

JOINT POSITION PAPER
OF EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCES

Unlocking Erasmus+ KA131 for Joint Programmes

The Case for Removing the 12-Month Mobility Limit

A proposal for the inclusive and sustainable funding of Joint Programmes in the context of the European Degree

A JOINT INITIATIVE OF

INGENIUM · EU-CONEXUS · UNITA · EURECA-PRO
YUFE · RUN-EU · FORTHEM · ULYSSEUS



§ Executive Summary

Joint Programmes¹ are at the heart of the European Commission's higher education policy agenda. The recent [Council Resolution on a joint European Degree label \(May 2025\)](#) and the launch of European Degree Exploratory Actions demonstrate the EU's commitment to making transnational education a reality for all types of universities and all types of students. Yet, one of the most effective instruments the EU already has at its disposal — Erasmus+ KA131 long-term mobility funding — remains constrained by a 12-month-per-cycle cap that effectively prevents its use to support students throughout the full duration of a Joint Programme.

This position paper argues that a targeted adaptation to the Erasmus+ Programme Guide — specifically, an exception to the 12-month limit for students enrolled in accredited Joint Programmes — would constitute a simple, cost-effective, and legally sound measure to make Joint Programmes more inclusive and sustainable. This change would directly support the European Degree agenda, strengthen the role of National Agencies in supporting Joint Programmes, and would not require any amendment to the Erasmus+ Regulation. Implementing this change during the current programme cycle, rather than waiting for the new programme, would also serve as a pilot that can help the European Commission to design the best possible funding framework to support joint educational provision in the next Erasmus+ programmes.

The signatory Alliances invite other European University Alliances and Joint Programme consortia, stakeholders, and policy-makers to endorse this position and support the inclusion of this adaptation in the 2027 Erasmus+ Work Programme and Programme Guide.



1 Policy Context: Joint Programmes and the European Degree

The development of Joint Programmes has become the flagship policy objective of the European Commission in the higher education field. For the purposes of this paper, a Joint Programme is understood as an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by higher education institutions from different countries, leading to double, multiple, or joint degrees. In the context of the European Degree Label, only Joint Programmes leading to a joint degree are eligible for the label. The European Degree package, adopted through the Council Resolution of 12 May 2025 and the [Council Recommendation on a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System](#), represents an unprecedented commitment to transnational education. The European Degree label is expected to be rolled out from mid-2026, and the European Degree Exploratory Actions, for which a €14 million call for proposals has already been launched, will provide alliances and other Joint Programme consortia with much-needed support in adapting and designing Joint Programmes aligned with the label criteria.

At the same time, 73 European University Alliances, involving almost 650 higher education institutions across Europe are actively working to create joint educational offers. These alliances represent an extraordinary diversity of institutional profiles: comprehensive research universities, universities of applied sciences, and specialised institutions. For the European Degree agenda to

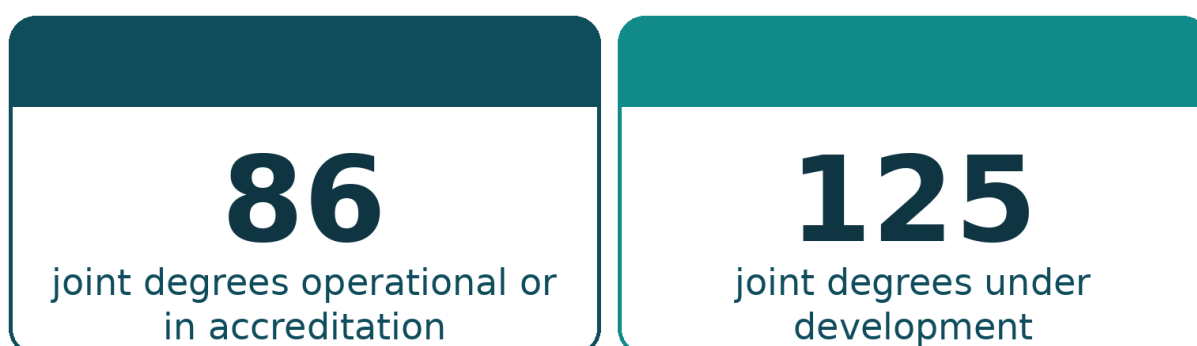
¹As defined by the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes: <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/definitions/>

succeed, it must work for all of them, as well as for any other higher education institution or consortium developing Joint Programmes, whether within or outside the framework of a European University Alliance.



