

# Designing and Implementing Joint International Study Programmes

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# The European Vision for Higher Education

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) serves as a comprehensive framework for fostering compatibility, comparability, and mutual trust among higher education institutions across Europe. This ambitious vision has fundamentally transformed how universities collaborate and how students experience international education.

The Bologna Process has evolved significantly since its inception, establishing key pillars including degree comparability, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), enhanced student and staff mobility, and robust quality assurance mechanisms.

The European Degree Blueprint, launched in 2024, represents the next frontier in this evolution, aiming to achieve automatic EU-wide recognition of qualifications and further reduce barriers to international education and employment.







# Why Joint Programmes Matter



## Academic Cooperation

Strengthen partnerships and facilitate meaningful mobility between institutions, creating networks of excellence that transcend national boundaries.



## International Talent

Attract highly qualified international students and staff, enriching the academic environment with diverse perspectives and expertise.



## Global Competitiveness

Enhance institutional visibility and competitiveness on the world stage, positioning universities as leaders in international education.



## Institutional Capacity

Build organizational strength through transnational cooperation, sharing resources, expertise, and innovative approaches to teaching and research.

# Key Features of Joint Programmes

Joint international study programmes represent a sophisticated model of academic collaboration that goes far beyond traditional exchange agreements. These programmes are characterized by several essential elements that distinguish them from other forms of international cooperation.

1

## Shared Design and Delivery

Joint design, delivery, and quality assurance processes ensure coherent educational experiences across all partner institutions.

2

## Common Learning Outcomes

Agreed learning outcomes and structured mobility periods that integrate seamlessly into the curriculum, ensuring consistent standards.

3

## Collaborative Research

Co-supervised research projects and theses, with dual or common accreditation that recognizes the contributions of all partner institutions.

4

## European Values Integration

Integration of European values, sustainability principles, and both green and digital competencies throughout the curriculum.

# Legal and Policy Framework

## European Framework

The legal foundation for joint programmes rests on multiple interconnected frameworks. The Bologna Process provides the overarching structure, while the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) ensures comparability of learning outcomes. The European Approach for Quality Assurance (EA) establishes common standards for programme evaluation.

The Blueprint for European Degree, introduced in 2024, outlines concrete EU-level pathways toward automatic recognition, representing a significant step forward in reducing administrative barriers and enhancing student mobility.

## National Implementation

EU and national frameworks work in tandem to enable joint degrees. Romania's Law 199/2023 serves as an exemplary model, explicitly permitting joint, multiple, and double degrees while providing clear guidelines for their implementation and recognition.

These developments carry important implications for Moldova's higher education system as it continues its alignment with European standards and seeks to strengthen international partnerships.

# Case Study: CIVIS TRACEE Joint Master

## Transdisciplinary Approach to Climate, Environment & Energy

The CIVIS TRACEE programme exemplifies best practices in joint programme development, bringing together 11 European universities and 2 African partner institutions in a truly collaborative educational endeavor focused on addressing global climate challenges.

This innovative master's programme features fully shared design across all dimensions: curriculum development, admission processes, and quality assurance oversight through a joint board. Students benefit from a common diploma recognized across all partner countries and ECTS credits that facilitate seamless mobility.

The blended mobility model allows students to experience multiple institutional contexts, combining physical mobility with digital learning opportunities across the CIVIS network. This approach maximizes learning opportunities while remaining flexible and sustainable.

