
WORK PACKAGE 2: TASK 2.3

GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUPS AND IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

List of European criteria for the joint transnational programmes to test a joint European degree label.

Minimum requirements

- **Higher education institutions involved**

Minimum requirement: The joint programme is jointly designed and delivered by at least 2 higher education institutions from at least 2 different EU Member States (EQF 6,7, 8).

Survey 2: Although 94.9% of respondents categorised this criterion as either very suitable (71.9%) or quite suitable (23%), the comments they provided made reference to some elements that merit further discussion.

Survey 3: This criterion is fulfilled by 129 (83%) of the 155 joint programmes included in survey 3. Of the 26 joint programmes that do not fulfil the criterion, 20 have partner institutions outside the EU.

Discussion points:

- How far do you agree/disagree with the following opinions? Would you recommend changing the criterion to include any of them?
 - the minimum should be 3 HEIs from 3 EU member states, in line with the general rule for most EU projects.
 - the minimum number of HEIs/member states should be different for the different EQF levels, with some proposing 3 HEIs from 3 EU member states at EQF 6 and 7 but 2 HEIs from 2 EU member states at EQF 8, and others proposing a higher number for EQF 8 than for EQF 6 and 7.
 - Instead of EU member states, the criterion should refer to EEA member states.
 - Joint programmes on a national level should also be included, as long as the teaching is delivered in a different European language to the national language(s).

It is worth mentioning that, according to the call for proposals ERASMUS-EDU-2022-POL-EXP through which this project was granted, the *Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation* adopted by the Council on 5 April 2022 invites the Commission to “pilot in 2022 the development and implementation under Erasmus+ of European criteria for the award of a joint European degree label. Such a label would be issued as a complementary certificate to the qualifications obtained by students graduating from joint programmes delivered in the context of transnational cooperation between several higher education institutions”. The use of the term “several” HEIs implies more than 2.

- With regard to the way the criterion is expressed, including more than one element in a single criterion was questioned. For example, if a joint programme

includes at least 2 HEIs from at least 2 different EU Member States, but is not jointly designed and/or jointly delivered, does this mean the criterion has not been fulfilled?

It was suggested that this could be resolved by separating the different elements into separate criteria.

- The joint programme is offered by at least 2 HEIs from at least 2 different EU Member States.
- The joint programme is jointly designed and delivered.

Do you agree with this proposal?

- Regarding procedures necessary to provide evidence of compliance with the criteria, what documents could be used to show that a joint programme was jointly designed?

- **Transnational joint degree delivery**

Minimum requirement: The joint programme leads to the award of a joint degree (EQF 6,7,8).

Survey 2: 89.2% of respondents considered this criterion to be very suitable (64.7%) or quite suitable (24.5%).

Survey 3: 63 joint programmes (41% of those surveyed) indicated compliance with this criterion, although the observations made by several of these respondents show that the degree offered is in fact a double degree not a joint degree.

Of the 92 joint programmes (59%) that do not offer a joint degree, 64 indicated that a joint degree is the preferred option but cannot be awarded due to technical, legal or administrative restrictions.

In the case of 13 joint programmes, a joint degree is not awarded by choice, as a double/multiple degree is considered the preferable option.

Discussion points:

- Although a joint degree is generally seen as desirable, in many cases it cannot be awarded due to restrictive legislation in some member states. Is it too limiting to include this as a minimum criterion at this stage or will it serve as a stimulus to remove the existing barriers?
- The opinion was expressed that the political prioritisation of a joint degree over the other formats can seem rather artificial. Given that some believe that a double or multiple degree can be equally valid and is in fact sometimes preferred, do you agree that a joint degree should be the only valid format to obtain the European degree label?

Minimum requirement: Dissertations are co-evaluated by supervisors or a committee with members from at least 2 different institutions located in 2 different countries (EQF 8).

Survey 2: 79.8% of respondents consider the criterion to be very (48.9%) or quite (30.9%) suitable. In general, co-evaluation of dissertations is considered as positive although comments include the need to include not only co-evaluation but also co-supervision of dissertations. Another concern is the viability of co-evaluation given the different systems and regulations governing the composition and functioning of evaluation of doctoral dissertations in different national contexts and individual institutions.

It was suggested that this criterion should also apply at EQF 7.

Survey 3: 75% of joint programmes reported fulfilment of the criterion.

Discussion points:

- Do you think that this criterion should include co-supervision of dissertations as well as co-evaluation?
- What barriers exist to the co-evaluation and co-supervision of dissertations, if any?
- Should this criterion also apply to EQF 7, for master's dissertations?

