating in the EDLab project, one of the pilot projects on the joint European degree label. Finally, he is university liaison for education policy matter to EUF (currently Steering Committee member), CESAER (currently part of the presidency team) and The Guild.



PARTICIPANTS

Manuel José Damásio, Coordinator. FILMEU Alliance, pilot ETIKETA

He is the Head of the School of Communication and Arts at Lusófona University in Lisbon, Portugal. He holds a PhD in Media Studies (Universidade Nova de Lisboa) and did his aggregation also in communication at Minho University.

He is the chair of GEECT – the European association of film and media schools and a member of the board of CILECT Executive Committee (International association of film and media schools). He is the coordinator of FilmEU – The European University of Film and Media Arts and also of ETIKETA, the FilmEU related project dealing with the definition of a label for European Degrees.

Aleksandar Šušnjar. Institutional Coordinators. YUFE Alliance, pilot FOCI.



PARTICIPANTS

Aleksandar Šušnjar. Institutional Coordinators.
YUFE Alliance

He is the Institutional Coordinator for *Young Universities for the Future of Europe* (YUFE) Alliance at the University of Rijeka. His main areas of work include the European degree label initiative (FOCI project), development of YUFE educational offer (including joint programmes) and coordinating participation of University of Rijeka experts in all YUFE activities. More broadly, Aleksandar has participated in or is currently engaged in European projects on inter-institutional cooperation, transnational educational programmes, quality of higher education, and social dimension. He has also been a member of different national and European policy-making and expert groups dealing with student engagement, social dimension, qualification frameworks, and quality assurance and enhancement.

With expert background in quality assurance, Aleksandar has coordinated internal quality evaluations at the University of Rijeka and participated in over 20 institutional, QA agency, and developmental thematic reviews at the national and international level. Since 2021, he is a member of the Register Committee of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).



PARTICIPANTS

Alberto Garrido, Coordinator. EELISA Alliance, pilot JEDI

Professor of Agricultural Policy and Natural Resource Economics and Vice-Rector of Quality and Efficiency at the Polytechnical University of Madrid (UPM). Has a Bachelor Degree (with MSc recognition) in Agricultural Engineering (1989), a Master's of Science in Agricultural and Natural Resource Economics from the University of California, Davis (1992) and a Doctoral Degree from UPM (1996). Was a visiting Professor at the University of California, Berkeley (2005-2006). He is presently the Coordinator of the EELISA European University Alliance. Has 30 years of research experience in climate and risk management in agriculture and agricultural insurance; water resources economics and policy; natural resources policy. Has been the principal investigator of more than 75 research projects, including several international competitive ones, having raised more than €3.5 mill. in research grants. Has supervised 25 doctoral students and published 21 monographs and 100 peer-reviewed journal articles. His h-index is 27 (Scopus). Has worked in Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, France, Nicaragua, Panama, Portugal, Suriname, The Netherlands, UK, US, and Vietnam, and consulted for legislative bodies (Regional, National and European Parliaments), to international organisations (OECD, IADB, The World Bank, FAO, IFAD and the European Commission), and has leded projects European Commission research programmes since 1998.



PARTICIPANTS

Nadia Fernández de Pinedo, Academic Coordinator at Madrid Autonomous University. CIVIS Alliance, pilot SMARTT.

Nadia Fernández-de-Pinedo, an Associate Professor at Universidad Autónoma of Madrid (Spain), excels in the field of Economic History. In her capacity as the Rector's delegate for CIVIS at UAM, she actively coordinates academic participation within CIVIS and spearheads strategic planning, underscoring her dedication to bolstering educational alliances. Nadia holds the position of current coordinator for SMARTT further solidifying her leadership in educational initiatives. Furthermore, she co-founded 'Programa Mentor: Next Learning' and is pivotal to UAM's 'Teacher Mentoring Expert Program' (TEMU).

Nadia's academic journey encompasses a PhD from the University of País Vasco (Spain) and post-doctoral research at Warwick University (UK) within the field of Comparative American Studies. Her research portfolio spans a diverse range of topics, showcasing her versatility and expertise, extending across economics, history, and interdisciplinary studies.

Nadia's influence extends to her role in the IBCgroup, and in the collaboration agreement between the Spanish Patent and Trademark Office (OEPM) and UAM (2000-2020). Her expertise is also evident in her contributions to various multi-partner research initiatives focusing on Latin America, technology transfer, trade, and material culture. Noteworthy projects in this regard include the ERC-GECEM project and MSCA-SE PortaDA.

For a comprehensive overview of her research and publications, please refer to her profile on the IBC Network website: https://www.ibcnetwork.org/nadia_fernandez-de-pinedo

