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**Report on barriers for European degrees**

**30 January 2023**

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## Introduction: Current situation in the home countries of ERUA's member universities

The current state of affairs regarding discussions on potential barriers for European degrees in the home countries of ERUA's member campuses varies. In France, authorities and specialised groups have been engaging in the topic actively. The French government has prioritised higher education and research during their EU presidency (Jan-Jun 2022), and several events and consultations have taken place<sup>1</sup> to contribute to the Council's recommendation<sup>2</sup> on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation in April 2022. The Conference of French University Presidents (CPU, currently renamed to *France Universités*) have called for the creation of European degrees as a way to implement SDGs<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, the accreditation agency HCERES recently held a conference on the importance of assessment in the European Higher Education and Research Area<sup>4</sup>.

In Germany, the topic of potential barriers for European degrees has been discussed by the EUI sub-group of the German Rectors' Conference as well as by an informal network of universities from Baden-Württemberg. This network includes universities that participate in the EUI and the regional Ministry of Science.

In Greece, discussions on potential barriers for European degrees have been initiated and are currently ongoing with the Ministry of Education in relation to the participation of Greek Universities in Alliances of European Universities.

Danish universities have collaborated closely on internationalisation, largely driven by European programmes, since the very beginning through a designated working group under the Danish Rector's Conference. A special advisory group on the European Universities Initiative was established in 2020 with a view to supporting ongoing dialogue between participating Danish universities and the Danish Ministry of Science and Higher Education. Notably how-

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<sup>1</sup> See Campus des UE 2022.

<sup>2</sup> See Recommendation 5 Apr 2022.

<sup>3</sup> See Propositions 2021.

<sup>4</sup> See Assessment 2021.

ever, the Danish government has expressed significant concerns regarding a European degree (and legal statute) and continues to advocate for improved implementation of existing Bologna tools<sup>5</sup>.

Due to the significant political instability in Bulgaria, there have been no discussions on potential barriers for European degrees so far. Later in 2023, the country is set to hold its fourth parliamentary elections in a row since April 2021, and it remains uncertain whether the country's National Assembly will succeed in forming a functional government.

As for specific meetings regarding the implementation of European degrees and involving the national authorities in the respective country and representatives of ERUA's member universities, things are still at a very early stage in their development. Representatives of UP8 (the Vice-Rector for International Relations and the Head of International Relations) are members of specialised working groups on internationalisation, but specific meetings on the topic of joint European degrees have yet to be organised. In the case of UKON, there is ongoing dialogue with the regional Ministry of Science and involving other universities from Baden-Württemberg, but attitudes to the topic vary, as the added value of and required effort for the implementation of European degrees still remain unclear. UAEGEAN has confirmed the general support and encouragement of Greece's Ministry of Education, but concrete discussions have yet to take place. Regrettably, NBU has not had the opportunity to engage in effective dialogue with national authorities due to, as noted above, persistent political instability in Bulgaria. However, this year NBU will launch and engage in dialogue with all other Bulgarian HEIs which are members of European university alliances to prepare the ground for a common strategy for appropriate legislative initiatives on European degrees as soon as a functional government is in place. RUC, on the other hand, will be limiting the scope of their engagement with ERUA to associate partnership, insofar as Denmark's government remain reserved about European degrees.

## **Focused comparison of ERUA's member universities**

Given the inconclusive results of ongoing discussions between national administrations and ERUA working groups, where such discussions are taking place, we decided to follow the

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<sup>5</sup> See Upton 2022.

example of a recent case study<sup>6</sup> and compare ERUA's member institutions around several focal points. This will allow us to provide a preliminary sketch some specific barriers regarding the potential implementation of European degrees in the case of ERUA from an intra- as well as interinstitutional point of view. To complete this task, in early December 2022 we circulated a survey form around ERUA's member universities and asked a total of 10 questions based on the model quoted above:<sup>7</sup>