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European Universities

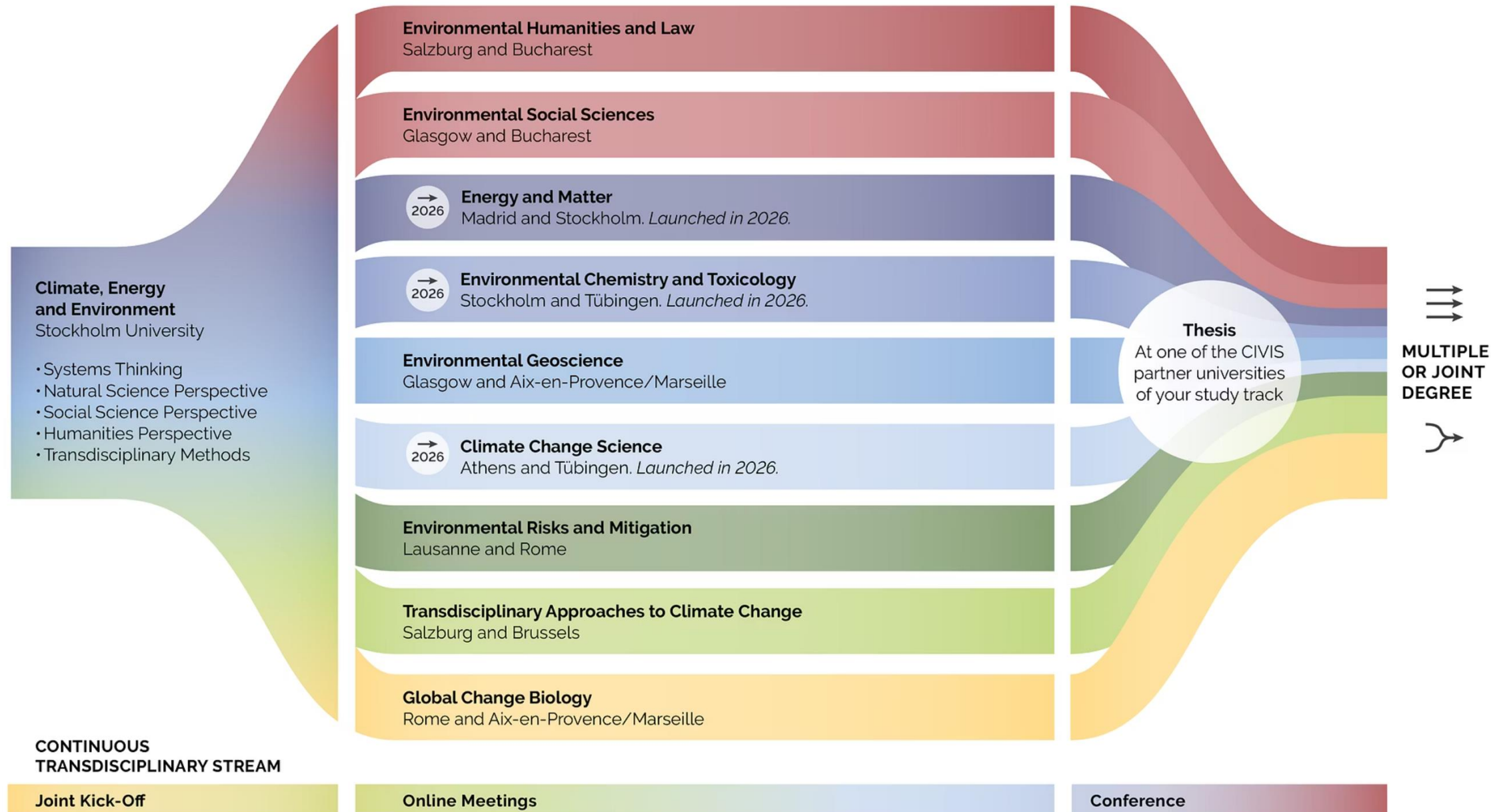
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African Partners

**SEMESTER 1 • 30 ECTS**  
Building the foundations

**SEMESTERS 2–3 • 60 ECTS**  
Customising your path

**SEMESTER 4 • 30 ECTS**  
Working on a real-world challenge



# Case Study: EC2U LIFELINE Master

## Lifelong Well-being Focus

Addresses healthy aging and quality of life across the lifespan through interdisciplinary approaches.

## Personalized Curricula

Multiple tracks spanning healthcare, social welfare, and public policy allow students to tailor their learning paths.

## Flexible Credit Transfer

Lego-like modular system enables flexible ECTS accumulation across partner institutions.

The EC2U LIFELINE Master programme demonstrates innovation in curriculum flexibility and student-centered design. The programme offers multiple specialized tracks in healthcare delivery, social welfare systems, and policy development, allowing students to construct personalized educational pathways that align with their career goals.

