

FORUM



MEMBER
MAGAZINE

Discussing international education

COLLABORATIVE EUROPE

- 09 JOINT DOCTORATES: CATALYSTS FOR COLLABORATION
- 20 IN CONVERSATION WITH IRINA FERENCZ
- 28 YUFE: GIVING STUDENTS A SEAT AT THE TABLE
- 30 EUROPEAN DEGREES: A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

CONTENTS

- 04 EDITORIAL**
- 05 CONTRIBUTORS**
- 06 CURRENT TRENDS IN JOINT PROGRAMMES**
A bird's-eye view of collaboration in Europe
- 09 JOINT DOCTORATES: CATALYSTS FOR COLLABORATION**
Forging strong connections at the doctoral level
- 12 THE UNIQUE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL NETWORKS**
Cooperating outside and alongside the European Universities Initiative
- 15 TAILOR-MADE NETWORKS**
Universities of applied sciences in the new age of networking
- 18 COLLABORATION BEYOND THE CONTINENT**
Connecting across cultures and continents
- 20 IN CONVERSATION WITH IRINA FERENCZ**
The Director of the Academic Cooperation Association on the past, present and future of joint programmes
- 24 CO-CREATING A EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY**
An inclusive approach to the universities of tomorrow
- 27 EUROPEAN COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMMES: KEY TERMS**
A short glossary of collaborative programmes
- 28 YUFE: GIVING STUDENTS A SEAT AT THE TABLE**
A model for governing European University alliances
- 30 EUROPEAN DEGREES: A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE**
A case study through the student lens
- 34 EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES: THE LATEST LITMUS TEST**
A new test in the long history of cooperation within Europe
- 36 CROSSING BOUNDARIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**
Working together across countries, institutions and disciplines
- 39 A EUROPEAN APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE**
Enabling the next phase of collaboration
- 42 EAIE BLOG SPOT**
- 43 CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

Published by

European Association for International Education
PO Box 11189, 1001 GD Amsterdam, the Netherlands
E-MAIL info@eaie.org
www.eaie.org

Editor Douglas Proctor

Publications Committee Douglas Proctor (*Chair*),
Jos Beelen, Han Aarts, Lucia Brajkovic, Ragnhild Solvi Berg,
Jacob Gibbons

Associate Director, Knowledge Development and Research

Laura E. Rumbley

Head of Marketing and Communications

Kellie Diepstraten

Editorial Coordinator Jacob Gibbons

Graphic Designer Nhu Nguyen, Maeghan Dunn

E-MAIL publications@eaie.org

Printed by Drukkerij Raddraaij, Amsterdam

Copyright © 2022 by the EAIE

All rights reserved. Extracts from *Forum* may be reproduced with permission of the EAIE. Unless stated otherwise, opinions expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect the position of the EAIE.

ISSN 1389-0808

Image: Shutterstock



09

“Joint doctoral programmes are ideal in acting as catalysts for structuring collaboration among higher education institutions”

JOINT DOCTORATES: CATALYSTS FOR COLLABORATION

20

“We need to reflect on what distinguishes the European degree from existing formats – otherwise we’ll just end up replicating or renaming what we already have”

IN CONVERSATION WITH IRINA FERENCZ



28

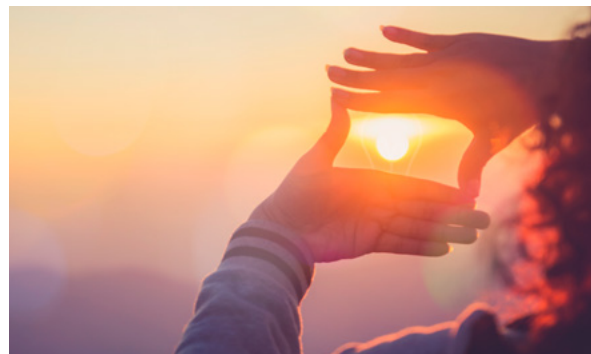
“The YUFE Student Journey gives students the opportunity to study simultaneously at 10 universities located in as many European countries”

YUFE: GIVING STUDENTS A SEAT AT THE TABLE

30

“My experience was indicative of the challenges the European higher education sector hopes to address regarding the delivery of joint degrees”

EUROPEAN DEGREES: A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE



EDITORIAL

Europe has been a global leader in the development of joint and collaborative programmes, and the Summer 2022 issue of *Forum* takes a deeper dive into this key aspect of international higher education. Known by many names – including joint degrees, dual and double degrees, and articulation programmes – collaborative programmes have flourished in Europe thanks to dedicated funding from the Erasmus+ programme. Where this programme initially supported joint Master's programmes with high levels of integrated study across borders, the establishment of the European Universities Initiative in 2019 has led to the development of new forms of collaborative programmes within Europe.

In many ways, European higher education has been preparing for a greater level of integration since the launch of the Bologna Process in the late 1990s, which led to alignment in degree structures across Europe and the adoption of shared instruments such as the European Credits Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). With the launch of the European Higher Education Area in 2010, European countries then committed to ensuring more comparable, compatible and coherent higher education systems. More recently, the intention to establish a European Education Area by 2025 includes a feasibility study for a 'European degree'.

Articles selected for this edition of *Forum* provide a range of perspectives on European collaborative programmes, as well as examples of programmes in action. Importantly for non-European readers (and perhaps for those in Europe who are keen for a refresher), a number of the articles provide an overview of the current policy landscape in Europe, including the history of key policy initiatives and a discussion of the European quality assurance



framework for these programmes. Other articles then outline perspectives from different stakeholders, such as participating students, universities of applied sciences and long-standing networks of European universities. Further contributions frame tangible examples of collaborative programmes (both in Europe and further afield) and highlight practical insights into how these programmes operate and the outcomes derived from them.

I am delighted that Irina Ferencz, Director of the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), agreed to be interviewed for this issue. Based in Brussels, ACA brings together 19 national-level organisations in Europe which promote and fund the internationalisation of higher education. As such, the Association is closely involved in supporting international cooperation in Europe, including by way of collaborative programmes. Although Irina regrets not participating in such a programme herself, her insights into the importance of this type of programming are compelling, not to mention her reflections on some of the barriers and hurdles along the way. Importantly,

Irina speaks about newer policy initiatives in this space, such as the European Universities Initiative and the European degree, and shares her thoughts on these developments.

At the outset of this issue, we hoped to answer questions on the evolution of European collaborative programmes and how they are perceived today by staff and students. We were also interested to know about quality assurance and governance. In reviewing the collection of articles that we've selected for this issue, I sense that we've done that and want to thank fellow members of the EAIE Publications Committee Lucia Brajkovic and Ragnhild Solvi Berg who joined me in reviewing submissions. A warm thank you as well to Mirko Varano, Chair of the EAIE Expert Community *European Collaborative Programmes*, who supported with the development and circulation of the call for proposals for this issue (in addition to writing an article).

I hope that you enjoy reading this edition of *Forum*.

— DOUGLAS PROCTOR, EDITOR
PUBLICATIONS@EAIE.ORG

CONTRIBUTORS

Mirko Varano

Senior advisor for international projects, KTH Royal Institute of Technology
Mirko landed by accident in the field of international higher education, after almost becoming a professional football player. He is also into street photography, occasionally holding exhibitions around Europe.

Marija Mitic

Policy analyst, European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture)
Self-described "occasional ping-pong champion", Marija is an expert of inclusion and diversity. She has studied in four countries and speaks four languages.

Sobail Luka

Policy officer, Marie Skłodowska Curie Unit, European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture)
Sobail's journey leading to international education is based on his experience as an academic in Egypt, Italy and the USA mixed with being part of the EU diplomatic service.

Laura Brossico

Project manager, UNICA
Laura describes working in international education as being part of a community striving to have a positive impact on the future of young people. She moved to Brussels from Italy and is an expert in international partnerships.

Alexandra Duarte

Project & communication officer, UNICA
Alexandra describes herself as "a full-time storyteller and part-time poet". She is also passionate about education and believes in its developmental power.

Laura Colò

Project assistant, UNICA
Specialised in the well-being of students and staff, sustainability and public engagement of universities, Laura also organises events for institutions to network and exchange practices.

Luciano Saso

Vice-Rector for European University Networks UNICA & CIVIS, Sapienza University of Rome
Luciano Saso is author of more than 300 scientific articles and has been referee for many national and international funding agencies and international scientific journals in the last 30 years.

Paul Nixon

Independent consultant on international education issues
Expert in partnerships and virtual exchanges, Paul studied in the UK, and worked in five different European countries learning their languages to varying levels. He is also a qualified chef.

Eka Dian Safitri

Dr Cipto Mangunkusumo General Hospital - Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Indonesia
A project management expert and Korean drama fan, Eka has been collaborating with international education partners through her institution since its establishment.

Nikki Giron

EU project manager and international affairs programme manager, University Medical Center Utrecht (UMCU)
Nikki studied in three different countries on three continents, inspiring her to seek a career in international education and later global health.

Maggy Ova

Strategic advisor for international affairs and strategic collaborations, University Medical Center Utrecht
With over 20 years of experience in different areas of internationalisation, Maggy has studied in Spain, Bolivia and Mexico.

Marta Calvo

Global engagement officer, University of Deusto
Having worked in different fields at an international level, Marta is an expert of international positioning within education.

Judit Cano

Global engagement office head, University of Deusto
Judit's journey to international education was fuelled by her desire to support others with fewer opportunities to achieve a better future. She loves music and attends live rock concerts and festivals.

Ainhoa Jorquera Cascón

Global engagement officer, University of Deusto
Besides being an expert of European Alliances, international degrees and international mobility, Ainhoa also has a passion for writing prose and poetry and has won competitions with her work.

Anca Teodosiu

Project designer, University of Oulu
Anca has lived and worked abroad in the last 10 years in the education sector specialising in strategic planning. She speaks four languages and is a certified asana yoga instructor.

Grace Yano

Project manager, Erasmus University Rotterdam
Leaving her comfort zone to study and explore in Japan and the Netherlands, Grace ended up building a career in international education.

Arum Perwitasari

Institutional relations specialist, ETS Global
Arum has always been curious about the world and studying abroad. She became a PhD student in the Netherlands before starting to work at ETS Global five years ago.

Daniela Trani

Director of the Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) alliance, Maastricht University
Daniela was one of the main developers of the YUFE Erasmus+ pilot proposal selected as one of the first 17 European University Alliances.

Wouter Baas

Bluebook trainee, European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture)
Baas studied in the Netherlands, Germany and Austria. He was a virtual exchange student in France and is currently supporting the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme in the European Commission.

Ligia Deca

Presidential adviser to the President of Romania
During her last mandate as ESU president, Ligia received an offer to become the Head of the Bologna Process Secretariat hosted by Romania between 2010 and 2012. She loves sailing and is a 'certified skipper'.

