



INGENIUM
European University

**An important step towards the European
Education Area**

***INGENIUM´s Reaction to the Blueprint for
a European Degree package***

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The European Degree package: An ground-breaking opportunity for the European Higher Education sector

The INGENIUM alliance welcomes the presentation of the European Degree package by the European Commission, and urges the Council of the European Union and the national and regional authorities of the 10 EU Member States where the alliance is present to take swift steps itowards the implementation of the package´s proposals so as to maintain the momentum of the initiative.

INGENIUM has realistic objectives in the creation of a joint educational offer based on joint programmes, microcredentials and open degrees. However, the initial work of the alliance in the creation of these programmes has already shed light to the operational challenges that a consortium universities encounter when trying to set up a robust, quality assured system for joint education. Most of these difficulties come from the divergent regulations in different fields, quality assurance and accreditation processes, and the criticality of a clear policy framework to guide the creation of such joint programmes.

In this sense, **the INGENIUM alliance considers that the European Commission´s proposal of creating the European Degree as a new type of degree in the national legislations of Member States could provide solutions to some of these challenges**, offering a clear path for alliances of higher education institutions which will reduce barriers. European Degrees could play an important role in revitalising Europe´s single market and boosting true intellectual circulation, avoiding brain drain and attracting new talent to our institutions.

Since this option is fully voluntary, and will coexist with other types of joint programmes, it is a near-unique opportunity for the different authorities in higher education to work together with the higher education institutions to ensure that current national and international regulatory hurdles are reviewed in the light of this ground-breaking development.

At the same time, **the INGENIUM alliance also considers that the creation of a cross-institution quality assurance framework for alliances of higher education institutions could constitute a tremendous step in their consolidation of academic provision across Europe and beyond. Linking this framework to the European Degree package is necessary to ensure that alliances can reach their full potential and create true future-proofed inter-university campus** where international opportunities become a reality for all. Alliances like INGENIUM already have a number of partners with experience in self-accreditation of programmes and institutional quality assurance reviews, and with the right support, can build on these collective experiences to support the capacity of those partners that need to undergo external quality assurance and accreditation processes for programmes.

INGENIUM also welcomes the different measures to support academic careers, with a special focus on enhancing excellence in teaching and in transnational higher education cooperation. In this document, INGENIUM offers a number of considerations and recommendations to the European Commission and Member States regarding the next steps on the implementation of the European Degree package. The alliance looks forward to collaborating with the wider higher education sector to help ensure that these proposals amount to a transformation opportunity for European Universities.

Considerations on the European Degree

The INGENIUM partners believe that the addition of European Degrees to complement existing local and translational degrees can bring tremendous benefits for universities and students. **In that sense, European Degrees can provide a great opportunity to create new degrees which build on the complementarity of different universities.** However, these processes of creation will only be feasible with an appropriate, common regulatory environment and support systems for the universities. In that sense, the European Degree will have more potential if the focus is on innovative creation rather than the replication of existing programme models. This requires specific resources and concerted efforts compared to an adaptation of existing programmes. For these reasons, the INGENIUM alliance welcomes the proposals for support measures for European Degrees, and asks the European Commission and Member States to work together on ensuring these incentives are widely available.

Besides the initial funding to set up the programmes, European degrees must be viable and sustainable. Conversations on the future of the European Degree long term funding schemes for alliances. In a recent internal survey, **7 out of 10 INGENIUM partners considered the lack of sustainable funding models as an obstacle for the establishment of joint programmes.** This could be addressed at the different levels, with a potential 'top-up' to the general funding for alliances provided at the European level, and special resources being allocated at the local, national, regional levels. European Degrees can play an important role in regions that are exposed to depopulation, as the embedded international experience may motivate students to continue their education in their regions. It is important that the INGENIUM partner's governments collectively appreciate, and act on, this potential.

It is important that the preparatory actions included in the package are accompanied by the possibility to use Erasmus+ KA2 cooperation projects (or equivalent) to support such projects. This is not a substitute for the long term funding, but it can help universities to work together in setting up future joint European Degrees.