1. Does your institution follow the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (<https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes>)? If yes, are there any limitations?
2. What is the type and level of external quality assurance mechanisms used at your institution (institutional only/programme only/institutional and pro-programme/custom)?
3. Does your country's national legislation require the re-accreditation of study programmes which have been accredited once?
4. Do national regulations in your home country allow for joint international degrees? If yes, are there any legal restrictions?
5. Does your institution currently offer any joint international degrees?
6. According to your national regulations, (1) how many ECTS are required for a successful 1st-cycle programme and (2) how many years does a 1st-cycle programme (i.e., bachelor's programmes) span over?
7. According to your national regulations, (1) how many ECTS are required for a successful 2d-cycle programme and (2) how many years does a 2d-cycle programme (i.e., master's programmes) span over?
8. According to your national regulations, (1) how many ECTS are required for a successful 3d-cycle programme and (2) how many years does a 3d-cycle programme (i.e., doctoral programmes) span over?
9. According to your national and institutional regulations, what are the language requirements for be admitted in a B.A./M.A./Ph.D., accordingly?
10. Please describe the grading system currently in use at your institution.

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<sup>6</sup> I.e., Challenges 2021.

<sup>7</sup> See 'Introduction' above.

All partners provided in-depth feedback in early January 2023. The following section provides a summary of the key points from their responses, presented in parallel.

## Results

1. Does the institution follow the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes? If yes, are there any limitations?
  - 1.1. **UP8:** The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes has not yet been implemented at UP8. Agreements with partner universities provide the framework to be followed for joint programmes.
  - 1.2. **RUC:** Roskilde University is subject to national regulation of degree programmes which are aligned with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. Danish universities are free to seek accreditation for joint programmes through an EQAR- (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) or otherwise accredited body.
  - 1.3. **UKON:** German universities can apply the European Approach only to joint degree programmes, not to double-degree programmes. However, the University of Konstanz is institutionally accredited, i.e. it can self-accredit its degree programmes. There is no monitoring (in terms of QA) of programmes by state authorities besides the requirement to prove the programmes' accreditation status. UKON does not see any great need to apply the European Approach to possible future joint degree programmes either, but is not fundamentally averse to it.
  - 1.4. **UAEGEAN:** As it is an official requirement of the Hellenic Authority of Higher Education, UAEGEAN follows the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.
  - 1.5. **NBU:** NBU follows the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes with no specific limitations.
2. What is the type and level of external quality assurance mechanisms currently in use at the institution?

- 2.1. **UP8:** An external accreditation body (HCERES) evaluates the university (model, administration, education, teaching) and the programmes regularly every 5 years (approximately).
- 2.2. **RUC:** Denmark has, as part of the Bologna Process, implemented the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for the quality assurance of higher education, and all public higher education study programmes must meet these international quality and relevance standards. Accreditation is mandatory and a precondition for attaining public funding for all institutions of higher education. The accreditation system is based on the 2013 Act on the Accreditation of Institutions of Higher Education. The Act aims to create a system with a view to ensuring and documenting the quality and relevance of higher education in Danish educational institutions. The Danish Qualifications Framework has been incorporated into the quality criteria of the accreditation system. The act changes the system of accreditation from programme accreditation to institutional accreditation. An educational institution undergoes institutional accreditation with focus on the ongoing systematic work of the educational institution to safeguard and develop the quality and relevance of its study programmes. Institutions with a positive institutional accreditation are entitled to establish new study programmes and new offerings of study programmes after these have been pre-qualified and approved and to make adjustments to existing study programmes. Institutions that have not yet obtained a positive institutional accreditation must have their study programmes accredited. Positive institutional accreditation is valid for 6 years. Roskilde University achieved positive institutional accreditation in 2022.
- 2.3. **UKON:** Every four years, a comprehensive assessment of a department is conducted in areas such as research, teaching, promoting young academics, and equal opportunities. As part of this process, all degree programmes are reviewed and follow-up measures are implemented and monitored in the following years. These four-year cycles alternate between internal and external reviewers. In cycles with external review, all departmental study programmes are also accredited. Thus, official accreditation occurs every eight years. In addition, the University of Konstanz also undergoes a system accreditation every eight years in partnership with a Swiss quality assurance agency.
- 2.4. **UAEGEAN:** The Quality Assurance (QA) Unit is responsible for organizing and coordinating both institutional and departmental evaluation and accreditation processes. Specifically, the QA Unit's coordinating role includes:



- Facilitating the implementation of external evaluation procedures at the institutional level in partnership with the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE).
- Facilitating the implementation of accreditation procedures at the institutional level in partnership with HAHE.
- Facilitating the implementation of external evaluation procedures within departmental and programme levels in partnership with HAHE.
- Facilitating the implementation of accreditation procedures within departmental and programme levels in partnership with HAHE.