► 1.1 The Joint Programme landscape: still limited and uneven

Despite these policy ambitions, the number of accredited Joint Programmes in Europe remains remarkably small. According to data from the [EQAR Database of External Quality Assurance Results \(DEQAR\), as of March 2026](#), fewer than 100 programmes have been evaluated using the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. While this number has grown significantly in recent years — driven by the European Degree policy agenda and the transformative role of the European Universities Initiative — it remains modest when compared with the ambition of making Joint Programmes a mainstream feature of European higher education. For context, prior to the establishment of the European Universities Initiative, the uptake of the European Approach was minimal: in 2023, less than 25 accredited programmes appeared in the Database. A survey conducted by the FOREU4ALL topical group on European Degrees and Joint Programmes in March 2026 identified 86 Joint Degree Programmes² currently operational or under accreditation and a further 125 under development across the European University Alliances alone, indicating a strong pipeline that the current funding framework is not yet equipped to support.



The landscape shows that further support is needed to boost the implementation of Joint Programmes:

- **Approximately 93% of programmes** using the European Approach are at the Master's level, with the vast majority linked to Erasmus Mundus, reaffirming the importance of external funding to ensure the sustainability of Joint Programmes.

² See definition at: <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/definitions/>

- **Only around 6 Bachelor’s programmes** have been identified, representing genuine trailblazers in a landscape that has historically focused on the second cycle.
- **No doctoral programmes** have yet used the European Approach.
- **Most Joint Programme cohorts range between 20 and 40 students**, making them small-scale by nature.

This means that the total number of students affected by any adaptation to mobility funding for Joint Programmes would be modest. A targeted change would not disrupt overall mobility numbers but could have a transformative effect on the viability of these programmes.

The suggested changes would benefit every kind of institution and consortia, but particularly those that have more difficulties accessing highly competitive calls such as Erasmus Mundus. They would offer an option rather than an imposition, so universities can follow their own decision-making processes to decide whether Joint Programmes are an institutional priority, involving all their stakeholders and, above all, their students. The signatories see this possibility as an effective way to reinforce the strategic role of Erasmus+ KA131, linking it more closely with the institutional priorities of higher education institutions.

► 1.2 The funding gap: a structural barrier to inclusivity

The current funding model for Joint Programmes relies on a combination of Erasmus Mundus scholarships (where available), alliance structural funds, national contributions, and tuition fees. However, only [around 150 out of the 220 “official” Erasmus Mundus programmes currently receive active funding](#)³, and fewer than 20% of all Joint Programmes using the European Approach carry Erasmus Mundus branding. For the growing number of Joint Programmes emerging outside the Erasmus Mundus framework — including new joint Bachelor’s and programmes within European University Alliances — there is no comparable systemic funding instrument. Although the recent exploratory action projects are an important starting point, they are far from becoming the systemic enabler that the sector needs.

This gap is particularly acute for universities in regions with lower fee levels, institutions with limited experience in generating external revenue, and programmes aimed at students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Without a reliable, inclusive funding mechanism for Joint Programmes, the European Degree risks becoming an instrument accessible only to a privileged segment of universities and students. However, we are convinced that the European Commission has a great solution at hand: mobilising the potential of Erasmus+ mobilities for higher education students, Europe’s most successful and inclusive scholarship scheme for student mobility.



2 The 12-Month Cap in KA131 Mobility as a Barrier

Under the current Erasmus+ Programme Guide, KA131 long-term mobility is capped at a maximum of 12 months per study cycle. This limit is designed for the general mobility framework, where students undertake exchange periods at a host institution before returning to complete their degree at home. For this purpose, the 12-month cap is appropriate and serves to distribute opportunities equitably.