- **Transparency of the learning outcomes**

Minimum requirement: The joint programme is described in ECTS (EQF 6,7).

Survey 2: 92.8% of respondents considered this criterion it to be very suitable (74.8%) or quite suitable (18%).

Survey 3: 140 (98%) of the 143 joint programmes reported use of ECTS.

While this criterion has a high level of acceptance and compliance, several respondents referred to difficulties in the use of ECTS due to:

- a) different national or institutional limitations on the maximum and minimum number of ECTS for a single module
- b) differences in the number of teaching hours assigned per ECTS credit
- c) different interpretations of the ECTS grading scheme
- d) joint programmes that include non-EU partners who may require the use of a different system
- e) certain activities may not find exact correspondence with an amount of ECTS as not all study and training experiences can be exactly measured in terms of hours/credits.

- The ECTS system has been in use for many years, and yet difficulties are still being reported (see above). Do you agree with the suggestion that the use of other more flexible methods of describing joint programmes, such as micro-credentials or open badges, should also be envisaged in the criteria for the European Degree label?

Minimum requirement: A joint Diploma Supplement is issued to the student at the end of the joint study programme (EQF 6, 7).

Survey 2: 89.2% of respondents considered this criterion to be either very suitable (67.6%) or quite suitable (21.6%).

Survey 3: 69 (48.3%) of the 143 joint programmes at EQF levels 6 and 7 issue a joint diploma supplement. Of the 74 (51.7%) who do not, 36 indicate technical or legal difficulties. In many cases it is stated that each institution automatically awards all students its own diploma supplement in a standard format and difficulties are cited with issuing individualised models for joint programmes.

Discussion points:

- In view of the above, should a joint diploma supplement be a minimum requirement to obtain the European Degree Label?
- Would a European template for a diploma supplement for European joint programmes be a useful tool to promote and facilitate its use?

- **Quality assurance arrangements**

Minimum requirement:

i) Internal and external Quality Assurance is conducted in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

ii) The programme, the study field or the institutions are accredited/evaluated by an EQAR registered agency.

iii) If external quality assurance is required at programme level in the countries involved, the transnational programme should be accredited/evaluated preferably using the European approach for quality assurance of joint programmes (EA) (EQF 6,7,8).

Survey 2: In this survey, parts i) and ii) of this criterion were included in the same question. 87% of respondents agreed that these requirements were very suitable (53.2%) or quite suitable (33.8%). Evaluation performed by EQAR-registered agencies provides a guarantee that QA will be conducted in accordance with the ESG. However, for member states such as Italy, which is not currently a member of EQAR, this is seen as a barrier. Concerns were expressed regarding difficulties in aligning internal QA arrangements among the partners in accordance with national and institutional regulations, and the need to ensure alignment between internal and external QA.

For part iii) of the question, 82.1% of respondents regarded it as very suitable (50.4%) or quite suitable (31.7%). Several respondents commented on the need to improve the use and acceptance of the European Approach across the EU as it is currently not widely used, and is not (fully) recognised in some member states. Including the EA in this criterion was seen as an opportunity to promote the EA and review its functioning. One of the EDLab focus countries, Italy, does not currently recognise the EA and this is obviously viewed as a significant barrier.

Survey 3: Fulfilment of criteria: i) 80% yes; 20% no. ii) 65% yes; 35% no. iii) 39% yes; 61% no.

The comments and observations indicate a lack of familiarity with terms such as EGAR and the EA, as well as a lack of knowledge of the procedures carried out in partner institutions within the joint programme. Several responses indicate plans to implement use of the EA in future editions of the joint programme.

Discussion points:

As far as the wording of the criterion is concerned, several respondents found the use of the term “preferably” with regard to using the EA to be confusing in a criterion that is a minimum requirement and questioned how this would be applied. It was suggested that either the term “preferably” should be removed (making it mandatory to use the EA) or the criterion should be optional instead of part of the minimum requirements.

- Would you recommend removing the term “preferably” from this minimum requirement? What would be the advantages/disadvantages of doing that in your opinion?

In the first part of the criterion, *“internal and external Quality Assurance is conducted in accordance with the ESG”*, several negative responses were registered due to interpreting the criterion to mean that both internal and external QA are necessary.

- Do you agree that re-wording the criterion to: *“Quality Assurance, be it internal or external, is conducted in accordance with the ESG”* would make it clearer? Do you have other suggestions to improve the clarity of the criterion?