Sarah Kollnig

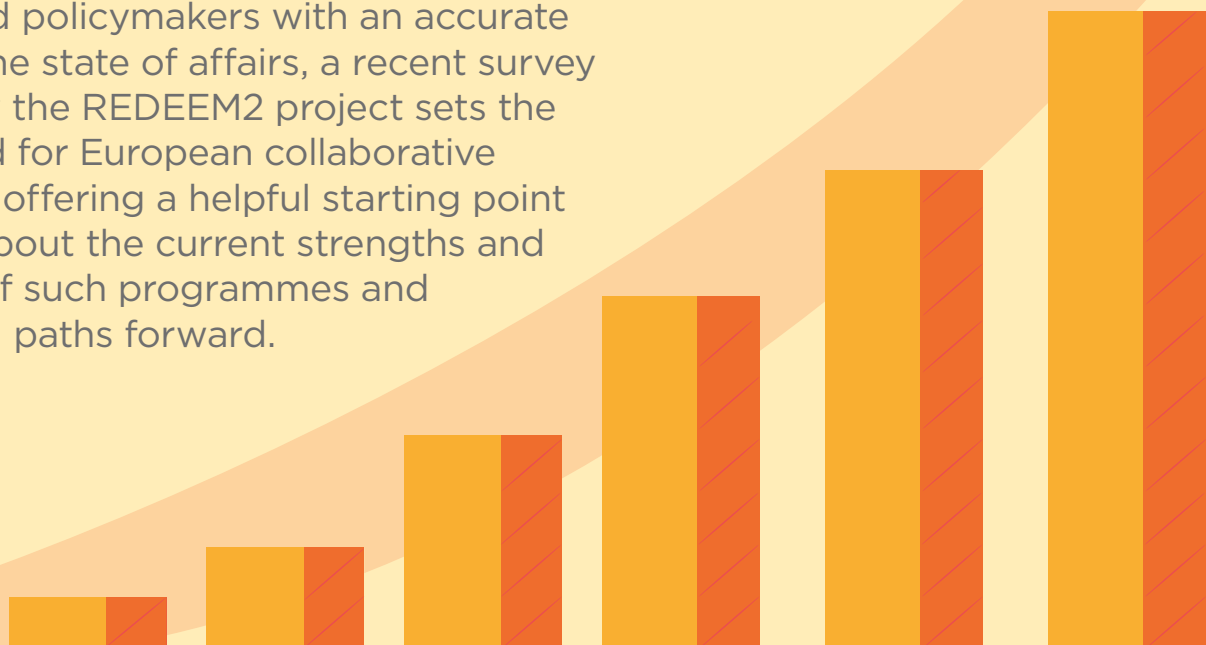
Innovation and technology transfer officer, Industrial liaison department, Montanuniversität Leoben
Having a cross-European educational background (studying in Austria, Lithuania, Sweden and Ireland) has lead Sarah to work with the EURECA-PRO European University Alliance. She speaks four languages and has two little Jack Russel terriers.

Colin Tück

Director, European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)
Getting in touch with the Bologna Process as a student was the inspiration for Colin to build a career in international education and join EQAR. He loves long cycling tours and discovering regions this way.

CURRENT TRENDS IN JOINT PROGRAMMES

The landscape of joint programmes and inter-institutional collaboration is a diverse and seemingly fragmented one. In order to provide educators and policymakers with an accurate overview of the state of affairs, a recent survey conducted by the REDEEM2 project sets the lay of the land for European collaborative programmes, offering a helpful starting point for thinking about the current strengths and weaknesses of such programmes and their potential paths forward.



From 2018 to 2021, the REDEEM2 project¹ – aimed at “shaping the next generation of joint programmes in science and technology” – developed a framework for the creation of innovative and efficient joint programmes (JPs) with the active participation of employers. In order to do so, a number of higher education institutions (HEIs), graduates and current students were surveyed to identify current trends, expectations and the perceived impact of JPs. This follows up on a previous project (REDEEM), which showed that the involvement of employers in joint programmes is a need agreed upon by all stakeholders.

This article focuses on the outcomes of the REDEEM2 survey, reflecting the feedback received from 140 HEIs from all over the world, 60% of which are located in Europe.

MODELS AND CERTIFICATION

When it comes to the structures of the JPs adopted by the respondents (total duration of the programme and duration of stays abroad), the responses show that the picture is still very fragmented, but with a trend towards the 1+1 year model (whereby students spend one year at one institution and a subsequent year at another institution) chosen by 38% of the respondents, probably due to the popularity of the Erasmus Mundus programme. Nine different models were offered by the questionnaire as multiple choice options, but 48% of the respondents chose the “other” option, which confirms that the number of models adopted worldwide is very diverse due to the highly fragmented national legislation and institutional regulations.

English as a teaching language is slowly becoming dominant, with 50% of the respondents stating that their JPs are taught entirely in English, while only 5% of the respondents are offering JPs exclusively in the national language. Nevertheless, 25% of the respondents are still offering JPs in the national language with a number of courses taught in English. The percentage of HEIs offering JPs in

English only varies considerably between countries, from 18% in France to 92% in the Nordic countries, whereas roughly one third of the HEIs in Portugal and Germany offer JPs in English only. In the near future, the need to offer JPs in English, in order to increase the attractiveness among potential applicants globally, will have to be balanced with the high priority placed on multilingualism by the European Commission.

When it comes to the type of certificate issued at the end of the programme, 61.5% of the respondents stated that two (or more) separate certificates are the rule, while 24.8% answered that a diploma supplement is also issued, including information on the nature and structure of the JP. Only 17.2% of the respondents reported that a joint certificate is issued as a rule.

RATIONALE AND CHALLENGES

Regarding the main motivations for developing JPs, on a scale from 1 to 4 (where 1 indicates “not relevant” and 4 indicates “very relevant”), the respondents rated “advancing internationalisation” with 3.7 on the average, “enhancing international visibility and prestige” with 3.5, and “recruiting talented and motivated students” with 3.4. Responding to student demand was rated much lower (2.8) and “responding to market demand” even lower (2.4/4). This reveals that a thorough needs analysis is often lacking and that JPs are still used as a tool for advancing the goals of HEIs. “Increasing revenue” had the lowest average score (1.8/4), which shows that HEIs are aware that these programmes are very costly and resource-intensive.

When it comes to the challenges associated with JPs, funding issues (3.4/4) and sustainability (3.1/4) were the aspects ranked highest. Mismatches in the academic calendar (2.5/4), institutional support (2.5/4), and programme duration (2.4/4) were considered the least problematic. This suggests that sustainability-related issues should be addressed at a very early stage to ensure the success of the venture.

The most challenging regulatory aspect, mentioned by 24% of respondents, is the minimum requirements in terms of allocation of credits. This shows that curricula are still rather rigid in many countries, which makes it difficult to

Only 17% of surveyed HEIs offer JPs with the direct participation of employers

satisfy the minimum requirements of two or more local (or national) regulations without ending up with an extension of the nominal duration of the programme. Accreditation was chosen as the most challenging aspect by 22% and language requirements by 21%.

Only 17% of the respondents offer JPs with the direct participation of employers. Although the figures are quite low in all surveyed countries, the situation varies greatly from country to country, with 50% of Italian HEIs claiming to offer JPs with the direct participation of employers, down to 18% in Germany and 15% in non-EU countries. Most of the EU countries (other than Italy, Sweden, Belgium, France and Germany) showed an average employer participation of a mere 5%. Even when this involvement exists, in many cases it is on a very superficial level with a limited impact on the programme. The most common activities are field visits to the employers (73%), curricular internships (69%), and hosting students for the Master's thesis (69%). Only one third of the respondents mentioned joint

curriculum development as one of the activities carried out together with the employers.

SUSTAINABILITY ASA KEY ELEMENT

The REDEEM2 survey shows that existing JPs are still underpopulated in terms of student enrolment. Indeed, programmes with fewer than 25 students per edition are more likely to be discontinued, as their cost/benefit ratio is too low to justify the effort. Yet, one third of survey respondents stated that the average number of students enrolled in their JPs is five or lower, and 75% of the respondents reported figures lower than 25 students. This suggests that JP developers are often not aware of the importance of securing a substantial and consistent number of eligible applicants for each intake to guarantee the sustainability of the programme.

Programmes with fewer than 25 students are more likely to be discontinued, as their cost/benefit ratio is too low to justify the effort

When asked about the most crucial elements needed to ensure sustainability of JPs, a plurality of the respondents (17.3%) selected “ensuring institutional support”, which confirms previous findings: too many JPs are discontinued or do not reach their full potential due to the lack of support or interest from the central level, which makes a thorough needs analysis even more relevant. This concern was closely followed by three very diverse elements with 15% each: “Commitment of the faculties”, “ensure a minimum

number of scholarships”, “ensure a shared model of governance”. Surprisingly enough, the branding of the programme was not perceived as a crucial element for sustainability. The active participation of companies was the lowest scoring element, mentioned by only 5.7% of the respondents.

Concerning the main source of funding used to set up and run JPs, 43.6% of the respondents selected “European programmes”, which turned out to be by far the most popular option, followed by “use of internal funding” (22.2%), followed by national programmes (14.4%). Only 2.6% of the respondents had private sponsors (companies and employers) as the main source of funding.

Barriers to the smooth and efficient development and implementation of JPs remain very high, but the number of tools

and body of knowledge available are gradually catching up. The upcoming establishment of a ‘European degree’ will most likely facilitate this process and encourage the creation of more JPs with a high level of integration and a full involvement of employers in the years to come.

—MIRKO VARANO

1. www.redeem2.eu

JOINT DOCTORATES CATALYSTS FOR COLLABORATION



Joint doctoral programmes are gaining recognition as a strategically important aspect of higher education policy in Europe. With support for structured transnational collaboration always on the rise, doctoral education programmes are well positioned to both boost this trend and benefit from its momentum, ultimately enhancing the quality of doctoral education and the profile of higher education in Europe. ▶

The European Joint Doctorate (EJD) initiative, introduced in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) in 2014, aimed to facilitate a highly integrated type of international, inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary collaboration, encouraging partnerships of universities, research institutions, businesses and other non-academic organisations. Between 2014 and 2020, 76 joint doctoral programmes involving 672 organisations received funding, with a total EU contribution of €263m and around 1200 doctoral candidates trained. Despite the programmes being joint, the degrees awarded through them could be joint, double or multiple. The MSCA's funding for joint doctoral programmes is continuing in Horizon Europe as part of the Doctoral Networks.

But why is the EU attaching such strategic importance to joint doctorates?

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

There are the obvious direct benefits for universities, doctoral candidates and employers. By pooling resources, universities are capable of attracting better candidates and increasing their international visibility, quality and ability to develop strategic partnerships.

There is also the strategic long-term importance of joint doctorates when viewed in the context of the overall strategies of the EU for growth and global attractiveness. Joint doctoral programmes are ideal in acting as catalysts for structuring collaboration among higher education institutions. Consortia have to establish joint operational procedures for

recruitment, admission, supervision and evaluation of doctoral candidates.

