The European Degree Label and inclusion in higher education

Dear Executive VP Mînzatu and DG Ahrenkilde,

We are writing to you in our capacity as Rectors of OpenEU, the digital university alliance, with deep appreciation for your leadership and commitment to advancing higher education and social inclusion across the EU.

As the European Degree and its label take shape, we share your ambition to build a more integrated, accessible, and high-quality EU higher education area. In this spirit, we wish to highlight a recent drafting change which, while seemingly technical, risks undermining these shared inclusion goals.

Earlier versions of the European Degree Label guidelines (notably Criterion A.8) recognized that well-designed digital provision allows fully online joint programmes to meet mobility and quality standards. This reflected a clear understanding: excellence, collaboration, and inclusion can be achieved through both physical and virtual mobility.[1]

The removal of the text of Criterion A.8 creates a significant gap. Restricting the label exclusively to physical mobility, without exception, would unintentionally exclude hundreds of thousands of learners, across the EU and beyond, for whom physical mobility is not feasible: working professionals, lifelong learners, persons with disabilities, migrants, and those in rural areas or remote regions - including most of the 380,000 students within our OpenEU University Alliance.

For these groups, fully online programmes and virtual exchange are often the only viable path to cross-border European education and experience.

While the importance of physical mobility is beyond doubt, the absence of a digital pathway risks narrowing access to what is potentially a flagship initiative for European inclusion and opportunity.

We therefore respectfully urge you to plead for the reinstatement of Criterion A.8 and virtual exchange, as a recognized component of the European Degree Label for fully online programmes. The European Degree would then reflect the full diversity of Europe's learners without compromising quality or ambition.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

The Rectors of the OpenEU Alliance

[1] Criterion A.8 as stated in the 3rd draft guidelines, circulated in March: *Fully online joint programmes designed to be completed without any required physical presence are not required to offer physical mobility but should provide suitable alternatives to students. Only these joint programmes are exempted from providing the evidence for the indicators below.*