- **Joint policies for the joint programme**

Minimum requirement: The HEIs involved have joint policies for admission, selection, supervision, monitoring, assessment and recognition procedures for the joint study programme (EQF 6,7,8).

Survey 2: 84.2% of respondents considered the joint policies as described in this criterion to be very suitable (56.1%) or quite suitable (28.1%). Agreeing on joint policies for procedures such as admission and selection of students is considered by many as “the essence” of a joint programme, and something that should be developed jointly and clearly established in the programme consortium agreement. It was also mentioned that this requirement already features for Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters and “even if it is not easy, it is feasible and it can really enhance the quality of the student experience”.

On the other hand, other respondents indicated that while this type of joint policies are desirable, in practice they often end up as “vague compromises” due to the difficulties to align different local/national specifications. It was suggested that the joint policies agreed on should have prevalence over the local/national policies in place in the participating universities in order to ensure the joint nature of the programme.

Not all respondents shared this view, however. A minority expressed the view that a joint programme should aim to expose students to different university cultures and practices and therefore not all policies should be the same in all the partner institutions. Another respondent indicated that what is important is not being joint but being of high quality.

Survey 3: Fulfilment of criterion: 83% yes; 17% no.

Discussion points:

The suitability of including a series of different elements in the criterion - admission, selection, supervision, monitoring, assessment and recognition procedures – was questioned, as it becomes an “all or nothing” option. In fact, of the 129 joint programmes that indicated compliance with this criterion, the details provided suggest that joint policies are not in place for all the procedures mentioned, meaning the criterion is not clearly expressed. It also

contrasts with the following criterion on access to services, where a list of examples is given rather than a list of (apparently) required elements.

- What would be your recommendation on how to word this criterion?
- Would having joint policies for some of the elements be enough or should all be in place to fulfil the criterion?
- What are the main barriers you can identify to fulfilling this criterion and how could they be addressed?

- **Transnational campus – access to services**

Minimum requirement: The joint programme provides enrolled students, regardless of their location, with seamless and free access to the participating HEI’s services such as, e.g. IT services, shared infrastructure and facilities, (online) library services, faculty development and support, academic guidance and psychological counselling, career advice/mentoring, alumni systems (EQF 6,7,8).

Survey 2: 93.5% of respondents considered it very suitable (64.7%) or quite suitable (28.8%).

Survey 3: 84% of the joint programmes indicate that they provide these services, with 16% answering no. However, in the open comments some limitations in the access to services were revealed.

Discussion points:

While the idea of access to services is unanimously welcomed, various issues arise with regard to the wording of the criteria and its possible interpretations. Several respondents question whether the intention is for all services of all participating HEIs to be available at all times to all enrolled students, as the way the criterion is expressed seems to suggest. They point out the difficulties that would entail; for example, it would require students to be enrolled in all the participating institutions for the duration of the joint programme whereas currently in many cases students are only formally enrolled in the coordinating institution and/or in the institutions where they are studying (either physically or digitally).

- Should the wording be changed to reflect the idea that these services should be available to students in the partner institutions where they are studying at any given time, be it in person or online?

The terms “seamless and free” access also gave rise to some observations. It was mentioned that students enrolled on joint programmes should have access to these services in the same conditions as all the other students enrolled in the institution, which may mean paying a fee for some services or complying with certain prerequisites.

- Do you agree with this or should the European Degree label require that students enrolled on joint programmes have special treatment with regard to these services?

Similarly, it was pointed out that the examples provided of different services can create confusion about exactly what services need to be offered with seamless and free access in order to comply with the criteria. This is perhaps more relevant given that in the previous criterion, a list of joint policies is provided not as examples but as, seemingly, a list of requisites.

- Should there be a list of services that students would need to have access to, or is it sufficient for students to have the same access to all available services as the rest of the students in any given institution?
- What evidence do you suggest could be used to validate compliance with this criterion?

- **Flexible and embedded student mobility arrangements**

Minimum requirement: The joint programme includes at least 1 period of student physical mobility at another partner institution of at least 30 ECTS (EQF 6,7).

Survey 2: 85.6% of respondents find it very suitable (68.3%) or quite suitable (17.3%).

Survey 3: 94% of the joint programmes fulfil this criterion, with only 9 programmes (6%) not including mandatory mobility of 30 ECTS (one semester).

Discussion points:

This section of the criteria is titled “Flexible and embedded student mobility”. The criterion includes the term “at least” twice, referring to the number of physical mobility periods (at least 1) and the duration of that mobility period (at least 30 ECTS). One mobility period of 30ECTS can seem a very low threshold for a joint programme.