The co-tutelle thesis model enables students to benefit from supervision by faculty members at multiple institutions, enriching the research experience. However, the programme has also highlighted important lessons regarding the challenges of managing curricular harmonization across diverse institutional contexts and navigating complex multi-country accreditation processes.



# Case Study: UNITA Joint Legal Studies

The UNITA double degree programme between the University of Timișoara (Romania) and the University of Turin (Italy) represents an ambitious approach to legal education that prepares students for practice in multiple jurisdictions.

This carefully structured 5-year programme combines two bachelor's degrees with two master's degrees, requiring strategic planning of student mobility between Romania and Italy.

The bilingual and bi-legal learning model provides graduates with unique competencies in both civil law traditions. Clear legal frameworks at both national and institutional levels ensure mutual recognition of all academic achievements, creating a seamless pathway for students navigating two distinct educational systems.



1

## Year 1-3: Bachelor Foundation

Students split time between UVT and UNITO, studying both Romanian and Italian legal systems in their original languages.

2

## Year 4-5: Master Specialization

Advanced study in both jurisdictions with specialization options in European law, comparative law, or international business law.

3

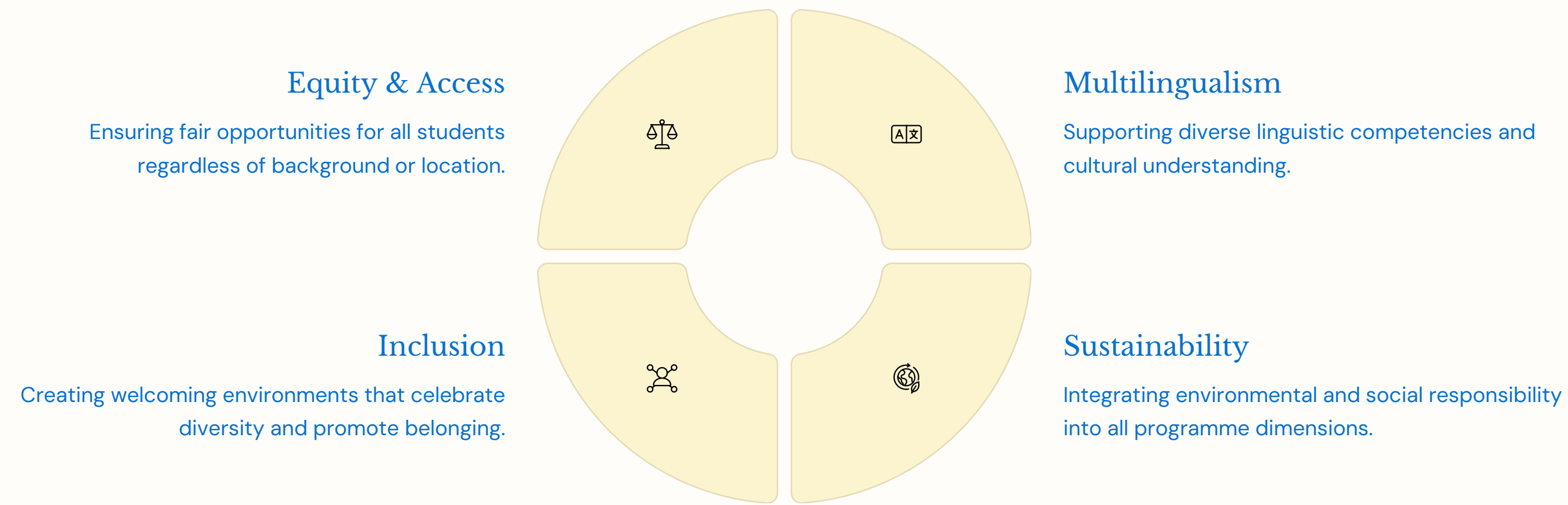
## Completion: Dual Recognition

Graduates receive degrees from both institutions, fully recognized in Romania, Italy, and throughout the EU.

# Case Study: EUt+ Quality Assurance Framework

## Pioneering European Standards for Joint Programmes

The European University of Technology Alliance (EUt+) has developed a groundbreaking approach to quality assurance specifically designed for joint and collaborative programmes, moving toward truly pan-European standards that transcend national boundaries.