Through this process, and given the ripple effect on the participating institutions, joint doctoral programmes exert a positive structuring effect on participating partners, whereby the collaboration

and Innovation, covering the 2021–2027 budgetary period. Going from one cycle to the next, the European Commission has used the experiences of the previous programme to develop the following one more effectively. Horizon Europe is taking this a step further by formalising

The collaboration culture and the necessary administrative flexibility gradually become part of the DNA of the participating institutions

culture and the necessary administrative flexibility gradually become part of the DNA of the institutions. As such, the programmes contribute to building long-lasting collaborations and sustainable joint educational programmes, and to raising the attractiveness of European doctoral programmes.

For these reasons, the European Commission has provided a budgetary incentive for MSCA joint doctoral programmes in Horizon Europe by significantly increasing their grant size in comparison with ordinary doctoral programmes.

POLICY PLANNING

Despite their benefits and strategic importance, the set-up and implementation of joint programmes at the doctoral level has turned out to be quite challenging, raising concerns among programme coordinators and prompting key actors, the MSCA included, to initiate and engage in a wide policy dialogue addressing the challenges.

Horizon Europe is the ninth EU Framework Programme for Research

such practice into its policy planning cycle. In all pillars of Horizon Europe, feedback to policy practice is now an organic component in the management of the programme.

As part of the MSCA feedback to policy work, the European Research Executive Agency, together with the European Commission, conducted a survey of EJD project coordinators in 2020 and organised a one-day event in November 2021 in order to identify and understand how to better address the major challenges associated with joint doctoral programmes. Some of the ideas presented in this article reflect findings from the survey and the event.

SIGNIFICANT OBSTACLES

The feedback received confirmed the universal attractiveness of joint doctorates but highlighted significant obstacles to pursuing them. These obstacles are rarely of an academic nature, instead tending to be administrative and legal at the level of both the degree-awarding institutions and national authorities.

Coordinators of joint doctoral programmes face a mosaic of intertwining national regulations and institutional rules that are not always compatible, relating to all steps of the doctoral candidate's journey, from admission to thesis defence. Specifically, contrasting requirements were identified for admission procedures, development of the joint study programmes (eg academic calendar compatibility and issues with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System), accreditation, quality assurance, diploma format, defence, awarding and recognition. This is complicated further in the case of international candidates, where visas and immigration aspects become additional pieces of the puzzle.

There is also a clear deficit in information at various levels. Programme coordinators struggle to understand institutional, national and transnational

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

In addition to – and consistent with – the fondness for joint doctorates we observed from those directly involved in pursuing them, a clear political momentum supporting structured transnational collaboration has been building in Europe, especially during the past five years.

This momentum culminated this year in the adoption by the European Commission of the *Communication on a European Strategy for Universities*¹ and the adoption by the European Council of the *Council Recommendation on Building Bridges for Effective European Higher Education Cooperation*.² Both want to facilitate joint degrees and to work towards establishing a joint European degree, including at the doctoral level. This is very significant given that education is a national competence and that such formal commitment from the side of member

on how to make the establishment of joint doctoral programmes less challenging and more rewarding. By way of example, the event in November recommended a focus on:

- Tackling the information deficit observed for programme coordinators, doctoral candidates and university administrators
- Asking national governments to adapt and better communicate their legislation governing joint doctorates
- Establishing a community of practice for coordinators of joint doctoral programmes to exchange experiences on how to surmount and ultimately remove obstacles

The European Commission will continue similar policy dialogues in the future, focusing on different elements of the MSCA. The current momentum of support for joint doctoral programmes is a unique opportunity that we should all seize: we have the chance to make joint doctoral programmes a common occurrence in European institutions and to raise the attractiveness of European doctoral education.

— MARIJA MITIC & SOHAIL LUKA

Coordinators of joint doctoral programmes face a mosaic of intertwining national regulations and institutional rules that are not always compatible

requirements; doctoral candidates need more guidance on the rules for admission and recruitment; and universities' administrative offices often lack familiarity with joint doctorates.

Despite these obstacles, higher education institutions continue to actively and enthusiastically develop joint doctoral programmes. This in itself is evidence of the importance that they attach to joint doctorates and implies high demand from doctoral candidates and employers.

states could usher in more flexible measures at national level (including legislative changes) to facilitate the establishment of joint doctoral programmes.

For this momentum to be channelled effectively into the policymaking process, we need to harness the experience of relevant stakeholders while maintaining an active dialogue between national administrations and higher education institutions' management. Such dialogue should yield concrete recommendations

1. European Commission. (2022). *Commission communication on a European strategy for universities*. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities>

2. European Council. (2022). *Council recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation*. Official Journal of the European Union. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0413\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0413(01)&from=EN)



THE UNIQUE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL NETWORKS

Institutional networks are experts in collaboration and have a crucial role to play in helping to build the universities of the future. Against the backdrop of the European Universities Initiative, university network UNICA has chosen not to partner with a specific European University alliance, but rather to blaze a new trail for the role of traditional university networks in the rapidly-evolving landscape of European collaboration.

European universities are among the oldest institutions in the world. For many centuries, scholars – with Erasmus and Galileo among the most famous – have been travelling and teaching in different universities, but strong collaborations between institutions were not very common until recently.

The birth of the Erasmus programme in 1987 was a very important step in this direction. Students were given the opportunity to study at different universities and faced, for the first time, the issue of recognition of their learning outcomes. Study programmes were very diverse at that time and the need to ‘harmonise’ European higher education programmes became evident. Following an important preliminary meeting in Paris in 1998, the Bologna Process started in 1999 at the oldest European university.

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System allowed us to measure and recognise the workload of students, and increasing attention was given to quality assurance procedures. Student mobility became much easier, with positive effects on the quality of education and training and on the employability of graduates. To further develop European programmes, financial incentives were provided by Erasmus and Erasmus Mundus to create double and joint degrees. The results were certainly interesting and significant – but overall only a small number of double or joint programmes were created.

LAUNCH OF THE EUI

In September 2017, President Macron of France gave a historic speech that triggered the European Universities Initiative (EUI). The European Commission launched two pilot calls and funded a total of 41 alliances, involving about 300 higher education institutions.

Although the main goals of the EUI are not totally new, this initiative has aroused a lot of interest – much more than expected. Universities from different countries (up to eight initially, and even more now) created very strong collaborations involving their leaders and high-level officers. Rectors, presidents,

vice-chancellors and their deputies personally discussed European collaborative programmes, highlighting bottlenecks related to issues such as the language of teaching, assessment procedures, accreditation and the academic calendar. Most of these problems are impossible to solve at the level of individual institutions, but the EUI has played a crucial role in increasing university leaders’ awareness of those issues

When the EUI was launched, UNICA decided not to become an associate partner of any specific alliance, but rather to play the role of umbrella organisation

and thus encouraging them to bring them to the attention of ministers of education and research.

UNICA, an institutional network of universities from the capitals of Europe, was created in 1990, just after the fall of the Berlin wall, to foster new collaborations between universities that had been separated by the Iron Curtain until then. Its size has increased steadily to reach the current total of 51 members in 36 different countries. UNICA has coordinated several European programmes and participated as a partner in many others.

When the EUI was launched, UNICA decided not to become an associate partner of any specific alliance, but rather to play the role of umbrella organisation, encouraging its members to participate in this fascinating new process and organising sessions for university leaders and high-level officers to share knowledge and good practices. We are proud to say that 39 of the 51 UNICA member universities – about 75% – are taking part in the EUI, and 21 out of the 41 European University alliances so far have at least one UNICA member as a partner. Another EUI call closed on 22 March and we expect other UNICA universities to become part of the EUI.

PIONEERING ROLE

Although higher education is the responsibility of individual states, the EU is cooperating with institutions and member states to accelerate the transformation towards an open and inclusive higher education system in Europe. But what role do consortia of universities such as UNICA play in this relationship?

In a sense, it can be argued that institutional associations of universities are pioneers in the establishment of collaborative ventures that have inspired international programmes implemented by the EU, of which the European Universities Initiative is the most recent example.

For instance, since 2008, UNICA has led 4Cities, a transnational collaborative study programme that brings together six universities in four European countries. Started as an autonomous initiative promoted by UNICA and six universities, the programme has been co-funded by Erasmus+ since 2013.

This is just one example among many of the pioneering role of consortia and why they must be involved in the process of building European Universities. Consortia of universities bring together academic communities that share common values and a common vision of the future, while celebrating and acknowledging their individual missions. By facilitating relationships between its members and promoting a concerted voice on strategic needs in university research, education, administration and societal engagement, UNICA is an active part of the process that is leading to the creation of the universities of the future.

NETWORK SUPPORT

In January, the European Commission issued a *Communication on a European*

*Strategy for Universities*¹ that acknowledged the role of the higher education sector in Europe's post-pandemic recovery and in shaping sustainable and resilient societies and economies. In the same document, it also recognised that strong partnerships were crucial to maximising higher education institutions' impact in promoting European interests and values.

Cooperative programmes and European university networks are both important drivers in fostering effective and deep European higher education collaboration and strengthening a sense of European belonging. In fact, consortia of universities in Europe are based on core European, democratic and academic values. UNICA, for instance, makes sure that members meet specific democratic and human rights standards. These standards are criteria for joining the Council of Europe, and all UNICA member universities must be based in a Council of Europe member state.

We believe that the European University alliances – with the support of traditional networks such as UNICA, the Coimbra Group and the European University Association – will make European collaborative programmes more numerous and popular in the next few years, with great benefits for the quality and diversity of education, the employability of graduates and the building of European identity.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Nevertheless, another unexpected player appeared in 2020, just after the launch of the EUI: the COVID-19 pandemic strongly affected institutions in Europe and the rest of the world, creating huge challenges but also new opportunities. We believe that the strong digitalisation push given by the COVID-19 tragedy

contributed to innovations in learning and teaching, helping to popularise innovative pedagogies and introducing virtual and hybrid mobility programmes such as blended intensive programmes.

We are aware that physical mobility is very important to a full learning experience abroad. On the other hand, virtual mobility can foster inclusivity, allowing us to overcome the financial and socio-economic barriers that have been discussed for many years. Another very relevant advantage for students participating in blended programmes is the possibility to be exposed in the same semester to lectures by experts from different universities based in different countries, whereas traditional physical mobility can involve only one institution at a time.

Centuries-old universities in Europe have been extremely active in the past 20 years in developing collaborative programmes, with the Bologna Process, the EUI and the COVID-19 pandemic all important drivers for change and improvement. Despite all the difficulties, we should be optimistic and proud of the impressive work carried out by individual universities, whose achievements have been fostered and supported by traditional networks such as UNICA and more recently by the European University alliances.

— LAURA BROSSICO, ALEXANDRA DUARTE, LAURA COLÒ & LUCIANO SASO

1. European Commission. (2022). *Commission communication on a European strategy for universities*. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities>



TAILOR-MADE NETWORKS

Collaboration is key in higher education, but it's important to choose the right partners and the right kind of partnership. As the European Universities Initiative continues into the second pilot phase, questions around its fit for various types of institutions remain. In the meantime, The Hague Network – comprising three universities of applied sciences and four research universities – is demonstrating how institutions like theirs can collaborate at a smaller scale in ways better tailored to their strengths and needs. ▶

The differences between universities of applied sciences and traditional research universities have decreased in recent years, with the former becoming more involved in applied research and the latter tailoring their programmes towards employability. Both types of institution have been innovative and proactive in adapting to changing times. Nonetheless, the two types do have a different focus. Universities of applied sciences tend to offer more vocational programmes – and although they seek to enhance the global outlook of their students and to engage in sustainable internationalisation, the struggle for funding means they have often had to concentrate on collaborating with public and private partners in their local area.