2.5. **NBU:** According to Bulgaria's Law of Higher Education (New, SG No. 17/2016, effective 03/01/2016), higher education institutions that receive an institutional accreditation grade between 9.00 and 10.00 are eligible to provide education franchise abroad, but only in professional fields and/or regulated professions that have received programme accreditation evaluation scores between 9.00 and 10.00. The franchise can only be provided to higher education institutions that are accredited under the laws of the respective country, where at least 80% of the education abroad is conducted entirely according to the curricula, study programmes, and methodological guidelines adopted by the Bulgarian higher education institution, which provides at least 50% of the teaching staff and issues the diploma for the acquired higher education.

3. Does the national legislation of the institution's home country require the re-accreditation of study programmes which have been accredited once?

3.1. **UP8:** Programme re-accreditation takes place after a recurrent and comprehensive institutional evaluation, which occurs every 5 years.

3.2. **RUC:** As noted above (see 2.2), accredited Danish institutions of higher education are entitled to establish new study programmes and new offerings of study programmes after these have been pre-qualified and approved, as well as to make adjustments to existing study programmes.

3.3. **UKON:** As per the study accreditation ordinance of the state of Baden-Württemberg, all study programmes must be accredited every eight years through either programme accreditation or as part of system (institutional) accreditation. This is a requirement for state approval of the study programme and is monitored by the regional Ministry of Science.

- 3.4. **UAEGEAN:** Recurrent re-accreditation of study programmes is required in accordance with Law 4115/2013.
- 3.5. **NBU:** Re-accreditation of study programmes takes place every four years. Mid-term progress reports on the evaluation committee's recommendations are due in the second year of the re-accreditation cycle.
4. Do national regulations in the institution's home country allow for joint international degrees?
- 4.1. **UP8:** A 'joint degree' is defined as multi-seal, bi- or multilingual degree jointly awarded by the partner institutions. The following rules apply for joint degrees:
- The degree must be recognised in the partner countries.
  - Specific rules for the degree certificate: language requirement (certificate in French); name of the degree in French and the official language(s) of the respective partner institutions.
  - Templates for joint degree certificates are provided by the French Ministry (using specific parchment paper for printing the certificates).
  - A joint document with additional information may be provided in addition to the degree certificate.
  - A diploma supplement issued in French with a possible translation.
- 4.2. **RUC:** Danish universities have been able to offer joint international programme/degrees since 2003. The provision of joint international programmes/degrees is subject to national regulation (Ministerial Order no. 247 of 13/03/2015).
- 4.3. **UKON:** Legally, joint degrees are defined as:
- Having an integrated curriculum;
  - A proportion of studies at one or more foreign universities of at least 25 per cent as a rule;
  - A Contractually regulated cooperation;
  - Coordinated admission and examination procedures;
  - Joint quality assurance;
  - A bachelor's degree must comprise 180-240 ECTS, a master's degree not less than 60 ECTS.

Additional legal requirements include:

- The entry requirements and selection procedures are appropriate for the level and subject discipline of the degree program.
- The ability to demonstrate that the degree programme achieves the intended learning outcomes.
- The supervision and design of the degree program, as well as the teaching and selection procedures used are appropriate.
- The supervision and design of the study programme, as well as the forms of teaching and learning applied respect the diversity of students and their needs and take into account the specific requirements of mobile students.
- The education institution's quality management system ensures the implementation of these requirements.
- Besides that, the general legal requirements for study programmes in Germany apply.

Additionally, we expect from our partners certain quality standards:

- European partners have signed the Erasmus Charter (ECHE) and take into account the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.
- Partners collect student feedback.
- Partners have an external assessment of the study programmes.
- The respective programme has a programme advisor and programme director.
- The programme concept includes information on the programme's funding, the admission procedures and requirements, the recognition of academic achievements, the study plan, as well as rules regarding student data exchange, information about quality assurance and development, as well as mechanisms for conflict management.