However, Joint Programmes operate on a fundamentally different logic. In a Joint Programme, mobility is not an add-on to the curriculum, it is a fundamental part of the curriculum. Students

³ The catalogue of Erasmus Mundus programmes is available at: https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/scholarships/erasmus-mundus-catalogue_en

enrolled in a joint Master's programme typically study at two or more partner institutions across the full 24-month duration. In a joint Bachelor's, this can extend to 36 months across three or more countries. In both cases, the 12-month limit means that KA131 funding can cover, at best, only half of the student's mobility needs at the Master's level, and only a third at the Bachelor's level.

The Programme Guide already recognises that some mobility patterns require flexibility. Single-cycle programmes (such as Medicine or Architecture) already benefit from extended mobility provisions. Joint Programmes, which are an explicit policy priority of the Commission, should be afforded the same treatment.

The current situation creates a paradox: Joint Programmes are the biggest policy objective in the EU higher education field, yet the most widely available funding instrument for student mobility (KA131) cannot fully support them. The European Commission has the power to shift this paradox and extend KA131 funding for Joint Programmes.



3

Legal Feasibility: Article 5 of the Erasmus+ Regulation

An important advantage of the proposed adaptation is that it does not require any amendment to the Erasmus+ Regulation (EU) 2021/817. The Programme Guide, which sets out the operational rules for implementation, is revised annually by the European Commission in consultation with the Erasmus+ Programme Committee. Changes to the Programme Guide need only be consistent with the Regulation.

Article 5 of the Regulation, which governs learning mobility in the field of education and training, supports a broad interpretation of mobility activities. It provides for:

- The learning mobility of higher education students and staff (Article 5(1)(a));
- Accompanying measures such as language support, preparatory visits, training, and virtual cooperation (Article 5(2));
- The possibility of replacing physical mobility with virtual learning for those unable to participate in physical mobility (Article 5(2)).

Crucially, Article 5 does not establish a specific maximum duration for mobility activities. The 12-month cap is a Programme Guide provision, not a legislative requirement. This means the Programme Guide can be adapted to create an exception for Joint Programmes without any conflict with the Regulation.

In fact, the Programme Guide has already been modified on multiple occasions to reflect evolving policy needs — for example, the recent reduction of the minimum number of participants in Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs). An analogous targeted adaptation for Joint Programme mobility would then build on this established precedent, demonstrating the programme's capacity to adapt to the policy priorities of the European Commission and the higher education sector.



4 Proposed Adaptations to the Erasmus+ Programme Guide

The signatory Alliances propose three specific, targeted modifications to the Erasmus+ Programme Guide to be included in the 2027 Work Programme. These proposals are designed to be proportionate, implementable, and consistent with the Regulation:

► Proposal 1 · Exception to the 12-month limit for accredited Joint Programmes

◆ PROPOSED PROGRAMME GUIDE TEXT

Students enrolled in Joint Programmes that have been accredited or evaluated using the standards of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes may receive KA131 long-term mobility support for up to the full duration of the programme at the Bachelor's and Master's level, provided that no double funding occurs.

This proposal uses the existing European Approach accreditation (or evaluation according to European Approach standards in the case of self-accrediting institutions) as a quality filter, ensuring that only programmes meeting the highest standards of joint delivery would benefit. The no-double-funding clause ensures that students receiving KA131 mobility support for a given period cannot simultaneously receive Erasmus Mundus scholarships or other EU-funded mobility grants for the same period. In practice, this means that institutions would declare the funding source for each student mobility period, ensuring that double funding does not occur. This protects the budgetary interests of the EU while giving institutions the flexibility to combine different funding sources across the full duration of a Joint Programme.

► Proposal 2 · Flexibility in the definition of sending institution

◆ PROPOSED PROGRAMME GUIDE TEXT

In Joint Programmes between higher education institutions, any of the institutions involved may be considered a sending institution for the purposes of grant allocation, regardless of the mobility structure of the programme.