THE EUI AND UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Universities in general are skilled at managing multiple collaborations. One model in vogue is forming strategic partnerships of like-minded institutions, increasing competences through knowledge sharing and learning from best practice. Partnership or alliance models range from the European University Association, with over 850 member institutions from across the sector; to the Universities of Applied Sciences Netherlands, which offers a comprehensive national perspective; through to smaller international alliances such as the Utrecht Network, established in 1987, and the CARPE alliance of seven European universities of applied sciences, founded in 2011 by institutions focusing on applied research and professional education.

In a 2017 speech arguing for greater professionalisation of higher education, President Macron of France reignited earlier attempts to create European Universities.¹ The European Universities Initiative (EUI) emphasises common European values and identity via cooperation between existing institutions. It seeks to engender “transnational alliances of higher education institutions developing long-term structural and strategic cooperation [...] fostering excellence, innovation and inclusion [...] accelerating the transformation of higher education institutions into the universities of the future with structural, systemic and sustainable impact”.²

Universities of applied sciences found it difficult to enter into the first phase of the European Universities Initiative

The institutional alignments necessary to facilitate such educational entrepreneurialism make great demands on the participating organisations in terms of planning and resources. Universities of applied sciences, with more limited financial means than research universities and fewer opportunities in the past to build up international cooperation, found it difficult to enter into the first phase of the European Universities Initiative.

This added to a perception that the initiative was a *grand projet* primarily focused on elite, resource-rich institutions and not on facilitating improvements within higher education in general. Macron’s ideas of professionalisation,

incorporating higher fees, threaten to price less affluent, marginalised students out of high-quality higher education. While more universities of applied sciences have been able to apply for funding in the second phase, one might question whether this is in the best interests of their traditional student catchment.

THE HAGUE NETWORK

As part of its efforts to form strategic partnerships, The Hague University of Applied Sciences sought a geographical spread of partners via a mixed model of approaching existing exchange partners as well as ‘new’ institutions that had the

potential to cooperate across a minimum of three of its faculties. In 2017, it decided with six partners to convert these bipartite links into a small European alliance called The Hague Network. The network covers a range of activities – student and staff exchanges, curriculum development, research and administrative issues – with each partner free to determine their own priorities within the broader goals. Those goals are:

- **Knowledge sharing:** Learning from the best practices of others, saving time, energy and resources
- **Developing people:** Establishing new relationships and engendering confidence and self-esteem in staff and

students, resulting in enhanced outputs and openness to change

- **Connections:** Seizing opportunities that might not be available to lone institutions, as EU and other research funding is increasingly targeted at networks or consortia
- **Promotion and credibility:** Using the network as an indicator of its members' status and intellectual capital

We consider the limited range of partners an advantage, with a largely bottom-up, iterative approach allowing flexibility, informality and agility in decision-making. The asymmetrical nature of our cooperation is also a great strength, enabling partners to concentrate their efforts in the specific areas where they can best contribute and benefit. This was particularly useful in the development of

learning, as all exchange programmes had to move to online or hybrid teaching, taking away part of its unique selling point. It also suffered from the fact that much of the enforced online teaching was an emergency response and that the content, unlike that of our project, was not specifically designed to be taught online. Some students saw online teaching as substandard and inferior to traditional teaching, thus affecting their willingness to consider virtual exchange opportunities.

FINDING THE RIGHT PARTNERSHIP

The pandemic had an effect on The Hague Network's activities but they were not curtailed. Guest lectures and courses migrated online, and existing relationships were maintained via increased digital communication. One thing that has helped sustain the network has

and participation in alliances such as The Hague Network. But it's important to think about exactly what type of partnership is right for your institution. The nature of universities of applied sciences means that forming alliances under the European Universities Initiative may not necessarily be the best option. Smaller, bottom-up and asymmetrical networks could be a better way for some institutions to build up their international links while still concentrating on their local area and serving their traditional student base.

Collaboration is the past, present and future of higher education in Europe, but the path forward for universities of applied sciences may in some ways diverge from that of traditional research universities. In the evolving landscape of European cooperation, institutions of all kinds will need to carefully consider the benefits as well as the organisational demands of potential partnerships.

— PAUL NIXON

The nature of universities of applied sciences means that forming alliances under the European Universities Initiative may not necessarily be the best option

a project called The Hague Network Virtual Exchange, which was envisaged prior to the pandemic to extend mobility to students unable to undertake traditional exchanges due to health, care, financial or cultural reasons. The project is currently in its third iteration.

One of the unexpected consequences of the pandemic was that The Hague Network Virtual Exchange suddenly faced competition in the field of online

been the personal investment, trust and relationships of those involved, the value of which cannot be overstated. Members were willing to support and try to offer solutions to each other's problems during the pandemic. Some initiatives have had to be postponed but it is hoped that these can now be rebooted and that the partnerships will continue to flourish.

We have all seen the opportunities and advantages that flow from partnerships

1. Gunn, A. (2020). The European Universities Initiative: A study of alliance formation in higher education. In A. Curaj, L. Deca, & R. Pricopie (Eds.), *European Higher Education Area: Challenges for a new decade* (pp. 13–30). Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56316-5_2

2. European Commission. (2021). European Universities Initiative [Fact sheet]. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/european-universities-initiative-factsheet>

COLLABORATION BEYOND THE CONTINENT



Sometimes collaboration extends beyond the European continent, perhaps most notably through the Erasmus+ Capacity Building programme. One such collaboration between universities and the private sector in Europe and Indonesia, a project called HEALTH-Indonesia, underscores several important principles of cooperation across cultures and continents.

The project HEALTH-Indonesia (HEALTH-I), which ran from 2017–2021, was an ambitious project funded through the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education programme. Its aim was to advance and strengthen clinical epidemiology and big data research capacity across Indonesia through online and face-to-face education. The project consortium consisted of three European higher education institutions, four Indonesian partners and one corporate enterprise based in the Netherlands.

The three-year project equipped a new generation of selected young Indonesian clinical researchers with the knowledge and skills to conduct research and contribute to evidence-based decision-making in healthcare. To sustainably strengthen research capacity in the four participating Indonesian universities, the project established an infrastructure of online education development in Indonesia, including the training of teachers. This was made possible with the creation of online

courses from the European partners and the online implementation support of the corporate partner.

Several years of collaboration between higher education institutions in Indonesia and the University Medical Center Utrecht, one of the partners in the project, helped to establish a strong connection and bring HEALTH-I to fruition. Past collaborations included a teaching project with Universitas Indonesia, on clinical epidemiology and evidence-based medicine, and a research programme with Dr Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital in Jakarta. These experiences clearly showed the potential of the Indonesian research community but also that it could not yet develop and maintain research capacity in a way that was sustainable in the long run. Thus, HEALTH-I emerged as a solution to help close this gap.

RESULTS

There were several positive outcomes from the project. It established a hands-on research environment for Indonesian



researchers and it initiated the development of blended learning competences for both teachers and students. Participants were able to gain practical knowledge and experience to help them develop and implement online courses that can support medical schooling and research methodology courses in Indonesia. The teach-the-teacher component was also effective in efficiently disseminating clinical practice knowledge to a broad audience.

The project also increased the number of international research collaborations and publications. This was achieved through the participants' final research projects, where they were able to receive supervision from the University Medical Center Utrecht as well as guidance towards publishing in global journals. Ultimately, this initiative has helped to fulfil the need for research skills and hands-on experience in Indonesia, strengthened the capacity to conduct research among clinical teaching staff and nurtured the possibility of future partnerships between Indonesian and

European institutions, thus enabling Indonesian institutions to work towards their internationalisation goals.

CHALLENGES

Despite the major benefits of the project, HEALTH-I was not without its challenges, which the Indonesian partners might still face in the aftermath of the project. While HEALTH-I helped to establish a research environment, there is still more to be done in terms of maintaining that environment.

A challenge cited by our Indonesian partners and participants was the need for a supportive research environment for clinicians to be able to engage in research. This includes protected time and the necessary resources such as physical space and funding. Additionally, there was a noticeable need to introduce clinical research earlier on in the clinician's study career in order to spark an interest in research.

These challenges require change on an institutional and a governmental level. This further demonstrates the importance of capacity building in research and the need for high-level organisational bodies to be engaged stakeholders in such projects.

WHAT'S NEXT?

HEALTH-I sprung from decade-long collaborations between consortium partners, and as such it was committed from the start to having a long-term impact. This was reflected in the online courses, the teach-the-teacher approach and the project's enthusiasm for looking ahead and planning for the future.

Future aspirations include the following:

- Keeping HEALTH-I online modules accessible and expanding its reach to other Indonesian and global participants and institutions
- Developing new online modules to meet local needs, including teach-the-teacher courses
- Continuing to share knowledge
- Increasing the number of international PhD candidates with international supervisors, doing research in their own local environment

- Enhancing locally generated evidence-based policy and professional expertise through epidemiology and public health research
- Increasing multidisciplinary and inter-professional collaboration in research
- Continuing to engage in (collaborative) research and having this reflected in scientific publications

REFLECTION

Through this EU-funded project, it was possible for Indonesian institutions to increase their research capacity and for European and Indonesian institutions to strengthen their international research networks and develop intercultural awareness and understanding. We are currently looking into applying to the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education programme again, not only to see if we can follow up on the HEALTH-I project in Indonesia but also to see where we can combine it with other collaborations in Asia, particularly in Bangladesh, the Philippines and Malaysia.

The opportunity to collaborate with others internationally for capacity building is one that European universities should take advantage of if they are looking to develop new or existing collaborations with others, address challenges facing higher education institutions in other countries or improve their own capacity to be part of a joint collaborative effort.

However, a significant and necessary characteristic of collaborative programmes in capacity building is sustainability. In the case of HEALTH-I, this meant that project goals and expected outcomes had to be aligned with Indonesian institutions' desires, needs and goals. So although HEALTH-I was an EU-funded project that was expected to align with EU values and goals, project outcomes were geared towards benefiting our Indonesian partners and providing long-lasting impact. This equitable approach is vital if collaborative capacity-building programmes are to be a success.

—EKA DIAN SAFITRI, NIKKI GIRON & MAGGY OVAA



IN CONVERSATION WITH

IRINA FERENCZ

MARIO ADAMO
EAIE

From her professional position as Director of the Academic Cooperation Association and her personal background as an international student, Irina Ferencz has a bird's-eye view of the past, present and future of European cooperation. In our conversation she discusses the growing appeal of joint programmes, the crucial role of national agencies, and her hopes for the European Universities Initiative.

Let us start from a personal angle. You hold degrees from Romania and Belgium. As a student, did you ever consider enrolling in a collaborative European programme?