4.4. **UAEGEAN:** In Greece, joint international degrees are allowed and regulated by Law 4957/2022. Greek HEIs may organise 1st cycle foreign-language study programmes in cooperation with recognised HEIs abroad, following the drafting of a corresponding Memorandum of Cooperation. These programmes are addressed exclusively to citizens of countries inside or outside the European Union who are graduates of high schools or equivalent schools with headquarters abroad. The HEIs may cooperate for the organisation of postgraduate study programmes with foreign institutions and research organisations, European and international bodies and organisations, as well

as recognised scientific bodies and associations operating in the form of legal entities under public law. Third-cycle (doctoral) study programmes with co-supervision may be organised by a department of an HEI in collaboration with one or more departments of the same or another HEI in Greece as well as with foreign institutions. When a postgraduate study programme is established in partnership with institutions that do not offer equivalent education and degrees to HEIs, the academic responsibility of the program belongs solely to the respective university. The Senate approves the special cooperation protocol for organizing a joint postgraduate study program. Prior to the actual start of joint study programmes, their certification by the Hellenic Authority of Higher Education (HAHE) is always required.

4.5. **NBU:** Joint international degrees are explicitly allowed by Bulgaria's Law of Higher Education as part of the academic freedom of cooperation for the purpose of joint teaching with other higher education institutions and academic organizations, education franchise with other higher education institutions, as well as joint research, creative work, projects and innovative work, in collaboration with other organizations and higher education institutions in the country and abroad (SG 61/2011, art. 20). Accredited Bulgarian universities may carry out training of students under a contract for joint educational activity with foreign higher education institutions that meet the following requirements:

- For partner institutions from within the EU: the partners are accredited by an agency that is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and/or listed on the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (EQAR) (for the higher education institutions participating in the educational process from member states of the European Union and the European Economic Area.
- For partner institutions from non-EU countries: the respective partners are accredited according to their national legislation.

5. Does the institution currently offer any joint international degrees?

5.1. **UP8:** There are no joint-degree international programmes at UP8. The university offers two double-degree programmes: a Master's in Political Sciences in cooperation with the European University of Viadrina and a Master's in Translation in cooperation with

the University of Florence. A Master's Degree in Philosophy previously offered together with UK's Kingston University has been discontinued.

5.2. **RUC:** Currently, two joint programmes are on offer at RUC: Erasmus Mundus Master in Global Studies and Nordic Master in Nordic Urban Planning Studies.

5.3. **UKON** offers an M.A. Early Childhood jointly with the Pedagogical University Thurgau (Switzerland). The programme starts at the beginning of October and usually spans over four semesters (full-timers) and 6 semesters (part-timers).

5.4. **UAEGEAN** offers no joint-degree and several double-degree programmes:

- Master's Programme in Sustainable Tourism Development: Heritage, Environment, Society, with University of Paris – 1 Pantheon – Sorbonne
- Master's Programme in Environmental Sciences, Policy, and Management, with Central European University
- Master's Programme in Applied Archaeological Sciences, with the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO
- Master's Programme in Islands and Sustainability, with the University of Groningen
- Collaboration between the Department of Social Anthropology and History, School of Social Sciences of the University of the Aegean and the AISSR (Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research of the University of Amsterdam) for the preparation of doctoral theses with co-supervision.

5.5. **NBU** offers no joint-degree and several double-degree bachelor's and master's programmes, all of which in partnership with the University of York (Europe Campus):

- English Language and Professional Communication (BA)
- Business Economics (BA)
- Banking and Finance (MA)
- Business, Management, Technology, and Innovations (MA)
- Digital Marketing and Social Media (MA)
- Marketing, Advertising, and Public Relations (MA)
- Neuropsychology (MA)

6. According to the national regulations of the institution's home country, (1) how many ECTS are required for a successful 1st-cycle programme and (2) how many years does a 1st-cycle programme (i.e., bachelor's programmes) span over?