Member states could leverage use **this opportunity to facilitate the creation of all types of joint education, making their higher education systems more fit for purpose and attractive by virtue of transnational cooperation.**

The European Degree criteria

The INGENIUM European University considers the European Degree criteria as highly relevant and in line with the consortium objectives. However, it will be important to use the opportunity that the upcoming European Degree policy lab will provide to clarify certain aspects of the proposed criteria. In that sense, INGENIUM asks the European Commission to take into account two aspects:

- > **Defining interdisciplinarity and allowing for flexibility:** INGENIUM partners consider that excellent programmes that are fully aligned with the European Degree objectives can emerge within a specific academic discipline.
- > **Making public institutions, civil society and industry crucial actors in the creation, promotion and assessment of European Degrees:** The degree criteria already incorporates references to the importance of collaboration with societal actors, and it is key that these are further developed in the guidance documents. These

programmes can a relevant breakthrough in the way in which universities collaborate with societal actors to create their educational offer.

The importance of targeted promotion strategies to reach a diverse student body

INGENIUM partners support the benefits for learners outlined in the European Commission Communication. The realisation of these benefits must take into consideration the diversity, career interests, facilitators and constraints associated with the contemporary European student body. Additionally, many prospective learners are attracted to practical degrees that reflect local and regional labour markets, but who at first sight might not be so keen on enrolling in a potential future European Degree. This is a particular risk in technical fields. INGENIUM partners believe that these students can still benefit greatly from European Degrees, and it is therefore extremely important to work on more elaborate promotion measures, together with industry and other actors, that take into account their particular realities.

In that sense, **INGENIUM believes that one of the main tasks of the future European Degree policy lab should be to understand the motivation of the various student profiles** across Europe and further elaborate on promotional measures that can be used by universities to maximise the outreach of the European Degree

Next steps on the European Degree Label

INGENIUM believes that the European Degree Label should be considered by Member states as a transitory step they can use while developing the adequate regulatory changes to embed European Degrees in their own legislations. EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies could easily assume the role of awarding the label, as many of them already award other types of quality labels. In that sense, INGENIUM asks its national and regional authorities to start the necessary processes to ensure this label can become a reality as soon as possible.,

Quality assurance and self accreditation for alliances: a key step forward

The INGENIUM alliance welcomes the proposal for a Council Recommendation on a common European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education. **The alliance believes that the proposals related to the creation of a cross-institutional framework for alliances that leads to self – accreditation are important steps in the consolidation of the European Universities Alliances that have among their key objectives the creation of a joint educational offer, such as INGENIUM.**

INGENIUM partners are fully committed to developing a joint quality assurance framework to underpin their joint educational activities. The initial work on the matter has already shown how the diversity of quality assurance and accreditation processes across Europe regarding accreditation of joint programmes constitutes a challenge in the development of joint educational programmes.

Within Alliances like INGENIUM partner members benefit from the experience of those partners that have experience in awarding their own degrees. Benefits include enhancements to, and mutual understanding of, partner quality assurance systems. In that sense, the **INGENIUM alliance believes that a quality assurance framework that allows the alliances to self-accredit their programmes**, as included in the proposal for a Council Recommendation, **is the necessary approach to help the alliances in their journey to become true transnational universities that deliver for their communities.** The alliances are in a unique position to build on all the existing knowledge of their partners with experience in institutional accreditation processes, helping partners to increase their capacity in the field of internal quality assurance.

With regard to the structure and operability of a common quality assurance framework, **the alliance comprehends the need for clear procedural facilitation of a cross-institutional reviews.** The Council Recommendation already encourages Member states to allow any EQAR registered agency to perform this review, but the practicalities of this should be further clarified, considering the diversity of accreditation processes across the European Union.

INGENIUM also embraces a stronger focus on enhancement and the creation of enabling frameworks for the use of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. These are critical for the support of transnational cooperation and the quality of education across Europe.

Attractive and sustainable careers in higher education

The INGENIUM alliance welcomes the content of the proposal for a Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable academic careers, which aligns with the intention of the alliance.

INGENIUM has identified as an objective, clarity on recognition of qualifications across the alliance through the existing good practices across the sector in Europe.

The Alliance envisages greater facilitation and support for the mobility of staff and increased transnational cooperation activities leading to enhanced mobility and career development across the alliance and beyond.