IF: Well, I must admit that, together with not going on Erasmus mobility, not having followed a joint programme when I had the opportunity is my biggest regret from my student years. I first moved to Belgium as an international student, enrolling in a one-year intensive Master's programme. It was only after my arrival that I found out this programme also had a double degree track. At the time it felt like doing an intensive one-year programme in a foreign country in English, writing a big Master's thesis, and having to worry about employment opportunities at the end of my studies was already challenging and enriching enough. In hindsight, I know of course, that the double degree track would have provided my studies even more added value.

Luckily, nowadays students are much more aware, in my view, of this added value and the attractiveness of joint programmes. However, this is mostly true for those students who

are already considering study abroad, whereas there's still quite some work to be done to make such programmes more inclusive, *ie* more 'the norm' also for students with fewer opportunities. We must adapt our key messages to the target audience and communicate the advantages of joint programmes in ways that are understandable to all students. Of course, communication alone is not sufficient and further transformations are necessary in the institutional practices to widen diversity, but it all starts from there.

What part do joint programmes play in the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA)'s work, as well as in the work of the national agencies who are members of ACA, in their respective domestic contexts?

IF: Supporting international cooperation is so central to ACA's work that it is reflected even in the name of the association. Over the years, we've been supporting (through funding, research or advocacy) different types of strategic collaboration at the institutional level, focusing currently on the European Universities Initiative, in particular. When it comes to collaborative

programmes, we've been working on two elements that I think are important: the curricular integration of mobility windows, and the large-scale development of English medium instruction.

At the same time, our members, which are internationalisation agencies and provide funding for mobility and transnational collaboration, have been doing some groundbreaking work at the national level, although they might not necessarily have a formal role in related processes. They have, for example, been

activities being complementary to those of others, like the reputable training and networking coordinated by the EAIE.

Are there any lessons that were learned in the development of joint programmes that could or should now guide the work towards the European (joint) degree?

IF: For me, and probably for many colleagues in our in our field, it would be hard to imagine our current level of development and the present debate on the European degree without the fundamentals

be a way to acknowledge the immense effort that higher education institutions in Europe are making in their collaborative delivery of education, as well as its added value. The Commission has sketched this as a gradual process, starting with the articulation of a label, followed by the definition of criteria, that will then be translated by member states into qualifications that would be implemented within the national qualification frameworks.

On paper, the process seems clear and neat; in practice, there are still important barriers to overcome. One of the lessons that I hope we've learned from our experience of joint programmes is that new labels are not immediately clear to the end beneficiaries – that is, to students and employers. This is equally true for prestigious programmes like Erasmus Mundus. For this reason, I think it is important to use labels that are immediately understandable.

It is also important to have clarity as to where the European degree sits in the wider landscape of available labels and qualifications. We need to reflect on what distinguishes the European degree from

One of the lessons I hope we've learned is that new labels are not immediately clear to students and employers

relentlessly advocating with their national authorities and ministries for the necessary legislative changes to enable the delivery of joint programmes, to remove related barriers, and to facilitate foreign language instruction in their respective countries. And they are also active in capacity building, funding the establishment of such programmes, supporting peer learning activities within their higher education systems and connecting them with institutions from abroad with relevant experience. As a platform, ACA offers them support. For example, at the end of April, we've hosted a training event on joint programmes for Czech higher education institutions, in collaboration with our Czech member organisation and with two experts on this topic. And of course we're not the only network active in this area, our

that were created through the Bologna process, from the indispensable work on recognition that has paved the way for the wider use of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), to the development of European standards and guidelines, and last but not least, a common European approach for quality

We need to reflect on what distinguishes the European degree from existing formats – otherwise we'll just end up replicating or renaming what we already have

assurance in joint programmes. Positively, this foundational work is now also widely acknowledged by the European Commission, which is very determined to push the European degree through. This could

already existing formats, otherwise we will just end up replicating or renaming what we already have. And I believe it's extremely important to have member states and national authorities actively

involved throughout the entire process, and it goes to the European Commission's credit that they have intensified this kind of collaboration as of lately.

What is ACA's opinion on the European Universities Initiative? What are your wishes or expectations for its future evolution?

IF: As an organisation we have been highly supportive of this initiative from the beginning, seeing it as a potential tool to foster innovation in our sector.

believe it is essential to try new, different cooperation models, and that strategic collaboration can be enhanced through multiple formats. With this initiative, we've broadened the spectrum to more formats and opportunities, ranging from pure mobility to the very deep and ambitious integration brought about by the European University alliances. And we hope that in the future, the European Universities Initiative will be more and more integrated with the various other forms of collaboration.

I find it's important to remind ourselves that this is a pilot, and that various types of models are being explored

We have particularly advocated for the widening of the initiative, and we hope that new alliances will be funded through the third call that was closed earlier this year, while we understand that the budget for new collaborations is very small compared to the support foreseen for already selected consortia. And in that sense, we've particularly welcomed, and also worked towards, a more inclusive approach in the design of this initiative. We were glad to see the idea of 'inclusive excellence' reflected in the sheer number of institutions and alliances, and their diversity in type, size and location.


And again, our members have been very involved in supporting the full rollout of this initiative at the national level, through co-funding and peer learning activities. This is because we

Overall, I find it's important to remind ourselves that this is a pilot, and that various types of models are being explored. I expect that some of these could bring about deep, bold innovations and necessary transformations for some higher education institutions, while they might be less impactful for others. For this reason, I hope that the diversity of models and the flexibility in collaboration will actually increase in the future, and will remain fit for purpose from an institutional perspective.

CO-CREATING A EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

At the core of the European Universities Initiative is the ambition to move away from top-down governance and towards an approach that gives all stakeholders a seat at the table. To that end, new models are emerging across the continent that bring disparate institutions and diverse students together to co-create their shared academic destiny.





Universities across Europe are going through constant change. From the growing dependence on technology to budget cuts that disrupt the status quo, they are experiencing institutional and system-level reforms. The European Universities Initiative is one major reform that has emerged from the need to strengthen strategic partnerships across the EU and boost the international competitiveness of European universities.

In 2019–2020, 41 transnational alliances answered the call to become European Universities. They are bringing together students, academics and external partners to work in interdisciplinary teams and define the future of the European Higher Education Area. European Universities offer intercampus study plans, co-created with students, so that mobility can be experienced at all study levels. They are developing interdisciplinary and intercultural programmes aimed at addressing societal challenges, and they are building a long-term framework around sustainability, excellence and European values. All these efforts are being officially recognised by huge investments in the future of European Universities.

The European Universities are tasked with innovating and have chosen to challenge traditional learning narratives, embrace lifelong learning policies and create inclusive higher education institutions that are accessible for all members of society. The main objective is the convergence of existing European institutions into bigger, stronger and more unified bodies that represent Europe and its values.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

How do we, as national universities, build these new European Universities? Their long-term success requires a harmonised international higher education framework for the development and design of deep collaboration. One major challenge is that each European country has its own higher education legal framework and national academic governance regulations. However, what could have been an insurmountable obstacle has become an opportunity to encourage changes at a legal level across Europe.

From a national perspective, the universities involved in European University alliances are not

only building networks across borders but simultaneously forming national lobbies to push domestic higher education ministries to accept new, shared and unified legislation at a European level. Demonstrable progress is being made. For example, the Spanish ministry for universities included special conditions for European Universities within its latest legislation regarding academic recognition and accreditation.

These common efforts are part of how European Universities are contributing jointly to the co-creation of a European higher education space that is harmonised, innovative, inclusive, intercultural and interdisciplinary, for the benefit of future generations as well as current global citizens.

The main objective is the convergence of existing European institutions into bigger, stronger and more unified bodies that represent Europe and its values

UNIQUE IDENTITY

From an international perspective, the institutions involved have to co-build joint university processes, procedures and programmes. Up to now, international collaboration between institutions has been limited to bilateral or trilateral programmes as the most advanced international cooperation model. These existing schemes maintain each university's own identity, procedures, structures and models; national regulations and institutional legal frameworks avoid further inter-institutional international collaboration. European Universities are taking collaboration a step further.

How can European institutions go beyond the established pillars of the Bologna Process? European University alliances are defining, developing and co-creating completely new international cooperation models: we are creating institutions with a unique identity, including their own governance model,

procedures and programmes. Shared decision-making bodies and a common academic process allow systemic and harmonised platforms through which we can offer hybrid programmes, where each student drives their own itinerary according to their own needs and professional career development.

STUDENT ROLE

This integration requires the university community – teachers, researchers and administrative staff – to work jointly with their students. The students are no longer clients or mere recipients of educational programmes; they are crucial actors with voice and vote, actively involved in changing, updating and co-creating structures, models, procedures and academic programmes.

As Laura Gómez, a student board member for the UNIC European University, put it: “The decision-making process is now open to us, as we are being given the opportunity to express ourselves and to participate within the governance structures in our institutions. From education programmes to interaction with our cities, the voice of the students is now considered and valued in European Universities. We are willing to contribute and to play the new role we have been given, to go further than the Erasmus programme.”

SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

We are approaching our societal partners in an equally inclusive way. In our globalised world, where common challenges are faced and where joint solutions must be adjusted to each civil, cultural, social

and economic context, European Universities are building new relationships with their environments. Together, we are developing stronger inter-institutional links and connections with society; we are not working *for* society, but *with* it. We are generating networks that engage citizens, municipalities, businesses, non-governmental organisations and other city stakeholders in the co-creation of innovative solutions to solve common societal challenges.

The identification of common challenges at an international level and the search for shared solutions are leading to

in the European Universities Initiative means that universities can join forces and take a leadership role in setting the stage for the European Higher Education Area of the future.”

HIGHER STANDARDS

European Universities are demonstrating that an internationalisation agenda in itself is not an objective; rather, it should be used as a tool to help co-create a new European Higher Education Area. Higher education institutions can no longer afford to separate themselves from society by remaining in their ivory towers.

Together, we are developing stronger inter-institutional links and connections with society; we are not working *for* society, but *with* it

a redefinition of our cities and universities, contributing to their internationalisation. Going from the local to the global allows European Universities and cities to build our new concept of international collaboration.

At the same time, this cooperation among citizens, cities, stakeholders and academia is providing all of us with the opportunity to co-develop a new model of university that responds to the necessities of society and achieves social impact.

Peter Scholten, UNIC Coordinator, said: “The aim of this initiative is to bring together a new generation of creative Europeans to cooperate across languages, borders and disciplines to address societal challenges and skills shortages faced in Europe. Participating

Instead, they must cooperate with cities in order to enhance the lives of a new generation of citizens. That generation is demanding a higher standard from educational institutions: a standard that focuses on fulfilling not only the mission to educate but also the mission to create societal impact.

These new standards are pushing European Universities to be inclusive and innovative by embracing educational models that equip students with new methodologies to face global challenges, promoting European values and identity and ultimately strengthening the competitiveness of European higher education.

— MARTA CALVO, JUDIT CANO, AINHOA JORQUERA CASCÓN, ANCA TEODOSIU & GRACE YANO

European collaborative programmes: **KEY TERMS**

Collaboration in Europe comprises a rich variety of policies and programmes with an ever-expanding list of terminology used to talk about them. Here are some of the most important terms when discussing European collaborative programmes.

