



European  
Commission

# Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees

*The story so far*



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B-1049 Brussels

# **Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees**

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## Introduction

Joint programmes were traditionally seen as a means to integrate and internationalise curricula, develop strategic international academic collaboration and provide a unique study experience to students who are keen to learn from different education systems. Through the Bologna Process, it became clear that joint programmes - and joint degrees in particular - could become a means to advance study recognition, quality and mobility across borders and enhance graduate employability.

From its creation in 2004 up to 2015, the Erasmus Mundus programme has funded more than 18 600 master's scholarships and 1 400 doctoral fellowships to individuals taking part in 328 joint postgraduate programmes. Erasmus Mundus funds scholarships to take part in joint or multiple degrees provided by consortia of European and (since 2009) non-European higher education institutions (HEIs). During these programmes, students attend higher education institutions (HEIs) in in two or more European countries. Since 2014, the Erasmus Mundus programme has formed part of Erasmus+, the new umbrella programme for education, training, youth and sport.

This publication, containing four articles on the different aspects of the Erasmus Mundus programme, has been created in order to review and reflect on the achievements and challenges faced since 2004. These policy papers discuss four different aspects of the programme: the employability of graduates of joint programmes, the students' view on Erasmus Mundus programmes, quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of awarded degrees and the challenges related to the management of joint programmes.

The first article discusses joint programmes and employability. The results of the most recent Erasmus Mundus Graduate Impact Survey show that Erasmus Mundus graduates have higher employment rates than other graduates. At the time of the survey two-thirds of graduates had found a job, and almost 60% of those had found their job within less than two months.

This can be explained by the fact that Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (EMJMDs) in general build strong links with the world of work. In fact, a strong connection with the field of work is one of the selection criteria for the programmes. EMJMDs foresee cooperation between academics and the world of business and policy, and involve employers in the quality assessment of academic provision. In addition, most programmes build internship periods into their curriculum, organise career guidance and organise supervision panels for joint programmes that involve a variety of stakeholders.

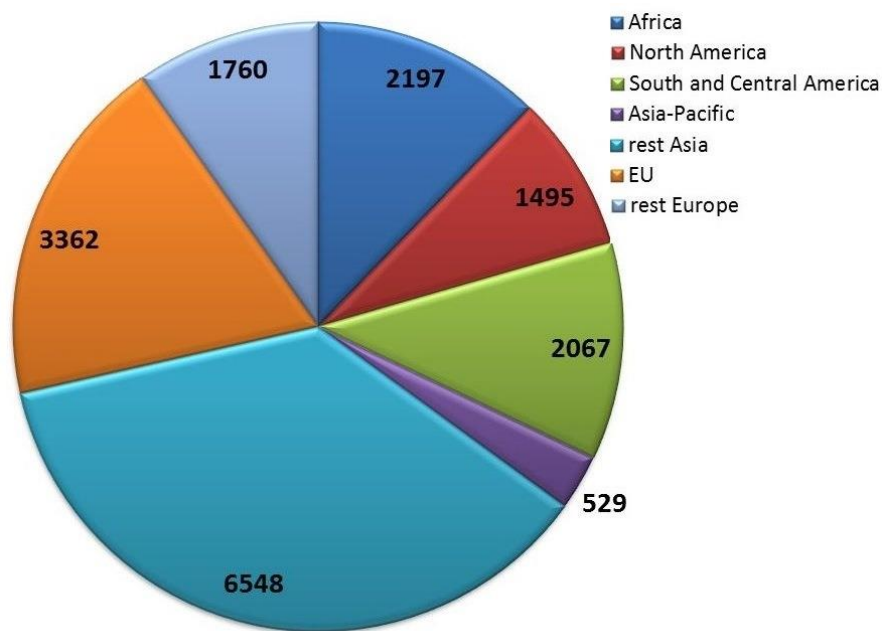


Figure 1: Number of scholarships awarded per region 2004-2015

Various studies, including the Erasmus Impact Study<sup>1</sup>, show that employers tend to value the additional 'soft' or transversal skills which the graduates obtain through their mobility, such as intercultural skills, communication skills, foreign language skills and confidence. Employers also believe that, in general, participation in an EMJMD shows the candidate's ability and willingness to deal with new situations, to take risks and to be open to new experiences.

