EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION

European Universities Initiative and the European degree package: an overview

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The European Universities Initiative: state of play

- Currently 65 alliances with more than 570 HEIs
- 375 out of EUA's +/- 900 members are full partners in an alliance
- Alliances are part of the big puzzle of diverse forms of transnational cooperation
- Alliances as such are also diverse
- **Need for overcoming barriers to transnational cooperation for all universities across Europe**

→ EUA's role: provide expertise to support members; advocate for a system that works for all universities!

The EU commission ”higher education package” March 2024

Towards a European Degree

1) Blueprint for a European Degree (Commission communication)
2) Towards a European quality assurance and recognition system (EC proposal for EU council recommendation to Member States)
3) Attractive and sustainable careers in higher education (EC proposal for EU council recommendation to Member States)

https://education.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-presents-a-blueprint-for-a-european-degree

European degree (label)

https://www.eua.eu/publications/policy-input/considerations-for-a-european-degree.html

What: Blueprint for a European degree / degree label

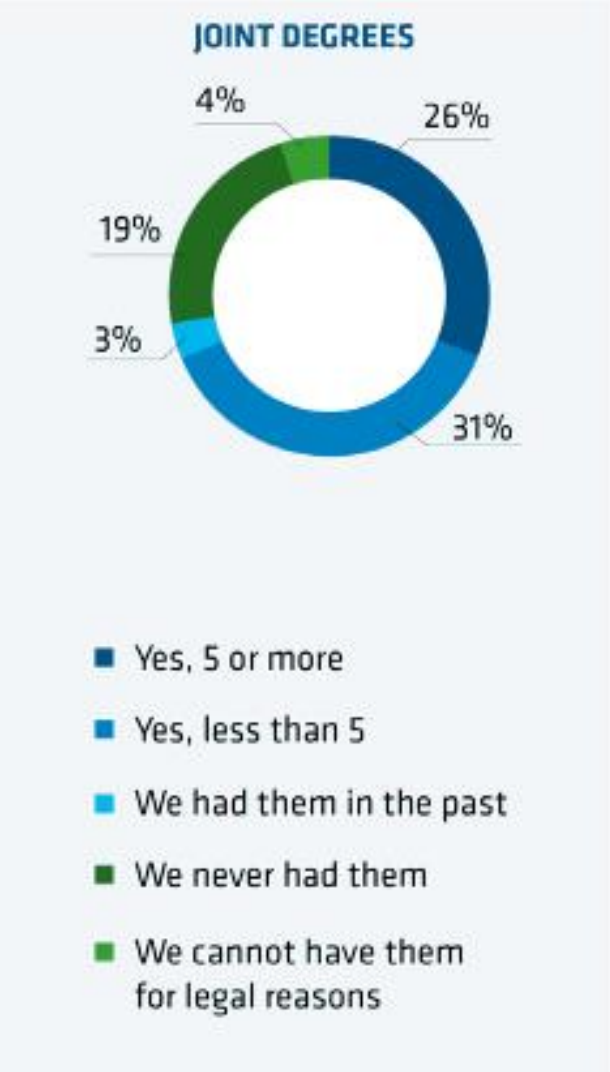
Why: Demonstrate the quality of education, the "jointness" and European dimension of it, and to increase the attractiveness of joint programmes

What's the state of play

- The EC published a Communication on a "blueprint" for a European degree in March 2024 – legislative process to take place throughout 2024.
- A pilot took place (2023-2024) to "test" criteria and feasibility for such label (consortia selected through a E+ call), report out in January 2025

EUA position

- Rely on the existing framework (the ESG and the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes)
- Not to duplicate criteria and clarify added value (also vs added workload and reporting requirements)
- Manage expectations (what will it solve and what not)
- Can one programme be about "everything"??



Source: Trends 2024, Fig. 35 (N = 397)

State of play: Joint programmes strategic, but limited in scale

- Feasible in most institutions, but might be cumbersome
- Challenges known and documented since a long time (but getting **more attention now due to Alliances**)
  - Quality assurance or accreditation (timelines, criteria, competent authorities, duplication, jointness…)
  - Conferring qualifications
  - Definitions of curriculum, credits, related workload, language of instruction…
  - Recognition
  - Financing and workload
  - Etc.
- Up to now, a small part of the degree education offer in Europe:
  - ✓ Only about half of the institutions that offer such delivery have five or more joint programmes or joint degrees.
  - ✓ Student numbers in these programmes and degrees tend to be quite (or very) low

Caveats and ways further

- **A European degree (label) will not solve structural issues encountered by joint programmes/degrees**
- Need to advance with the implementation of all agreed reforms **in the entire EHEA** (implementation is not necessarily best in the EU countries)
- **The diversity (and complementarity) of transnational cooperation activities** (within/outside those supported by the EC) should be recognised to achieve the goal of international experience for all graduates.
  - ✓ Opportunities to facilitate cooperation for all universities – **benefits for the entire HE sector**
  - ✓ The academic purpose of the cooperation is core
- **Adequate and efficient support** (notably through funding programmes and funding autonomy to allocate resources to various types and formats of cooperation)
- Unclear how the current presidency of the EU council, or the new commissioner(s) will take this forward

→ European Degree (and Alliances etc.) are welcome initiatives, and have capacity to promote implementation of agreed reforms, but should not be limiting factors