Bologna Process: a series of ministerial meetings and agreements between European countries to ensure comparability in the standards and quality of higher education qualifications – especially the three-cycle higher education system consisting of Bachelor's, Master's and doctoral degrees – through the establishment of the European Higher Education Area

Doctoral Networks: part of the MSCA (see below) aimed at implementing doctoral programmes by partnerships of organisations from different sectors across Europe and beyond to train highly-skilled doctoral candidates

European Higher Education Area (EHEA): a group of 48 countries that cooperate to achieve comparable and compatible higher education systems throughout Europe

Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters: degrees delivered by multiple higher education institutions and run across various countries, distinguished by their academic excellence and high level of integration

European Student Card initiative: a process aiming to create an online one-stop shop through the Erasmus+ mobile app for students to manage all administrative steps related to their mobility period

European Universities Initiative/European University alliances: the ongoing effort to establish transnational alliances that will become the universities of the future, promoting European values and identity, and revolutionising the quality and competitiveness of European higher education

Innovative Training Networks: competitively awarded, multi-beneficiary, international research and training networks providing post-graduate training in specific and interdisciplinary scientific fields

Joint programmes: an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions from EHEA countries, and leading to double/multiple degrees or a joint degree

Joint European degree: as proposed in the 2022 EU Strategy for Universities, a degree that would attest to the 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

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA): part of Horizon Europe; the European Union's flagship funding programme for doctoral education and postdoctoral training of researchers

YUFE

GIVING STUDENTS A SEAT AT THE TABLE

What does ‘co-creation’ mean in practice? For the Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) alliance, it means radically reinventing the way higher education institutions are governed. As one of the first alliances funded by the European Universities Initiative, YUFE is setting an example for how students can have a meaningful role in shaping individual and institutional journeys.

The Young Universities for the Future of Europe alliance brings together 10 dynamic research-based universities¹ from 10 European countries, as well as four partners from the non-governmental and private sector.² YUFE was one of the very first European Universities Initiative pilots to be funded by the European Commission in 2019.

Our aspiration is to establish a more equitable, diverse and effective higher education and research system by strengthening the structural collaboration between academic institutions, the world of work, the non-profit sector, decision-makers and civil society. We call this the YUFE quadruple-helix approach.

Two important initiatives that support the fulfilment of our vision are the YUFE Student Journey and our diversity and inclusivity strategy.

STUDENT JOURNEY

Our students actively co-create and are at the centre of everything that YUFE does.

The YUFE Student Journey gives students the opportunity to study simultaneously at 10 universities located in as many European countries. Unlike on regular exchanges, students can combine their academic endeavours with language courses, professional training and civic engagement, such as community volunteering or help desk support. Since the summer of 2020, YUFE has provided students with flexible academic curricula paired with personal and professional development opportunities. Enrolled students have two years to meet the requirements for the YUFE Student Journey Certificate.

Although physical mobility has been limited by the COVID-19 pandemic, the YUFE Virtual Campus has supported online and blended exchange. It has allowed the alliance to achieve substantial progress in the implementation of the vision and plans developed prior to the crisis.

Also introduced in 2020 was the YUFE Star System: an innovative, learner-centred assessment and recognition system



Image: Shutterstock

supporting the visibility of personal and professional skills development. It currently consists of four stars that reflect competences and skills acquired through professional and civic experiences – skills that will empower YUFE students and put them in a strong position in the labour market. The YUFE Star System is being piloted with YUFE students but will be offered to all learners in the future as part of YUFE’s lifelong learning vision and actions.

More than 300 students from all 10 partner universities are participating in the YUFE Student Journey, some of whom are attending both virtual and in-person classes. A satisfaction survey among the first participants was conducted in November 2020, with 83% of respondents saying they were happy with their YUFE experience so far. The students said that positive elements included “interesting classes”, “courses that are not offered at the home university”, “taking up a virtual class abroad even in times of

COVID-19”, and “getting to know other students and making friends”.

In addition, since the official start of our European University in December 2019, YUFE has organised over 870 staff mobility experiences through more than 50 training opportunities.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY

The YUFE model of a European University is rooted in the principles of diversity and inclusivity, along with digitalised learning as a key instrument to increase equality and accessibility of (transnational) education. In this context, the alliance is working to foster the use of technology in higher education; develop the digital competences and literacy of all learners; and contribute to enhanced access to high-quality international education for all learners across Europe.

In June 2020, YUFE adopted a diversity and inclusivity strategy and accompanying actions across all its institutions, representing a major step forward. Two institutions have set up diversity and inclusivity offices and posts, illustrating a tangible transformation within individual institutions since the development and launch of the alliance-wide strategy.

The YUFE alliance aims to be inclusive by involving students in all its governance bodies, task forces and working groups. Thirty students (three per academic partner) are chosen each year to represent their institutions within the YUFE Student Forum and help co-create the alliance. The YUFE Student Forum can elect its own board, which represents the student voice in all of YUFE’s governance bodies. The president of the YUFE Student Forum co-chairs the YUFE Strategy Board, the highest decision-making body in the alliance.

This strategy of involving students in all YUFE activities has been acknowledged and praised by the European Commission. It has also been mentioned on several occasions as an example of YUFE’s potential to become a role model

for integrating students into the operation of European Universities.

The YUFE alliance has set out an ambition for all its member institutions to become leaders in diversity and inclusivity. Since the establishment of the alliance, the YUFE diversity and inclusivity leadership concept has developed, and related workshops have been delivered to the students enrolled in the YUFE Student Journey. Further, train-the-trainer events have been held to build knowledge and capacity and to help create communities of good practice. Conversations and training about inclusive leadership have commenced within the highest governing bodies of the alliance, to support its members in being diversity and inclusivity role models.

SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS

In conclusion, the YUFE alliance has demonstrated that a high level of integration between universities, regions, businesses and research and innovation ecosystems can be successfully established and launched even in the midst of a pandemic.

Despite the hurdles of the past two years, YUFE has made substantial progress towards realising its mission in shaping the future of European higher education by establishing a European University open to all. The approach taken in the YUFE alliance helps to continue Europe’s progress towards systemic, structural and sustainable cooperation – and the creation of true European Universities.

— ARUM PERWITASARI & DANIELA TRANI

1. YUFE academic partners are: Maastricht University (coordinating institution), the Netherlands; University of Antwerp, Belgium; University of Bremen, Germany; University Carlos III de Madrid, Spain; University of Cyprus, Cyprus; University of Eastern Finland, Finland; University of Essex, UK; Tor Vergata University of Rome, Italy; University of Rijeka, Croatia; Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland.

2. YUFE non-academic partners are: Kiron Open Higher Education; Adecco Group France; Educational Testing Service Global; and European Entrepreneurs CEA-PMA.

EUROPEAN DEGREES A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

If European Universities are to be truly inclusive, then the student perspective must be central. One recent joint programme graduate of the Europaeum consortium – whose mobility period and overall student experience were crucially impacted by the pandemic – reflects on the high and low points of navigating a multi-institutional, transnational course of study and articulating his experience to employers after graduation.

In the academic year 2020–2021, I studied a joint programme on European history and civilisation, offered by three universities of the Europaeum consortium: Leiden University, Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University and the University of Oxford. Over the course of the year, disappointment set in as the mobility periods to France and England were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In short, what was supposed to be a transformative international experience became a rather lonely story of a student working on his thesis from his room, trying to stay in contact with students and teachers from across Europe via video calls.

Now, during my traineeship at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, joint programmes and joint degrees are the talk of the town, especially since the *Communication on a European Strategy for Universities*¹ on 18 January 2022. It has made me realise how timely and relevant my slightly awkward hybrid experience of a European joint programme actually was. My experience, it turns out, was indicative of many of the challenges the European higher education sector hopes to address in the coming years regarding the delivery of joint degrees.



Image: Shutterstock

EUROPEAN AMBITIONS

In the *Communication on a European Strategy for Universities*, as well as in a proposal for a European Council recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, the European Commission announced work towards four flagship

Student Identifier; and taking steps towards a joint European degree, to be piloted as a label in 2022.

The ambitions behind the European degree will sound familiar to any student or alumnus of a joint programme. They reflect in many ways the course taken by the European higher education sector

experiences for students and academic staff are no longer an add-on to a regular study programme but rather a natural part of it, reflecting the drive towards long-term structural, systemic and sustainable cooperation between European higher education institutions.

The European Commission now wants to recognise programmes that take this systemic cooperation to the next level and offer joint degrees. As a first step, a European degree label will pilot criteria – co-created with member states and higher education institutions – that reflect an innovative and transformative higher education experience in multiple institutions from multiple European countries. As a second step, consortia of higher education institution alliances, member states and stakeholders will conduct policy experimentation to further investigate the feasibility of a joint European degree.

HARMONISED SYSTEMS

Let me take my own degree as an example of what is at stake. First and foremost, my programme was a joint programme but not a joint degree, as the eventual degree was awarded only by Leiden University, supplemented by a small document signed by the Oxford Europaeum office to say that I had indeed participated in the transnational trimesters. A major disadvantage of this is that when I apply for jobs, I have a hard time explaining my study programme, as it is not obvious from my diploma. The European degree, on the other hand, would be a truly joint degree delivered by all alliance partners together, with a joint governance structure, a joint diploma supplement and, accordingly, automatic recognition of credits.

In recent years, the sector's focus has shifted from stand-alone mobility to truly European joint study programmes with embedded mobility

initiatives: expanding the European Universities Initiative to 60 European Universities; developing a legal status for alliances of higher education institutions; scaling up the European Student Card initiative by deploying a unique European

ever since the European Universities Initiative was announced. In recent years, the sector's focus has been shifting strongly from stand-alone mobility to truly European joint study programmes with embedded mobility. Transnational



Learn all about the regional higher education sector at the **'Introduction to higher education in Catalonia'** session on 13 September at the 32nd Annual EAIE Conference in Barcelona


To learn more, visit www.eaie.org/barcelona

See you at EAIE Barcelona 2022!

Stories of human values

professional — encouraging — enterprising
creative — vibrant — enriching — international
open — excellent

Studyincatalonia.com



Find out more of these stories of human values

This would not only greatly enhance the visibility and status of joint programmes such as mine but would more importantly help to overcome discrepancies in higher education systems in regard to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, the alignment of academic calendars and the status of interdisciplinary study programmes. Combined with a legal status for university alliances, it can be an incentive to lift restrictive national regulations surrounding tuition fees, student enrolment, programme accreditation and quality assurance for joint programmes.

For alliances of higher education institutions, the European degree would mean an acknowledgement of their standing and their tremendous efforts in internationalising their education, teaching and research and pooling their resources to make the European Higher Education Area more attractive globally.

INTEGRATION AND MOBILITY

The intercampus dimension that a European degree would signal should be a key feature of all joint programmes. During my programme, I was unable to travel due to the pandemic and had limited access to physical libraries and facilities. For that reason, the institutions' online environments became even more important to the successful completion of my degree. You can imagine my joy at being granted digital access to the affluence of the Bodleian Library, in addition to Leiden University facilities, but I experienced problems in connecting virtually to other facilities of the partner universities.