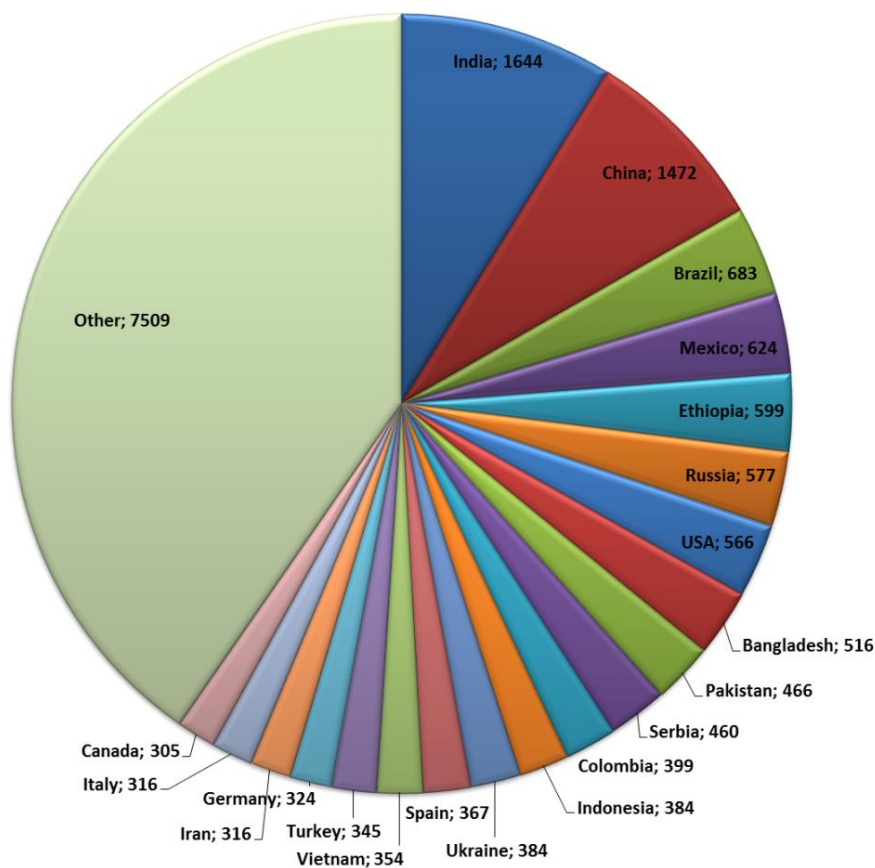


Figure 2: Nationality of EM Master scholarship receivers 2004-2015

What is not clear, and difficult to prove, is the added value of the joint programme as such, as opposed to other forms of international education and/or credit mobility. In addition, it is hard to investigate to what extent the employability of graduates is dependent on the previous work experience of the students, since many EMJMD students have obtained previous work experience before starting their master programme.

The second article discusses the students' perspectives on Erasmus Mundus Masters or Doctorate degrees and the motivating factors that influence a student's decision to enrol in an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree. Both this

policy paper and the results of the Erasmus Mundus Graduate Impact Survey<sup>2</sup> show that many students base their decision on economic reasons, such as the rate of tuition fees or the level of available scholarships. The prospect of a scholarship is the most cited reason for students to enrol in an EMJMD. Other reasons that are often mentioned include the possibility to experience European cultures and to live and study in Europe.

A central aspect of the Erasmus Mundus student experience is mobility; all students have the opportunity to live in at least two different European countries during their studies. Nevertheless, students state that this opportunity also brings with it new challenges, such as visa processes, cultural adjustment, and the time and energy spent moving from one location to another. Many of the higher education institutions involved offer a range of services that are aimed at helping students adapt to a new academic system and integrating them into the local environment.

<sup>1</sup> Erasmus Impact Survey results: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-14-1025\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-1025_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Erasmus Mundus Graduate Impact Survey <http://www.em-a.eu/en/erasmus-mundus/graduate-impact-survey.html>



Another unique feature of the Erasmus Mundus student experience is the intense learning that occurs both within an international classroom and outside the classroom, leading to academic knowledge and intercultural competences. Since EMJMDs are branded as programmes of excellence, students start the programmes with high expectations of quality. This also brings several issues to the surface, such as the quality of teaching, the integrated curriculum and course management.

The third article deals with the awarding of joint degrees. When the Erasmus Mundus Programme started, the award of a joint degree was more or less impossible because most institutional and legal frameworks did not allow for such degrees. Partly under the impulse of Erasmus Mundus, the last decade has seen a rapid expansion of higher education institutions offering joint programmes, which has put these on the agenda of national authorities. Joint programmes are now regarded as a means of achieving the objectives set in the Bologna Declaration. There has therefore been a push – through the institutions – for legal frameworks allowing the award of joint degrees. As a result,