In many Joint Programmes, students follow a structured mobility path across multiple partner institutions from the very start of the programme. This creates an unbalanced situation in which some institutions have to face a disproportionate financial burden related to the provision of Erasmus+ grants. By allowing any partner institution in the Joint Programme consortium to act as the sending institution for the relevant mobility period, the financial responsibility would be distributed more equitably across the partnership.

► Proposal 3 · Optional budget ceiling for Joint Programme mobility

◆ PROPOSED PROGRAMME GUIDE TEXT

Higher Education Institutions may allocate up to a maximum of [X]% of their KA131 internal policy funding to support mobility within accredited Joint Programmes. Alternatively, Higher Education Institutions may allocate proportionately across the types of mobilities they manage, according to their internal policy, ensuring that students in accredited Joint Programmes receive equitable access to mobility support.

This safeguard addresses the legitimate concern that extended mobility for Joint Programmes could divert resources from the general mobility pool. By introducing a cap (modelled on existing provisions in the Programme Guide governing the use of internal policy funds for mobilities to associated countries), National Agencies retain control over the distribution of their budgets. Given the small cohort sizes typical of Joint Programmes (20–25 students), the budgetary impact at this stage would be contained. However, as the European Degree agenda gains momentum and more Joint Programmes are developed across the sector, funding needs will grow. This is precisely why both a fixed percentage ceiling and a proportionate allocation model are offered as alternatives: the former provides predictability, while the latter gives institutions greater flexibility to adapt to their evolving portfolio of Joint Programmes. In either case, the safeguard ensures that the general mobility pool is protected while Joint Programmes receive the support they need.



5 Towards Sustainable Funding for Joint Programme Mobility

The proposals in Section 4 are designed to be implemented immediately within the current budgetary framework: they require no additional funding, only greater flexibility in how existing KA131 resources can be used. For many alliances, including INGENIUM, this short-term flexibility would already enable the launch of Joint Programmes with Erasmus+ mobility support from the academic year 2027–2028 onwards. However, as the European Degree agenda gains traction and the number of accredited Joint Programmes grows across the sector, it is essential that the European Commission also plans for a proportionate increase in the resources available to support this growth. The signatory Alliances therefore propose two complementary measures that can be introduced through the Programme Guide and the annual Work Programme.

► 5.1 Recognising Joint Programme delivery in KA131 funding allocation

Currently, KA131 funding is allocated to Higher Education Institutions by National Agencies primarily on the basis of past performance in mobility delivery. There is no mechanism to recognise the additional demands placed on institutions that are actively developing and delivering accredited Joint Programmes. The signatory Alliances propose that the positive assessment of any higher education institution's involvement in Joint Programmes should be considered as a factor in the allocation of KA131 funding. This would not require a fundamental overhaul of the allocation model; rather, it would introduce a targeted incentive, comparable to the way in which National Agencies already take into account institutional demand and strategic priorities when distributing funds. Such a measure would signal to the sector that the European Commission takes the sustainability of Joint Programmes seriously and is prepared to back its policy ambitions with proportionate resources.

► 5.2 Organisational support for Joint Programme mobility

Joint Programmes generate coordination costs that go beyond those of standard mobility: joint student recruitment across multiple countries, harmonised enrollment procedures, credit recognition across different national systems, and the management of mobility flows that are structurally different from traditional exchanges. The Erasmus+ Programme Guide already provides organisational support grants for Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs), recognising that innovative mobility formats require additional institutional capacity. The signatory Alliances propose that a comparable organisational support mechanism be introduced for mobility within accredited Joint Programmes. This could take the form of a per-student organisational support grant allocated to each participating institution, covering the additional administrative and coordination costs of

managing Joint Programme mobility. Such a measure would be particularly beneficial for institutions that are earlier in their internationalisation journey and may lack the administrative infrastructure to manage complex cross-border student flows without additional support.