Other components of the EU higher education package

1) **Commission proposal for an EU council conclusion on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education**
   - Implementation of Bologna QA tools (ESG)
   - Shift towards institutional external evaluation (facilitates international cooperation)
   - Evaluation of agencies to exempt joint programmes of those alliances from programme accreditation
2) **Commission proposal for an EU council conclusion on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education**
   - Parity of esteem between missions
   - Recognition and reward of international activities

EUA position on the HE package

https://www.eua.eu/news/eua-news/full-implementation-of-existing-tools-central-to-success-of-european-commission-s-new-higher-education-package.html

Generally, the recent developments in higher education marked **a shift in policy attention:**

- ✓ **Focus on higher education institutions**
- ✓ (Strategic) transnational cooperation between institutions (**beyond individual mobility**) – how HEIs reach goals together
- ✓ Highlighted and provided **focus on still-existing challenges** to seamless cooperation (”more needs to be done, faster, by EU”)

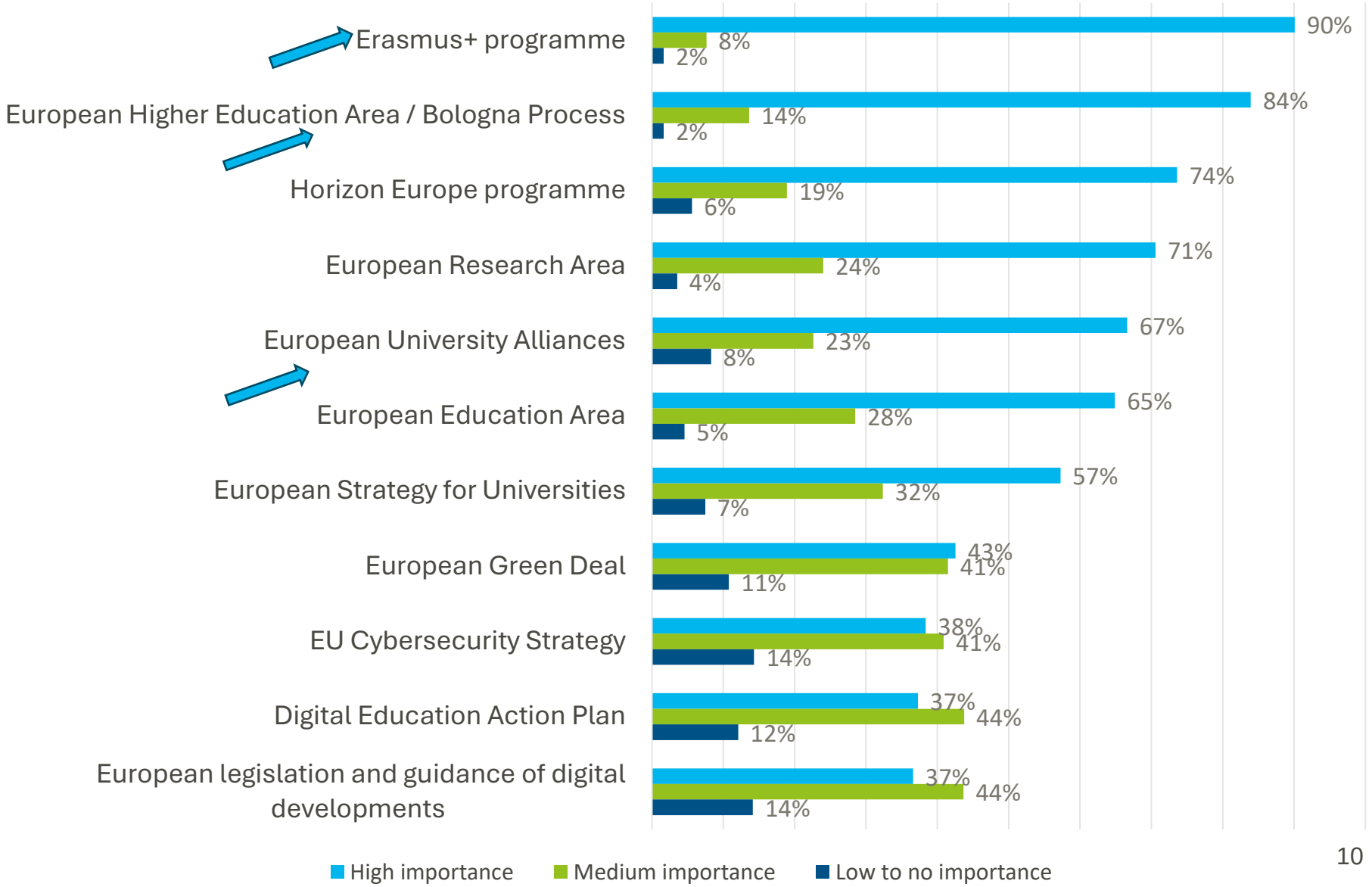
EUA welcomes the call :

- ✓ for **full implementation of already agreed tools for QA/recognition** at European (EHEA!) level
- ✓ for **streamlined and fit-for-purpose processes** for joint education offers, in a transnational cooperation context
- ✓ for a **renewed commitment to parity of esteem** between tasks related to the university missions (L&T, research, service to society) + engagement in international activities

Requires further and strategic reflection on higher education systems, in a holistic way, and how to work across systems.

Shows how institutional autonomy is key in addressing transnational cooperation

Relevance of European strategies, initiatives and funding programmes for institutions



Trends 2024

Survey to HEIs in May – July 2023

Fig. 4 (N = 484)

"What level of importance do the following European strategies, initiatives and funding programmes have for your institution?"

Thank you for your attention!

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