- Do you think the minimum requirement should:
 - i) differentiate the length of the mandatory physical mobility between EQF levels 6 and 7? For example, while 30 ECTS would represent 50% of a one-year master’s programme, and 25% of a two-year master’s programme, in the case of joint programmes at bachelor level the minimum should be 60 ECTS so that it represents at least one third of the programme.
 - ii) require two mobility periods of 30 ECTS each to two different partner institutions participating in the joint programme?
- Should physical mobility only be mandatory (embedded) if adequate scholarships and accommodation are guaranteed?
- Should it be mandatory but include exceptions for students unable to participate in physical mobility?
- What should be the role of virtual and blended mobility?

For some, allowing the mobility period to include the possibility of virtual or blended mobility instead of only physical mobility would be more inclusive and respectful of students who, for whatever reason, are not able to undertake physical mobility. For others, virtual mobility is a way to promote a greener future. Other comments referred to the recent developments in the field of virtual exchange/virtual mobility/blended learning etc. and can be summarised by the following comment from one respondent: “An exclusive focus on physical mobility with fixed minimum ECTS/time requirements hampers innovation in delivery modes, and disrespects student-centred learning processes in which the learning outcomes should determine the appropriate mobility formats.”

Minimum requirement: The joint programme includes a total of at least 6 months of physical mobility at another partner institution (including secondment). The total of 6 months can be the sum of several shorter mobility periods (EQF 8).

Survey 2: In the case of physical mobility at doctoral level, 73,4% of respondents considered the criterion to be very suitable (50.4%) or quite suitable (23%). The observations made were of a similar nature as those for mobility at EQF levels 6 and 7 with regard to the need to include virtual and blended mobility, and to take into consideration the situation of students who are not able to undertake physical mobility. At doctoral level, a higher proportion of students have professional or family responsibilities and therefore may be more limited regarding physical mobility.

According to several respondents, the length of the mobility period at this level should be 12 months.

Finally, it was pointed out that “including secondment” could be understood to mean that secondment is a required part of the mobility period or that a secondment period can be counted as part of the 6 months of physical mobility. This should be clarified for the viability of the criterion.

Survey 3: Fulfilment of criterion: 58% yes; 42% no. However, of the 5 joint programmes that responded no, 3 did so due to not fully understanding the question, as 2 require a minimum of 12 months of physical mobility and 1 requires 6 consecutive months of physical mobility. The actual result is therefore 83% yes; 17% no.

Discussion points:

- In your opinion, what should be the minimum length of mobility for joint doctoral programmes? Please justify your answer.
- “*The joint programme includes a total of at least 6 months of physical mobility at another partner institution (this may include secondment).*” Does this wording make the criterion clearer? Should an explanation of exactly what is meant by secondment be included, or is the term sufficiently well understood?

Minimum requirement: In addition to physical mobility, the joint programme includes opportunities for doctoral candidates to participate in one or more of these activities at another partner institution: teaching activities, international events, international conferences, joint research publications with researchers from partner institutions (EQF 8).

Survey 2: 73.4% of respondents found this criterion to be very suitable (47.5%) or quite suitable (25.9%). However, more than half of the respondents stated that it should be an optional criterion rather than a minimal requirement as many of the suggested activities require funding and/or are subject to local or national regulations which means it is not feasible to offer them in all joint programmes.

There were concerns over how to measure compliance with the criterion as the expression “the joint programme includes opportunities for doctoral candidates to participate in” was considered rather vague. The availability of opportunities does not mean that the doctoral candidates will necessarily participate and benefit from them, so simply offering the opportunities should not be a qualifying criteria for the European degree label. However, to quantify successful participation in a minimum number of such “opportunities” would also be complex: for example, joint publications can take many months to get published, and success in joint research projects may depend on the timeline of external calls.

Survey 3: 100% fulfilment. Regarding the type of activities undertaken, joint research projects and participation in international events were the most cited.

Discussion points:

- Bearing in mind the opinions stated above, should this criterion be a minimum requirement or optional? Please explain your answer.
- If it were to remain a minimum requirement, is “including opportunities for” enough to qualify for a European degree label?
- How could fulfilment of this criteria be proven, given the complexity of providing timely evidence for some of the activities listed?

- **Multilingualism**

Minimum requirement: During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different EU official languages (this may include students’ mother tongue/s), language classes excluded. Exposure to EU official languages can take place in active and/or passive use of the language(s), at any level in teaching and/or learning activities, examinations, research activities, professional or civic engagement activities and during mobility periods, including by going on mobility to a country where a different EU official language is predominantly used in daily life. Examples: A joint programme is offered in 2 different EU official languages; a joint programme is offered in 1 EU official language and students have the opportunity to go on mobility in a country where a different EU official language is predominantly used in daily life (EQF 6,7,8).