Joint programmes should truly integrate students and staff in the different networks and services the institutions

provide – digitally, without barriers and free of charge. It is not enough to engage in mobility abroad: you have to feel truly part of a transnational environment, whether online or offline. The European degree can boost innovation towards the university campus of the future.

The European degree should also support the movement towards embedded mobility in study programmes. Physical mobility is the central feature of joint

and flexible: there is no use in deciding at a European level about programme substance or contents. What should be European about a European degree is its transnational dimension, delivered in a flexible and innovative way, reflecting principles of sustainability, interdisciplinarity and inclusion.

Before anything else, a European degree should be a tool to empower alliances of European higher education

It is not enough to engage in mobility abroad – you have to feel truly part of a transnational environment, whether online or offline

programmes, to be encouraged not only for students but for staff and researchers as well. Alongside this physical mobility, however, non-traditional forms of studying abroad, such as virtual and blended learning, should also become self-evident, engaging students from all consortium partners from the start and not only in the physical mobility period. Joint intensive courses could be offered in hybrid formats so that teachers and students from all participating institutions can join, and there should be opportunities for joint supervision, international research conferences and networking opportunities. The integration of virtual and blended mobility on top of standard physical mobility can make a transnational degree even more transnational.

FLEXIBLE APPROACH

Different qualification levels and study fields require different approaches to the European degree, whose criteria should therefore deliberately be left open

institutions to deliver joint degrees in a simpler way that ensures the quality of a programme and builds on the strengths of each participating institution. Transformative higher education as signalled by the European degree respects the competences of member states and the academic identity of participating institutions, bringing different universities' expertise together to develop new programmes.

For me, the true academic experience is to follow your own intellectual path through the wealth of knowledge and skills on offer. Bringing together diverse academic practices from across Europe, a European degree for joint programmes can help institutions to offer students just that.

— WOUTER BAAS

1. European Commission. (2022). *Commission communication on a European strategy for universities*. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities>

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES THE LATEST LITMUS TEST

Image: Shutterstock

Universities in Europe have cooperated for nearly as long as they've existed, and the recent set of ambitious programmes and policy measures form only the latest chapter in that history. With the European Universities Initiative approaching a crucial target deadline in 2025, its implementation and the impact thereof will reveal much about the present and future course of international higher education within Europe.

European cooperation in higher education is as old as universities themselves. However, following the Second World War, Europe started to reflect on how to conceptualise and support this cooperation, often by mirroring wider European cooperation. European degrees awarded by European Universities were a much-coveted goal, popular among the founding fathers of the European Community, but less so among prestigious European universities, which retain treasured academic traditions dating back to the Middle Ages.

With each new phase of European integration, as well as with the emergence of the Bologna Process, Europe has moved closer to this goal. 2025 is the year in which the European Commission has set a target to obtain true European degrees, in the frame of European Universities, thus making this relatively new European policy instrument the most recent litmus test of European cooperation in higher education.

A SHORT HISTORY OF EUROPEAN COLLABORATION

Anne Corbett separated the post-WWII history of higher education cooperation into three main phases: a 1948–1972 phase, where the focus was on academic values like democracy and academic freedom, as a reaction to totalitarian regimes and their agendas; the 1973–1989 phase, when university cooperation was pursued in a much more utilitarian fashion (see, for example, the introduction of the idea of a European University in the Euratom treaty, underlining the need for Europe-wide, recognised degrees in the field of nuclear energy); and the post-1990 phase, when conflicting priorities (cooperation versus global competition) were reflected in an ever-expanding European policy arena, which by that time included the Bologna Process and resulted in the emergence of the European Higher Education Area and the European Education Area.¹

Andrew Gunn traces the idea of a European University back to the 1948 debates on the European project, which would require, in the view of German economist Alfred Müller-Armack a “community of the intelligence” to be finalised.² This German



position, which viewed a European university as an “intellectual homeland” that could contribute to cultural integration and nurture a European elite³, did not come to fruition due to other post-war priorities. Instead, it was reshaped by France, which took a more utilitarian view to the need for European degrees, by linking them to the concrete needs of Europe (eg the need for professionals in nuclear energy).

Years later, around the time of the 1969 civil rights movements, Italy managed to become host to the first European higher education institution – the European University Institute – set up via an inter-governmental approach, rather than by an EU instrument. Even the European Technology Institute was initially conceptualised by the Barroso Commission as a Europe-wide higher education and research institution, despite its rather different shape today.

Probably the most successful translation of the European University idea is now in full swing with the Erasmus+ backed European University Initiative (EUI).

Politically launched by French President Emmanuel Macron at his 2017 Sorbonne speech, the EUI calls for proposals encompassing many of the instruments of cooperation included in the Bologna Process (automatic recognition, ECTS, Diploma Supplement) as well as new ones, like micro-credentials, mobility in all forms and shapes, streamlined quality assurance procedures and the addition of a European dimension to the missions of member institutions. EU policy recommendations are expected to add new layers to the structure of European Universities, giving the bloc an enhanced role in the field of higher education.

THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN COOPERATION

In lieu of the 20 European universities by 2024, as imagined by President Macron, the EU now sees over 40 such institutions, which are now going to enter a consolidation phase. The plans of the European Commission are to expand this number to around 60 university alliances by 2025 and to use these alliances to accelerate EU-envisaged reforms. The funds available from various sources (Erasmus+, Horizon 2020, national budgets *etc*) are meant to propel these institutions towards becoming a true academic matrix for higher education in Europe. Nevertheless, two major questions remain: how to avoid creating a two-speed Europe by leaving out around half of European universities from this EUI family; and whether this new enhanced form of cooperation will truly result in removing the bureaucratic and cultural obstacles towards creating true European degrees.

It can be argued that the way in which the EUI was developed reflects the tensions of the decade in higher education cooperation – the European Commission aims for both excellence and inclusion, as well as for both common intra-European degrees and worldwide competitiveness of these alliances. At the same time, money is thrown at these

institutions to expand from the existing number of members to 9–10 universities per alliance, in an attempt to not leave many academic communities behind and to consolidate European cohesion. But the work of negotiating the way in which networks of individual universities can transform into European campuses is a time-consuming affair, which became even more so with the two-year hiatus caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many problems remain and the accelerator pedal is already being pressed in the race toward European degrees by 2025. This will be, in this author’s view, the latest litmus test for the Bologna Process agenda, as well as for the majority of recent European Union policy initiatives on higher education cooperation. If European degrees are not a concrete reality by 2025, enabled by very difficult changes in national legislations to allow them and by a common understanding and use of European trust-building tools in higher education, the idea of European higher education will suffer another setback. And the last thing that we need in the context of the Ukrainian war and the rise of nationalism and populism in Europe is a weakening of the European ideals of cooperation, respect for human rights and academic freedoms. The times might just make the case for European Universities becoming an “intellectual homeland”.

— LIGIA DECA

1. Corbett, A. (2012). Principles, problems, politics... What does the historical record of EU cooperation in higher education tell the EHEA generation?. In Curaj, A., Scott, P., Vlasceanu, L., & Wilson, L. (Eds.) *European Higher Education at the Crossroads* (pp. 39–57). Dordrecht: Springer

2. Gunn, A. (2020). The European Universities Initiative: A Study of Alliance Formation in Higher Education. In: Curaj, A., Deca, L., Pricopie, R. (eds.) *European Higher Education Area: Challenges for a New Decade*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56316-5_2

3. Corbett, A. (2005). *Universities and the Europe of Knowledge: Ideas, institutions and policy entrepreneurship in European Union Higher Education Policy, 1955–2005*. Basingstoke: Palgrave

CROSSING BOUNDARIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Of the European University alliances that have emerged so far, several of them are organised around tackling various aspects of the climate crisis and sustainable development. For the EURECA-PRO consortium, cooperation on sustainable consumption and production calls for working together not only across national and institutional borders, but also across disciplinary and cultural boundaries.

In autumn 2020, the EURECA-PRO consortium, which now consists of eight universities across Europe¹ and 24 associated partners, embarked on a journey to implement teaching, research and innovation related to responsible consumption and production. This was inspired by UN Sustainable Development Goal 12 – sustainable consumption and production – which expresses the necessity of reducing the material impacts of particularly the Western lifestyle.

This is a complex topic that requires us to cross disciplinary, cultural and geographic boundaries. As ecological economist Manfred Max-Neef argues, complex problems require complex thinking.² This kind of thinking can only be achieved when an understanding across disciplines and institutions is established – which is a challenge not only in teaching but also in research and outreach activities. How have we approached this challenge so far?

COMMUNICATION AND TEAMWORK

The key to successfully managing a project with partners from different countries, academic traditions and disciplines is



Image: Shutterstock

constructive communication across these boundaries. Our strong project lead has established communication routines such as a weekly coordinators' meeting. Beyond the exchange of ideas, these meetings

university management. It would be impossible to develop new structures for education, research and innovation without the participation and backing of the universities' rectors and vice-rectors.

The key to managing a project with partners from different countries, academic traditions and disciplines is constructive communication across these boundaries

provide an opportunity for everyone to be up to date on the latest developments and be included as an important part of the project. It is vital to create direct channels for handling challenges as they arise.

In this respect, it is important to be backed up by high-level support from

Together, they form the Board of Rectors, which is in constant dialogue with the project management.

The tasks within our work packages are addressed by representatives across countries and disciplines. Our collaboration therefore has to be structured and

organised in a way that is accessible for everyone. *Ad hoc* task forces have been founded to address specific issues, such as the construction of a virtual campus. This IT Task Force, for instance, includes representatives from each university and from very different disciplinary backgrounds, from the social sciences to IT.

As well as the collaboration between staff members, students also have a voice in the implementation of the European University. They form the student co-creation unit that is part of the governance group steering the strategic development of EURECA-PRO.

Monetary resources have been allocated to create a level playing field where everyone has the possibility to contribute equally to the project. Should a partner be lacking expertise for a certain task, the

other partners – particularly the project lead – help out with an exchange of knowledge with this partner.

CONFLICTS AND SYNERGIES

One challenge is that each participant in the consortium is both part of a university and part of the emerging European University. This can lead to conflicting interests and the creation of parallel structures. For instance, the broad innovation

the strengths of the universities involved and also lead to the creation of new research fields.

Legal barriers, such as differences in national regulation, are also an issue in the construction of joint research, teaching and outreach. The universities in the consortium are managed and regulated differently, and the problems arising from this still limit the creation of a truly European University. Efforts made by

broadly oriented universities, particularly their social science departments, have an equally strong voice in addressing responsible consumption and production.

We have already created common teaching, research and outreach content on responsible consumption and production, and we are working on defining this umbrella topic more concretely. While it is necessary to lead a constructive debate on the meaning of responsibility related to consumption and production, there is also an advantage to remaining quite broad in this common vision. In this way, a wide range of perspectives and academic backgrounds can be accommodated.

Easily accessible communication channels, high-level support and the well-balanced contribution of all partners are core aspects of EURECA-PRO. In this European University, we are overcoming barriers by focusing together on one common target and making great use of the synergies between our participating institutions.