6 Fostering Inclusivity and Sustainability

The European Degree agenda will only succeed if it is inclusive. The current reliance on Erasmus Mundus as the primary funding instrument for Joint Programmes creates a two-tier system: well-funded programmes with EU scholarships, and unfunded programmes that must rely on fees and ad hoc resources. This is neither sustainable nor equitable. Moreover, Erasmus Mundus funding has historically been concentrated among research-intensive universities, leaving universities of applied sciences and other institution types with limited access to this instrument. European University Alliances are already demonstrating that all types of higher education institutions can be pioneers in Joint Programme development, particularly at the Bachelor's level, where the potential for innovation is greatest. Unlocking KA131 for Joint Programmes would support this momentum and encourage a wider range of institutions to engage in transnational degree delivery.

KA131 is the most democratic instrument in the Erasmus+ toolbox. Every accredited higher education institution in Europe has access to KA131 funding through its National Agency. By extending its scope to fully cover Joint Programme mobility, the European Commission would:

- **Empower all types of universities** to participate in Joint Programmes, not only those with the capacity to attract competitive EU grants;
- **Give National Agencies a meaningful role** in supporting the European Degree agenda through their existing instruments;
- **Strengthen the link between mobility and degree delivery**, which is central to the vision of inter-university campuses as described in the European Universities initiative;
- **Support student choice and democratic engagement**, by allowing universities to involve student representatives in deciding how their mobility funding should be distributed, and which Joint Programmes should receive enhanced mobility support;
- **Contribute to regional development and talent retention**, as Joint Programmes with embedded international mobility can motivate students in depopulating regions to pursue their education locally, with a European dimension.

The European Universities initiative explicitly targets 50% mobility among participating institutions. Without adequate funding instruments to support this ambition, alliances are forced to rely on short-term project funding or unsustainable fee models. KA131 is the missing piece in the puzzle. It can also demonstrate how successful programmes, such as Erasmus+ exchanges, can evolve to respond to new societal needs while remaining relevant and impactful.



7 The Transformative Value of Joint Programmes

Beyond their direct educational value, Joint Programmes act as powerful catalysts for institutional transformation. The process of designing, accrediting, and delivering a Joint Programme compels partner institutions to align their academic calendars, harmonise quality assurance processes, develop shared governance structures, and create interoperable digital systems — changes that benefit the institution as a whole, far beyond the programme itself.

Faculty involved in Joint Programme delivery acquire transnational teaching competences that they bring back to their regular courses, enriching the learning experience for all students. Administrative staff develop expertise in international student services, credit recognition, and cross-border regulatory compliance that strengthens the institution's overall capacity for internationalisation. In this sense, every Joint Programme creates a multiplier effect: it raises the baseline of the institution's ability to engage in transnational cooperation, making subsequent initiatives (whether additional Joint Programmes, micro-credentials, collaborative research, or challenge-based learning formats) easier to launch and sustain.

This spillover effect is particularly significant for universities that are earlier in their internationalisation journey, where a single well-supported Joint Programme can serve as the entry point to a fundamentally different way of operating. Ensuring that these programmes have access to sustainable mobility funding is therefore not only a matter of supporting the students enrolled in them, but rather an investment in the long-term transformation of Europe's higher education institutions. At the systemic level, this institutional transformation directly supports the construction of a true European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and advances national compliance with the Bologna key commitments on joint degrees, quality assurance, and recognition — objectives to which all EU Member States have committed but which remain unevenly implemented in practice.



8 Conclusion and Call to Action

The proposals in this paper are designed to be feasible, proportionate, and fully aligned with the Erasmus+ Regulation. They represent the kind of practical, low-cost adaptation that can have a transformative impact on the sustainability and inclusivity of Joint Programmes across Europe.

The signatory Alliances call on:

- 1. The European Commission** to include the proposed exception to the 12-month limit for accredited Joint Programmes in the 2027 Erasmus+ Work Programme and Programme Guide;
- 2. The Erasmus+ Programme Committee** to support this adaptation as a concrete measure to advance the European Degree agenda;
- 3. National Agencies** to advocate for the inclusion of this provision, which would strengthen their role in supporting Joint Programmes and the overall European Degree policy agenda;
- 4. National Authorities** to recognise that sustainable funding for Joint Programmes requires systemic solutions, not only project-based grants.

Joint Programmes are at the centre of the EU's higher education policy agenda. Let us ensure they have the funding instruments they deserve.

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