Survey 2: In this survey, the multilingualism criterion was divided into two parts. The first part – *During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different EU official languages (this may include students’ mother tongue/s), language classes excluded.* - scored the lowest level of acceptance (64%) of all the minimum requirements with regard to the percentage of answers choosing very suitable (38,1%) or quite suitable (25.9%). However, the results should be considered alongside those of the second part of the criterion in which “exposure” is further explained. In this case, 76.2% of respondents indicated that this part of the criterion was very suitable (38.8%) or quite suitable (37.4%).

Survey 3: 90% of joint programmes indicated that they fulfil this criterion with 16 joint programmes (10%) responding negatively, mainly due to non-EU partners meaning that the other languages involved are not official EU languages.

Many respondents found the multilingualism criteria to be rather confusing and it is suggested that clearer wording (including the footnotes) is needed to ensure better understanding of the proposed measures. There were also several responses indicating that language classes should not be excluded as part of the “exposure to at least two different EU official languages” requirement. Another suggestion to modify the wording was “During the joint programme, each student is offered exposure to at least 2 different EU official languages”. This reflects the view that language learning should not be obligatory and indeed is not considered by some to be relevant for some disciplinary fields. Including language learning as part of the curriculum of joint programmes was questioned, with one respondent sharing the experience that if

language courses are not part of the curriculum, students do not attend but assigning ECTS to languages courses is often difficult as it detracts from other essential elements of the joint programmes. It was also mentioned that it is “inappropriate to place linguistic expectations on a joint programme”.

A recurring concern referred to the limitations this criterion seems to imply for joint programmes that involve institutions from two different countries that share a common language, such as Germany and Austria; and Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands. It was pointed out that mobility has impacts beyond language and should not be discounted because the same language is spoken.

There was a clear preference for the use of English as the language of instruction and academic activity, with several respondents stating that all transnational joint programmes should be taught in English to make them more attractive and accessible.

“Exposure” was considered to be a very vague term with little impact and difficult to measure. Indeed the situations described in the criterion are not considered sufficient to guarantee a desirable level of multilingualism in the view of some respondents. It was also pointed out that experience with languages other than English will vary from student to student, depending on their personal interests, previous experience and ability.

Discussion points:

This is an extremely complex and, indeed, politically sensitive issue to frame adequately as a criterion for a European degree label.

- Do you have any suggestions on how to modify this criterion?
- Should language classes be included?
- In its current form, “the student is exposed to”, are the outcomes sufficiently solid to warrant including multilingualism as one of the elements in being awarded a European degree label?
- How would this exposure be measured?

- **Innovative learning approaches**

Minimum requirement: The joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinary and/or intersectoral components using student-centred and/or challenge-based approaches (EQF 6,7,8).

Survey 2: This criterion was considered by 72.7% of respondents to be very suitable (41%) or quite suitable (31.7%). The observations made range from those who fully agree with this measure to those who state that although they agree that a label should award excellence and innovation in education, they “would argue against the EU prescribing the methodologies in order to strengthen the sustainability of the label and its criteria, as well as preserving the autonomy of the institutions in defining their approach to teaching and learning”. Another view is that while some joint programmes might benefit from this approach, there are others where it “has no sense at all and thus its application should not be mandatory for all”. In this sense, another respondent comments that innovative teaching methods are welcome “provided that a sound knowledge of the specific discipline is nonetheless guaranteed”.

Several respondents comment that the criterion is very vague - “*the joint programme includes embedded ...*” - and therefore difficult to implement and measure. Are we referring to a percentage of the programme? How would this be quantified?

Survey 3: 88% of the joint programmes indicate that they include these components and approaches, with 12% (18 programmes) responding negatively.

Discussion points:

- Do you consider this criterion to be a minimum requirement for a European degree label, or should it be optional? Please give reasons for your answer.
- Given the rather vague wording of the criterion “*the joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinary and/or intersectoral components...*”, how could this be measured to ensure compliance? What would be the threshold?

- **Graduate outcomes**

Minimum requirement: The joint programme has a system to monitor graduate outcomes. This system can be at the level of the programme or institutional level(s). If possible, the content is aligned to the survey content of EUROGRADUATE (EQF 6,7,8).