— SARAH KOLLNIG

With responsible consumption and production, we have a topic that gives the consortium a common direction

agenda of EURECA-PRO for sustainable consumption and production could conflict with a purely technical focus on innovation. Newly established structures within the consortium, such as innovation academies, could be parallel endeavours that rival existing innovation efforts.

It is paramount to foster synergies between the European University and the existing university structures. A broad innovation agenda can complement purely technical approaches, and emerging innovation centres can build upon existing innovation activities. The same is true for teaching and research activities: any newly developed lecture series should build upon the vast pool of work produced by teachers and researchers in the consortium. Through this collaboration, new courses and teaching approaches emerge. The research activities build on

consortium members to overcome this need to be embedded in favourable conditions created at the level of national and European policymaking.

COMMON PATHWAY

EURECA-PRO unites more than 60,000 students and 11,000 staff members. It is a challenge to bring together this large number of people and their different perspectives and backgrounds. With responsible consumption and production, we have a topic that gives the consortium a common direction. Staff and students work on a common pathway towards reaching this goal.

We are building upon our existing strengths, which are specifically the technical aspects: four of the eight universities in the consortium are technical universities. But it is paramount that the more

1. The participating universities at the start were from Austria (University of Leoben), Germany (Technische Universität Bergakademie Freiberg, University of Applied Sciences Mittweida), Spain (University of León), Greece (Technical University of Crete), Romania (University of Petroşani) and Poland (Silesian University of Technology). We have since added an extra partner university from Belgium (Hasselt University). Together, we form the European University on Responsible Consumption and Production, EURECA-PRO.

2. Max-Neef, Manfred. (2005). Foundations of transdisciplinarity. *Ecological Economics*, 53(1), 5–16.

A EUROPEAN APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE



The desire to stimulate joint programmes is nothing new, but an overarching quality assurance framework to enable them has only started to gain momentum in recent years. Firmly situated within the context of existing initiatives, the European Approach to quality assurance is poised to be a crucial enabler of the European Universities Initiative and of increased European collaboration more generally. ▶

In the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), political will to increase the number of joint programmes has long been evident in the form of various Ministerial Communiqués. However, in reality, joint programmes challenge existing national quality assurance (QA) systems; QA thus

“recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes”. In order to provide a more specific and directly operational framework, the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) in 2013 commissioned a small *ad hoc* expert group to “develop a policy proposal for a specific

structural aspects rather than to education content and learning outcomes. Infamous examples include requirements on the number of ECTS per course/module or those assigned to a final thesis, with some countries’ criteria in outright contradiction with others’.

The European Approach² is solely based on the agreed-upon EHEA tools, especially the ESG and the EHEA’s Qualifications Framework (QF-EHEA). It was clear that it had to be applied without adding national criteria to be successful.

The European Approach has two main components: a set of agreed standards and an agreed procedure. The standards are closely based on Part 1 of the ESG, but spelled out specifically for joint programmes. They can be used directly and without further translation or operationalisation. Likewise, the agreed procedure is ready to be used by a suitable EQAR-registered QA agency whenever at least one consortium partner requires an external programme accreditation. In cases where all participating institutions

In an ideal scenario, a given joint programme would be assessed via a single external QA procedure

remains a central issue that often hampers joint programmes. Frequently, several QA agencies from various countries carry out separate QA procedures and each review only the part of the provision taking place in their country. Such a fragmented assessment obviously neglects the crucial characteristic of the programme, namely its being offered jointly.

In an ideal scenario, a given joint programme would be assessed via a single external QA procedure. Over the years, a number of projects have pursued that goal, such as the European Consortium of Accreditation in higher education (ECA) project ‘Joint programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of degrees awarded’ (JOQAR).¹ However, specific, additional national requirements have often had to be added to the common European frameworks.

The goal of enabling single external QA procedures has been part of the accumulated body of Bologna policy initiatives since the Bucharest Communiqué (April 2012), in which ministers committed to

European accreditation approach for joint programmes”. The author was a member of that group, and after several iterations and discussions, its proposal was adopted by ministers in 2015.

CORNERSTONES OF THE EUROPEAN APPROACH

Drawing from JOQAR and other experiences, our starting point was that the Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA (ESG) were highly accepted in

Many institutions and European University alliances value that a European Approach accreditation underlines their European profile

Europe, but different national criteria that had to be applied were the major impediment for cooperating institutions and agencies. In many cases, such national criteria were not easily understandable for institutions, experts and agencies from other countries, and often they referred to

are ‘self-accrediting’ and only need external QA at institutional level, they could use the agreed standards in their internal QA arrangements.

THE EUROPEAN APPROACH IN PRACTICE
The European Approach was discussed

at length before it was adopted. Once it was adopted, some agencies were keen to put it to use immediately, but some also remained rather hesitant for a considerable amount of time.

Even though the European Approach is directly usable, it leaves some elements to be fleshed out in practice. Some agencies are always keen to be trailblazers, while others prefer to follow a more well-trodden path. Projects and funding can always be a powerful incentive. The ImpEA³ project boosted the piloting of

regulations still prevent its full use. As of April 2022, only 17⁵ of the 49 EHEA countries fully allow the use of the European Approach for all higher education institutions. This includes four countries where all institutions are self-accrediting and the European Approach is thus available by definition, while most other countries need to change national laws or regulations to permit the use of the European Approach. Thirteen additional countries only allow the European Approach to be used, but only by some institutions

cooperation to flourish and joint programmes to grow significantly.

The recent proposal for a European degree can be seen as addressing the same challenges: trying to dismantle obstacles to European cooperation by creating a coherent European framework, and trying to focus on what we have in common more than on our differences. To achieve that, the European degree label should be closely linked to the European Approach.

Preserving Europe's rich diversity is key to its attractiveness. But it must be clear: to truly boost European cooperation, all European countries will have to let go of some national criteria and regulations. This is the only way to provide flexibility to higher education institutions. Eventually, allowing cooperation to flourish allows Europe's autonomous and responsible higher education institutions to preserve European diversity in their cooperation projects, in their joint programmes, and in their teaching and learning.

— COLIN TÜCK

To truly boost European cooperation, all European countries will have to let go of some national criteria and regulations

the European Approach and produced a lot of valuable additional material that gives guidance to HEIs and QAAs. Yet, as of today we still have only approximately 15 cases⁴ where the European Approach was used in an external programme accreditation. Nonetheless, it is by now well-established that the European Approach functions well in practice, and a few more reviews are in progress.

Higher education institutions are keen to use it: where the European Approach replaces two or more national accreditations, it clearly reduces red tape. But we notice that many institutions and European University alliances also value that a European Approach accreditation underlines their European profile.

And while plenty of EQAR-registered agencies stand ready to implement the European Approach, many national

or subject to specific conditions. While some progress is visible from year to year, no big leaps have been made recently.

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES AND EUROPEAN DEGREES

Traditionally, joint programmes represented a fairly small share of the vast number of study programmes, particularly when viewed in terms of student numbers.

With the European Universities Initiative, this is no longer the case: thanks to the efforts of many dedicated colleagues in the alliances, joint programmes are recently turning from a niche to a mainstay of European higher education. Virtually all alliances have encountered the well-known challenges involved in creating joint programmes, and their leaders have made policymakers aware of the need to cut red tape if they really want European

1. For a description and outcomes of the JOQAR project, see: <http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/JOQAR>

2. See <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/> for the full text.

3. See <https://impea.eu/> for the material produced by the project.

4. See map (<https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/Avppi/4/>) and <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/european-approach-cases/> for the reports available in EQAR's Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR).

5. See <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/national-implementation/>

EAIE BLOG SPOT

In between *Forum* issues, visit the EAIE blog for news, views and insights, anywhere and at your fingertips. Just grab yourself a comfy seat and start browsing!



29
MAR

Supporting international students in times of crisis and conflict

Students and staff affected by crisis and conflict need extra support from their institutions. This piece shared some of the key areas to address in times of need.

<http://ow.ly/KauB50J8Kl4>

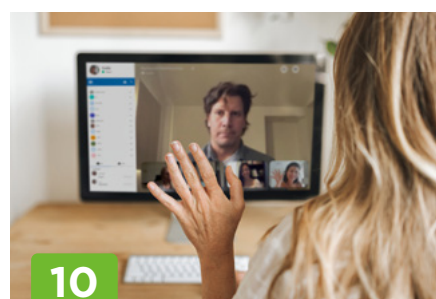


19
APR

International virtual traineeships: 5 tips for transversal skills

International virtual traineeships can be an ideal bridge to employment when carefully constructed for maximum skills gain.

<http://ow.ly/TJJ250J9SAZ>



10
MAY

5 soft skills facilitated by the pandemic

With the widespread move to online teaching, has the pandemic negatively impacted the key learning objective of cultivating soft skills – or does perhaps just the opposite hold true?

<http://ow.ly/u5s650J8KyI>

EAIE PODCAST



16
MAR

Sarah Todd: An Asia-Pacific update

President of the Asia-Pacific Association for International Education (APAIE), Sara Todd, discusses the challenges and innovations for international education across this diverse region.

<http://ow.ly/Tsq50J8KW2>



13
APR

Karina Bilokon: A Ukrainian student's story

Get an inside look into the first-hand experience of a Ukrainian student as she watches the war in her home country unfold while studying abroad.

<http://ow.ly/zke050J8KWT>



11
MAY

Arunima Dey & Carmen Neghina: Admissions trends 2022

Will the start of a new academic year in Europe in autumn 2022 witness a post-pandemic bounce-back? Recent research and analysis by the EAIE, The Class Foundation and StudyPortals may give some indications.

<http://ow.ly/AYoF50J8L7h>

CALENDAR



**13–16
SEPTEMBER**

32nd Annual EAIE Conference and Exhibition in Barcelona

The future in full colour

www.eaie.org/barcelona

**10–12
OCTOBER**

THE World Academic Summit 2022

Trajectories in higher education: meeting rising expectations

www.timeshighered-events.com/world-academic-summit-2022

**18–21
OCTOBER**

AIEC 2022 Australian International Education Conference

Beyond borders

<https://aiec.idp.com>

**25–28
OCTOBER**

16th IAU General Conference 2022

Relevance and Value of Universities to Future Society

<https://na.eventscloud.com/website/9207/home>



**OCTOBER &
NOVEMBER**

EAIE Online Academy autumn training programme

Visit the EAIE website for course information and dates

www.eaie.org/training

The main graphic features the text 'EAIE | BARCELONA' in a large, bold, black sans-serif font. Below it, '2022' is written in a smaller font, and '13-16 SEPTEMBER' is written in a medium-sized font. The text is overlaid on a vibrant background of abstract, overlapping shapes in shades of blue, purple, and yellow. The background image shows a colorful mosaic or collage of patterns and textures, including a prominent yellow and blue patterned area at the bottom.

EAIE | BARCELONA

2022 | 13-16 SEPTEMBER

Reconnect with old friends and partners in person at Europe's leading international higher education conference and exhibition

REGISTER NOW TO SAVE
www.eaie.org/barcelona