The framework establishes 10 comprehensive pan-European standards that address critical dimensions of programme quality. These standards have been rigorously tested through the JEDI and STYX pilot projects, providing valuable insights into practical implementation challenges and best practices that can inform broader adoption across European higher education.



# EU Instruments for Support



## Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees

The established precursor to the European Degree, providing funding and recognition for high-quality joint programmes that attract talented students worldwide.



## European Degree Pathway Projects

New funding stream launching in 2025 under Erasmus+ to support institutions developing programmes aligned with European Degree standards.



## Policy Lab & Annual Forum

The European Degree Policy Lab and Annual Forum, both launching in 2025, will provide spaces for experimentation, learning, and policy dialogue among stakeholders.

These instruments represent significant European Commission investment in advancing joint programme development and moving toward the vision of a truly integrated European higher education space where students can seamlessly pursue internationally recognized credentials.

# Implementation Barriers

Despite the clear benefits and growing policy support, joint programmes face significant implementation challenges that require sustained attention and creative solutions from institutions, national authorities, and European bodies.

## Divergent Accreditation Rules

Each country maintains its own accreditation requirements and timelines, creating complex compliance obligations for joint programmes. Harmonizing these processes while respecting national sovereignty remains a persistent challenge.

## Administrative Burden

The legal complexity of establishing joint programmes creates substantial administrative workload. From contract negotiations to student registration systems, institutions must navigate multiple regulatory frameworks simultaneously.

## Quality Assurance Inconsistencies

Varying approaches to quality assurance and funding models across countries complicate the establishment of truly integrated quality management systems that satisfy all partners' requirements.

## Language and Support Challenges

Language barriers affect both programme delivery and student support services. Ensuring adequate support mechanisms for students navigating multiple institutional contexts and cultures requires significant resources and coordination.



# Success Factors for Joint Programmes

## Building on Best Practices

Analysis of successful joint programmes reveals several critical success factors that institutions should prioritize when developing collaborative educational offerings.

- 1

Common Governance

Establish shared governance structures and transparent financial models that ensure equitable distribution of costs and benefits among all partners.
- 2

Digital Integration

Leverage blended learning and digital tools for shared delivery, such as the CIVIS Digital Campus, which enables seamless collaboration across institutions.
- 3

Institutional Flexibility

Maintain organizational agility and strong strategic leadership that can navigate challenges and adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining programme quality.
- 4

Continuous Dialogue

Implement robust quality assurance processes with regular stakeholder engagement, ensuring ongoing improvement and responsiveness to student and employer needs.

# Implications for Moldova

As Moldova continues its integration with European higher education frameworks, the development of joint international programmes presents significant opportunities for transformation and growth. Strategic engagement with these opportunities requires coordinated action across multiple dimensions.



## Legislative Alignment

Align national legislation with EU joint programme frameworks, creating clear legal pathways for recognition of joint and double degrees issued by Moldovan institutions in partnership with European universities.



## Micro-Credentials

Develop micro-credentials that complement joint curricula, providing flexible learning pathways that align with European standards and support lifelong learning.



## Pilot Programmes

Launch pilot double or joint degree programmes with EU partners, starting with fields where Moldova has established strengths and existing international connections.



## Infrastructure Investment

Invest strategically in digital platforms, mobility facilitation services, and comprehensive quality assurance reform to create the foundation for sustainable joint programme development.

# Policy and Institutional Recommendations

## A Roadmap for Moldovan Higher Education

### 1 National Methodology

Create a comprehensive national methodology for joint programmes that provides clear guidelines while allowing institutional flexibility in implementation.

### 2 Alliance Participation

Encourage Moldovan universities to join European University Alliances, accessing networks, resources, and expertise that accelerate capability development.

### 3 Coordination Office

Establish a dedicated Joint Programme Office for national coordination, providing support services, sharing best practices, and managing relationships with international quality assurance bodies.

### 4 Funding Integration

Integrate internationalization key performance indicators into national funding formulas, incentivizing institutions to develop high-quality international partnerships and programmes.

# Conclusions and Next Steps

"Design locally, cooperate internationally, and govern jointly."