Survey 2: 65% of respondents considered this criterion to be very suitable (35.3%) or quite suitable (31.7%). The wording of the criterion was questioned, as including a sub-criterion that can be met “if possible” is not considered viable. What reasons or circumstances would be acceptable in the cases where it is not possible and how would this be decided? What is the added value with regard to the awarding of the label for those programmes that do align their system to EUROGRADUATE if exceptions are allowed?

The mention of EUROGRADUATE was commented on by several respondents, many of whom are not familiar with this survey and felt its use in the criterion was not advisable. One respondent indicated that “the content of the EUROGRADUATE survey may change at any time and thus, have a direct and uncontrollable influence on the comparability and continuity of the criteria for the European Degree Label”.

In other cases, it was signalled that monitoring graduate outcomes should be included as a criterion, but that in some cases institutional or national systems prescribe how this should be done. How to monitor graduate outcomes should therefore be discussed and agreed on in the planning phase of the joint programme and included in the consortium agreement.

Survey 3: 66 joint programmes (43%) indicated that they comply with this criterion although only 5 are aligned with EUROGRADUATE. The other 57% of the programmes responded that they do not have a system to monitor graduate outcomes.

Discussion points:

- “*If possible, the content is aligned to the survey content of EUROGRADUATE*” In your view, what is the value of including this as a “possibility”?

- The term “monitor graduate outcomes” does not appear to have been well understood by several respondents. Do you think the use of another term such as “graduate tracking” would be preferable?

- **Inclusiveness and sustainability**

Minimum requirement: The joint programme commits to wide participation through socially and geographically inclusive admission through tailored measures for all categories of disadvantaged students (EQF 6,7,8).

Survey 2: This criterion was considered by 87% of respondents to be very suitable (60.4%) or quite suitable (26.6%). One respondent stated “this criterion is just one of the European values that all joint programmes established in the European Union should align with”. Some respondents commented on the need for a clearer definition of “all categories of disadvantaged students”.

While there is wide support for this criterion, a recurring comment refers to the need for investment in adequate supporting structures, financial means and prepared personnel. Admitting disadvantaged students onto a joint programme is not enough if the supporting structures they need to successfully complete the programme are not available.

It was pointed out that the applicability of this criterion varies according to the joint programme in question. For example, a joint programme on oceanography which includes working at sea or diving cannot be open for all categories of disadvantaged students. Also, some concerns were expressed regarding the importance of academic excellence as the main criteria for admission, and the need to ensure that students selected through tailored measures are able to perform academically on a level with the rest of the cohort.

Finally, a connection was made between this criterion and criterion 7 – *Flexible and embedded student mobility*, to ensure that disadvantaged students are offered alternatives to physical mobility when necessary.

Survey 3: 68% comply with this criterion whereas 32% indicate a negative response.

Discussion points:

- How could “tailored measures for all categories of disadvantaged students” be quantified? If there are no measures in place for one “category” of disadvantaged students, would that mean the criterion has not been fulfilled?
- Should a European degree label require joint programmes to go beyond the inclusive measures to widen participation that are in place in their institutions?

Minimum requirement: The joint programme commits to respect the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers and commits to the principles of the MSCA Green Charter (EQF 8).

Survey 2: 73.4% of respondents considered the criterion to be very suitable (54%) or quite suitable (19.4%). Among the observations made it was stated that all joint programmes at this

level (EQF 8) should adhere to the principles of the European Charter, although it was also pointed out that not all the principles are applicable in all countries. Also, some provisions of the MSCA Green Charter (the example given referred to the organisation of events with physical presence) are particularly difficult to enforce for HEIs in non-central locations.

Survey 3: 75% (9 joint doctoral programmes) fulfil this criterion.

Discussion points:

- Do you agree that this should be a minimum requirement for a joint doctoral programme to be awarded a European degree label?
- Beyond a statement of commitment to these principles, should any follow-up be carried out to ensure compliance, and if so, what would that be?

Optional criteria

Discussion points:

The draft criteria include 9 optional criteria, 6 of which are applicable to EQF 6,7 and 8; 2 to EQF 6 and 7; and 1 to EQF 8. How these optional criteria would be used is unclear. What is the benefit if a joint programme fulfils some or all of the optional criteria?

- How do you envisage the optional criteria being used in the award of the European degree label? Please consider the following options and explain any others you consider viable.
 - A multi-tier award where those programmes fulfilling only the minimum requirements are awarded the “standard” label, and those that comply with the optional criteria are awarded the “standard plus” label, or gold/silver/bronze level according to how many of the optional criteria they fulfil.
 - A catalogue of criteria of which applying programmes need to fulfil a pre-defined percentage, and where some criteria could be mandatory.
 - There is no difference in award between JP fulfilling only ‘mandatory requirements’ and those fulfilling both mandatory and optional requirements.

