

# FORUM



MEMBER  
MAGAZINE

*Discussing international education*

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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



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“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

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“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  
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# 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**  
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## *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*

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A project management expert and Korean drama fan, Eka has been collaborating with international education partners through her institution since its establishment.

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Nikki studied in three different countries on three continents, inspiring her to seek a career in international education and later global health.

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With over 20 years of experience in different areas of internationalisation, Maggy has studied in Spain, Bolivia and Mexico.

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**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**  
Judith'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.

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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.

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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 advisor 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.

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# 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

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

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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*<sup>1</sup> and the adoption by the European Council of the *Council Recommendation on Building Bridges for Effective European Higher Education Cooperation*.<sup>2</sup> 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

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

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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

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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)





IN CONVERSATION WITH

# IRINA FERENCZ

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MARIO ADAMO  
EAIE

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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

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

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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

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## 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

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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.

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

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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.

# CALENDAR



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[www.timeshighered-events.com/world-academic-summit-2022](http://www.timeshighered-events.com/world-academic-summit-2022)

**18–21  
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<https://aiec.idp.com>

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The graphic features a large, light blue, irregular shape that serves as a background for the text. This shape overlaps with a purple shape and is surrounded by smaller yellow and green shapes. A thin black line forms a partial circle around the central text. The background of the entire image is a blurred view of a colorful mosaic or stained glass window.

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