Joint and European degrees represent the next evolutionary phase of the Bologna Process, moving beyond mobility and credit transfer toward truly integrated international educational experiences. These programmes offer unprecedented opportunities for enhancing educational quality, fostering innovation, and preparing graduates for an interconnected world.

For Moldova, strategic engagement with EU partnerships presents a pathway for transformative growth in higher education. By building on existing strengths and systematically addressing implementation challenges, Moldovan institutions can position themselves as valued partners in the European higher education landscape.

<b>Institutional Readiness</b>  Building organizational capacity and faculty expertise	<b>Legislative Support</b>  Creating enabling legal and regulatory frameworks	<b>Quality Culture</b>  Embedding continuous improvement in all processes
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Success requires simultaneous progress across all three dimensions: institutional readiness, supportive legislation, and a pervasive culture of quality that encompasses all aspects of programme development and delivery.



# Developing a Joint Degree: The Foundation

## Steps 1-3: Planning, Design, and Governance

01

### Initial Planning and Partnership

Define common academic purpose and learning outcomes aligned with Bologna and EQF frameworks

- Identify strong, accredited partner institutions with complementary strengths and shared values
- Draft a comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding outlining mutual goals, responsibilities, and expectations
- Conduct feasibility studies examining market demand, resource requirements, and sustainability

02

### Programme Design

Co-create curriculum and teaching modules ensuring ECTS compatibility and coherence


- Agree on common admission criteria, grading scales, and assessment methods that respect diversity while ensuring comparability
- Plan integrated student mobility across at least two institutions with clear recognition mechanisms
- Design shared learning resources and digital infrastructure to support collaborative delivery

03

### Governance and Legal Framework

Establish robust joint governance structure with clearly defined roles and decision-making processes

- Create Programme Board, Quality Assurance Committee, and Admissions Committee with balanced representation
- Ensure compliance with each national regulation and accreditation requirement through careful legal review
- Document tuition fees, funding distribution, and financial sustainability models that ensure long-term viability

 **Key Resource:** European Commission's *Working towards a Joint European Degree* (2025) and the *JOIMAN Guide to Developing and Running Joint Programmes* provide comprehensive guidance on all stages of development.

# Developing a Joint Degree: Implementation and Sustainability

## Steps 4-6: Quality Assurance, Launch, and Continuous Improvement

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### Accreditation and Quality Assurance

Submit the joint programme for approval in all partner countries, coordinating timelines and documentation requirements across multiple regulatory systems. Apply the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA) to streamline the process where possible.

Develop shared monitoring and reporting tools for continuous improvement that satisfy all partners' internal and external quality assurance requirements while avoiding duplication of effort.

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### Implementation and Award

Launch with coordinated communication and recruitment strategies that leverage all partners' networks and reputations. Develop unified branding while respecting institutional identities.

Provide comprehensive student support services including orientation programmes, housing assistance, mentorship, and visa/immigration services to ensure smooth transitions between institutions.

Implement co-supervision models for theses and capstone projects across institutions, culminating in award of a joint or multiple diploma that clearly articulates the collaborative nature of the programme.

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### Evaluation and Sustainability

Conduct annual joint evaluations incorporating feedback from students, faculty, employers, and other stakeholders. Use data to identify areas for enhancement and demonstrate impact.

Apply evaluation results for systematic curriculum refinement and programme evolution, ensuring ongoing relevance and quality improvement.

Plan strategic expansion toward European Degree Label or full European degree recognition, positioning the programme for future policy developments and funding opportunities.

# Resources and Support

## Key References and Tools for Joint Programme Development

### European Commission

- *Working towards a Joint European Degree* (2025)
- European Degree Blueprint documentation
- Erasmus+ Programme Guide
- European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes

### Quality Assurance

- JOIMAN Guide to Joint Programmes
- ENQA Standards and Guidelines
- EUt+ QA Framework materials
- EQAR registered agency guidance

### Networks and Alliances

- European University Alliances
  - CIVIS, EC2U, UNITA, EUt+ resources
  - Bologna Process documentation
  - National rectors' conferences
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# Thank You

## Questions and Discussion

Let's explore together how Moldova can leverage international partnerships to advance higher education quality, access, and recognition.

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