For each of the following optional criteria, please indicate:

- a) If you consider the criterion should be reclassified as a minimum requirement for the European degree label and why
- b) If you consider it should not be considered a criterion and why
- c) It requires rewording to clarify meaning – please indicate the proposed changes.
- d) How verification of fulfilment could be carried out.

Optional criterion 1: In addition to physical mobility, the joint programme includes additional formats of transnational learning activities with partner higher education institutions (e.g. online or blended, in the format of regular or intensive courses, summer/winter schools) (EQF 6,7)

Survey 2: 77.7% of respondents considered this optional criterion to be very suitable (46.8%) or quite suitable (30.9%), and the majority agreed with its status as an optional criterion. Several respondents recommended merging this optional criterion with the minimum requirement criterion 7 (periods of mandatory physical mobility) as a way to complement

physical mobility, or as an alternative for those unable to undertake physical mobility, thereby reinforcing the term “flexible” as mentioned in the description of the criterion. The additional formats of transnational learning mentioned were seen as a way to improve international interaction without raising costs for students.

While some respondents expressed a desire to maintain face to face teaching as the preferred method, particularly for programmes with field activities, laboratory activities, practical classes, etc., others felt that with the ongoing evolution of teaching and learning methods, it is important to include this type of formats in a transnational joint programme. It was, however, pointed out that some institutions need to comply with national regulations and requirements regarding online and blended learning.

Finally, the suggestion was made to change the wording of the criterion to: “In addition to physical mobility, the joint programme **offers** additional formats of transnational learning activities.”

Survey 3: Fulfilment of criterion: **45% (64 joint programmes) yes, 55% (79 joint programmes) no**

Optional criterion 2: The joint programme offers the possibility to take language classes so as to enhance the command of multiple European languages (EQF 6,7,8).

Survey 2: With regard to this optional criterion, 85.7% of respondents considered it to be very suitable (54%) or quite suitable (31.7%). Many of the observations referred to the fact that most universities offer language courses to all students, irrespective of the programme they are studying. Several references were made to the cost of these classes, which could be a barrier for some students. Another relevant element was the possible recognition of such courses, where the majority of comments expressed the opinion that they should be extracurricular or, at most, could be recognised as free electives if the joint programme makes provision for that. It was also mentioned that providing opportunities to learn multiple European languages should not be considered the responsibility of a joint programme any more than it is of any other programme offered in a European HEI.

Survey 3: Fulfilment of criterion: 61% yes, 39% no

Optional criterion 3: The joint programme supports future labour market needs and/or includes cooperation with businesses and sectors in its curriculum (EQF 6,7,8).

Survey 2: 79.1% of respondents considered this criterion to be very suitable (48.2%) or quite suitable (30.9%). Several respondents commented that this criterion refers to a basic element that should be part of all well-designed curricula and that all programmes should comply with it, not only European joint programmes. It was also mentioned that this criterion is part of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and as such should be obligatory, at least for EQF 6 and 7.

Several mentions were made of the fact that the relevance of this criterion depends to some extent on the field of study of the joint programme, and that the understanding of the terms “labour market” and “businesses and sectors” should be as broad as possible to cover the needs of careers in academia and basic research.

Survey 3: Fulfilment of criterion: 63% yes, 37% no.

Optional criterion 4: The joint programme provides opportunities for international professional internships/work-based learning recognised through the award of ECTS (EQF 6,7)

Survey 2: A total of 78,4% of respondents classified this criterion as very suitable (48.9%) or quite suitable (29.5%). The observations regarding this criterion included the opinion that the subject area of the joint programme affects its applicability, as in some fields it might be considered compulsory while in others, only recommended or even unnecessary. It was also commented that international internships are particularly suited to EQF level 7.

A clearer definition of what is meant by “international” was recommended – does it refer to a different country from the country of residence, or a different country from those where the joint programme takes place?

Several respondents referred to the need for these internships to include financial reimbursement to support students during their internship, as well as possible difficulties for students lacking communicative competence in the local language.

The criterion was considered positive as an optional criteria and it was pointed out that providing opportunities for internships does not mean all students following the programme should necessarily do an internship.

Survey 3: Fulfilment of criterion: 65% yes, 35% no.

Optional criterion 5: The joint programme includes a career development plan devised with the candidate and/or exposure to the non-academic sector (such as internships, seminars, networking) (EQF 8).