6.1. **UP8:** 180 ECTS, 3 years

- 6.2. **RUC**: 180 ECTS, 3 years
- 6.3. **UKON**: 180 ECTS for 6-semester bachelor's programmes and 240 ECTS for 8-semester bachelor's programmes. UKON requires an average of 60 ECTS per academic year (i.e., 30 ECTS per semester) with a maximum deviation of 3 ECTS per semester.
- 6.4. **UAEGEAN**: 240 ECTS and a minimum duration of 8 academic semesters; in the case of applied sciences and technology, the required minimum is 210 ECTS and a duration of 7 academic semesters.
- 6.5. **NBU**: 240 ECTS completed between 2-4 years.
7. According to the national regulations of the institution's home country, (1) how many ECTS are required for a successful 2d-cycle programme and (2) how many years does a 2d-cycle programme (i.e., master's programmes) span over?
- 7.1. **UP8**: 120 ECTS, 2 years
- 7.2. **RUC**: 120 ECTS, 2 years (full-time) or 60-90 ECTS (part-time, professional master's)
- 7.3. **UKON**: 4-semester master's – 120 ECTS (full-time) or 60 ECTS (part-time); 2-semester master's = 60 ECTS; the minimum required sum of ECTS for the first and second cycles combined is 300 ECTS.
- 7.4. **UAEGEAN**: 60 ECTS and a minimum duration of 2 semesters (1 year).
- 7.5. **NBU**: 90 ECTS, 1-2 years.
8. According to the national regulations of the institution's home country, (1) how many ECTS are required for a successful 3d-cycle programme and (2) how many years does a 3d-cycle programme (i.e., doctoral programmes) span over?
- 8.1. **UP8**: There are no required seminars for doctoral students. According to the Student Guide, the doctoral student must comply with the operating rules of his/her doctoral school and follow the courses, conferences and seminars offered by the school. Typically, a Ph.D. is completed within 3 years for funded candidates and a maximum of 6 years in all other cases.
- 8.2. **RUC**: 180 ECTS, 3 years.
- 8.3. **UKON**: Not all 3rd-cycle programmes award ECTS; if they do, 180 ECTS are usually awarded. Requirements for awarding a doctoral degree are a doctoral thesis and an oral examination. 3rd-cycle programmes usually last 3 years.

- 8.4. **UAEGEAN:** 3d-cycle programmes may include optional course load or other educational/research activities amounting to a minimum of 30 ECTS; however, this is not a mandatory requirement.
- 8.5. **NBU:** 180 ECTS, 1-3 years.
9. According to national and institutional regulations, what are the language requirements for admission in a B.A./M.A./Ph.D. programme, accordingly?
- 9.1. **UP8:** French students do not have any language requirements as they possess the national high school diploma. However, foreign students must demonstrate a B2 level proficiency in French through the DELF diploma. Additionally, programme offerings in languages other than French may have varying language requirements. In special cases, PhD students may be permitted to write their thesis in English.
- 9.2. **RUC:** Requirements are nationally regulated and vary depending on the programme.
- 9.3. **UKON:** That depends on the teaching language and the programme. If the language of instruction is German, usually level C1 is required, but there may be additional language requirements for specific programmes.
- 9.4. **UAEGEAN:** Foreign students applying to first-cycle study programs through the examination system of the Ministry of Education and Culture must demonstrate proficiency in Greek (level B2 certificate required). This language proficiency requirement is waived for individuals who possess a Greek or Cypriot secondary school diploma or a graduate certificate from a foreign school that demonstrates successful completion of Greek language courses. For admission to postgraduate programmes and selection of doctoral candidates, the regulations refer to certifying language proficiency (B2) in the required language (e.g. Greek, English, French).
- 9.5. **NBU:** for programmes taught in English, the required minimum of language proficiency is B2; for Bulgarian-taught programmes, possession of the national diploma is sufficient.
10. What is the grading system currently in use at the institution?
- 10.1. **UP8: 20-point grading system:** 18-20 and 16-17: EXCELLENT: remarkable results; 14-15: VERY GOOD: above-average results; 12-13: GOOD: generally good work; 11: SATISFACTORY: decent work; 10: PASS: results meet the minimum criteria; 6-9 and 0-5: INSUFFICIENT: considerable additional work is re-required.