Survey 2: 66.9% of respondents considered this criterion to be very suitable (38.8%) or quite suitable (28.1%). In some cases, these services are offered at institutional level by a centralised service with specialised staff rather than at programme level. Individual candidate’s needs and interests play an important role here and including a CDP for all candidates would be complex within the framework of a joint programme at this level, especially if students are mobile.

Survey 3: Fulfilment of criterion: 75% yes, 25% no.

Optional criterion 6: The joint programme includes components and actions related to environmental sustainability and implements measures to minimise the environmental footprint of its activities (EQF 6,7,8)

Survey 2: The responses to this criterion indicate that 70.5% consider it to be very suitable (43.2%) or quite suitable (27.3%). It was pointed out by several respondents that environmental sustainability should be a focus in all programmes and therefore it should not be a determining factor in awarding the European degree label. Some respondents also mentioned that many measures related to environmental sustainability need to be implemented at institutional level rather than at programme level. There were also questions about how this could be implemented, and suggestions for guidelines on how to achieve it at

programme level. Finally, a significant number of respondents pointed out the inherent contradiction of a physical mobility requirement and at the same time the desire to reduce the environmental footprint of the programme's activities.

Survey 3: Fulfilment of criterion: 46% yes, 54% no.

Optional criterion 7: The joint programme includes components and actions related to the development of high level digital skills of students, it offers high quality digital education content, as well as assessment of student skills (EQF 6,7,8).

Survey 2: Optional criterion 7 was considered by 74.1% of respondents to be very suitable (38.1%) or quite suitable (36%). While respondents recognised the importance of digital skills, there were several concerns related to this criterion. Firstly, it was felt that the criterion was not clearly expressed. "High level" digital skills mean different things to different people and will also vary according to the nature of the programme – in some fields, digital skills come "by default" and applying digital tools is a basic part of the study programme. Also, the clarity of the expression "as well as assessment of student skills" was questioned. This could be interpreted as "as well as **digital** assessment of student skills" or "as well as assessment of students' **digital** skills". In this regard, if the latter meaning is understood, the reference to the need to assess students' skills is questioned in the sense that all student skills and competences should be assessed if they are part of the training objective of a curriculum.

In addition, the meaning of "high quality digital education content" is questioned. Does this refer to the use of digital teaching and/or working methodologies in the educational sector, or to students learning how to apply digital tools in their field of study and/or future professional life?

Other respondents indicated that the focus should not be on digital skills per se, but on connecting these skills to the contents of teaching activities and to the learning outcomes of the course. Digital skills should not be prioritised over the specific learning objectives of the programme.

Reference was also made to the need for institutional support to apply these measures as they can depend on expensive infrastructure and equipment which cannot be the sole responsibility of a joint programme. The possible inequalities caused by differences between the infrastructure and equipment available at different partner institutions within a joint programme were also mentioned.

Finally, as with the previous criterion, it was stated that digital skills are important in all higher education programmes and therefore should not be a distinguishing criterion for the award of a European degree label.

Survey 3: Fulfilment of criterion: 59% yes, 41% no.

Optional criterion 8: The joint programme offers the possibility for students to participate in activities promoting democratic values and addressing societal needs of the local community(ies), including volunteering, and to receive ECTS for it (EQF 6,7,8).

Survey 2: 59.7% of respondents considered this criterion to be either very suitable (30.2%) or quite suitable (29.5%), which represents the lowest score for all the proposed criteria.

Respondents recognise the importance of promoting democratic values and addressing societal needs but question the validity of assigning ECTS for taking part in such activities. Other forms of recognition such as open badges are suggested. Also, this is seen as an important issue for all higher education programmes and not one that should be used to define the quality of a transnational joint programme. The complexity of organising, managing and assessing this type of activities in an international context is mentioned.

Survey 3: Fulfilment of criterion: 25% yes, 75% no.

Optional criterion 9: The higher education institutions offering the joint study programme conducts joint promotion and awareness- raising activities to ensure visibility of the joint programme and provide the necessary information about it for students and other relevant stakeholders such as future employers (EQF 6,7,8).

Survey 2: In the case of this criterion, 83.5% of respondents considered it to be very suitable (50.4%) or quite suitable (33.1%). Several respondents indicated that promotion and awareness-raising activities give value to a joint programme and are indispensable. On the other hand, others believe that this type of activities are not always needed, or that all HEIs promote their programmes as a matter of course, making it moot to include this as a criterion for the award of a European degree label. Others request clarification of what exactly is meant by “joint promotion”.

Survey 3: Fulfilment of criterion: 75% yes, 25% no.