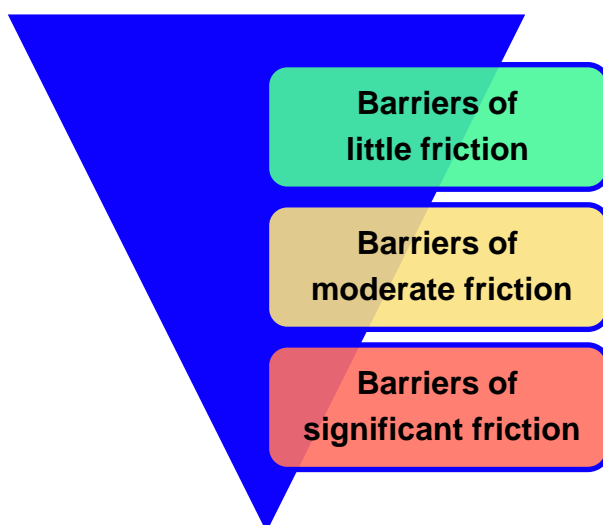


- 10.2. **RUC: 7-point grading system:** 12 = excellent performance displaying a high level of command of all aspects of the relevant material, with no or only a few minor weaknesses; 10 = very good performance displaying a high level of command of most aspects of the relevant material, with only minor weaknesses; 7 = good performance displaying good command of the relevant material but also some weaknesses; 4 = fair performance displaying some command of the relevant material but also some major weaknesses; 02 = performance meeting only the minimum requirements for acceptance; 00 = performance which does not meet the minimum requirements for acceptance; -3 = performance which is unacceptable in all respects.
- 10.3. **UKON: 5-point grading system:** 1: very good (excellent performance); 2: good (performance is significantly above average requirements); 3: satisfactory (performance meets the average requirements); 4: sufficient (performance meets the minimum requirements despite its shortcomings); 5: insufficient (performance does not meet the requirements due to significant shortcomings).
- 10.4. **UAEGEAN: 10-point grading system:** A student is considered to have completed a course successfully if the final grade is equal to/greater than 5 on a scale from 0 to 10; the passing grades are: EXCELLENT (10.00-8.50); VERY GOOD (8.49-6.50), GOOD (6.49-5.00).
- 10.5. **NBU: 6-point grading system:** EXCELLENT (6.00-5.50), VERY GOOD (5.00-4.50), GOOD (4.49-3.50), PASS (3.49-2.50), FAIL (2.00-2.49).

## Conclusions

Based on the data above, one can outline three types of barriers facing the potential implementation of European degrees in ERUA's case. Insofar as, in a broader perspective, ERUA's members are representative of their national policy landscapes in this regard, expectedly and with a very high degree of probability this may also be the case with other European university alliances – at least partially:





For example, ERUA's grading systems vary, but the ECTS grading scale, presumably implemented by all member institutions for their diploma supplements, allows for easy conversion between the different grades. Also, following the European Approach for QA of Joint programmes is widely accepted across the partner institutions. The respective national legislations allow for the implementation of joint degrees, and the language requirements in that case hardly pose an obstacle. We expect these four areas to be ones of minor friction.

However, there are also some respects in which the differences between ERUA's member institutions are of greater significance. ECTS requirements and programme length for example vary between 180-240 ECTS and 3-4 years (for bachelor's programmes), 60-120 ECTS and 1-2 years (master's programmes), and 0-180 ECTS for doctoral programmes. Nevertheless, we believe that in the case of the potential implementation of a joint international degree – whether it be a European-degree label in the form of a complimentary certificate or something more complex – a technical solution will be relatively easy to find, as there are no limitations regarding maximum ECTS numbers.

Lastly, there are areas of significant dissonance regarding the potential future of European degrees at ERUA. Accreditation procedures, for example, are vastly different and subject to national legislation. On the whole, implementation of the goals and principles of the Bologna process remains uneven across the European Higher Education Area and higher education institutions continue to face numerous regulatory obstacles to successful learning mobility, cross-border institutional cooperation and mutual recognition of learning outcomes and qualifications. Notably, double-/multiple-degree programmes are more popular with ERUA's current member universities, the majority of which currently offer few or no joint degrees.

**The detailed analysis and classification of barriers produced here will be presented to the relevant national groups, networks or stakeholders as soon as. Bilateral meetings between national (or other relevant authorities) and ERUA members will be planned in the following months in order not only to raise awareness on specific issues and increase the alliance's outreach but also to initiate preliminary steps to overcome the**

**barriers that we identified here and those that may appear in the future, following the evolution of national regulations. Interalliance collaboration on this cross-cutting topic will also be fostered through the „Education innovation and mobility (incl. new curricula & legal barriers)“ subgroup of the 44 european alliances forums.**

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