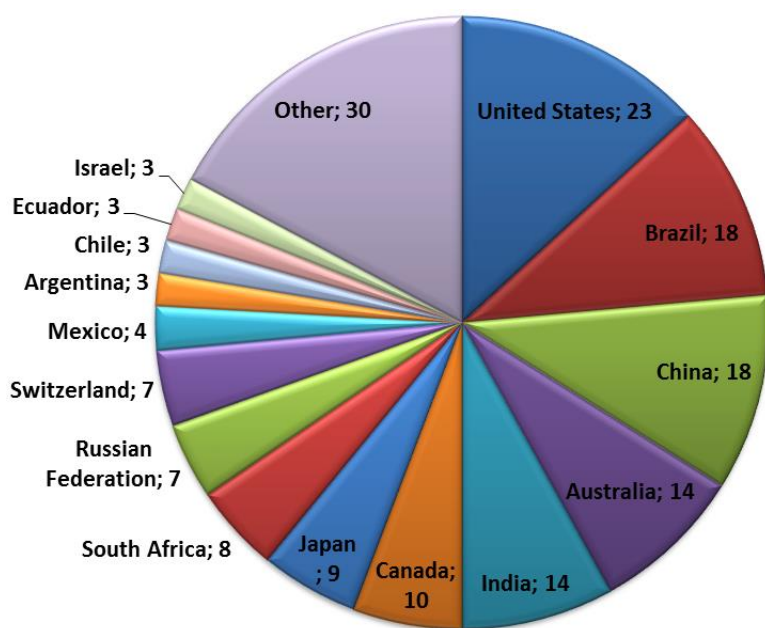


Figure 3: Number of Partner HEIs per Partner Country 2004-2015

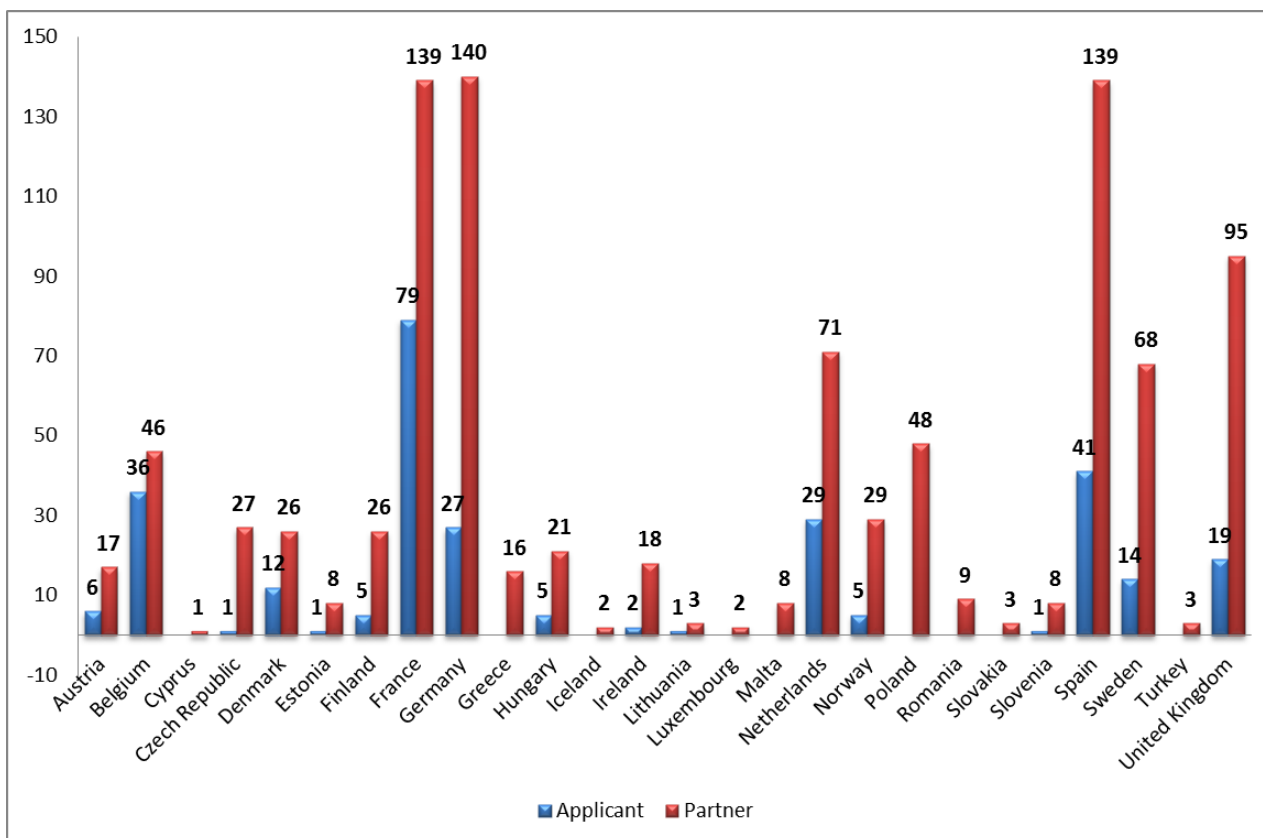


Figure 4: Erasmus Mundus: Number of coordinating and partner HEIs in Programme Countries 2004-2015

practically all national legal frameworks now accommodate the award of joint degrees.

Nevertheless, there are still a number of diverse national requirements and legal restrictions that discourage consortia from awarding joint degrees.

The introduction of Erasmus Mundus master programmes into higher education systems also drew the attention of quality assurance and accreditation agencies. Their procedures towards joint programmes were not coordinated in the past; the introduction of joint programmes has led to more coordinated approaches. In May 2015, the European ministers in charge of higher education adopted the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*<sup>3</sup>. By setting EHEA<sup>4</sup>-wide standards, this should provide joint programmes a means of avoiding discouraging national standards and criteria. However, the implementation of the European Approach still requires a concerted effort of deregulation by national authorities, since many of the obstacles the European Approach intends to overcome, are embedded in legal frameworks. The European Commission is currently committed to (i) raising awareness about the European Approach (ii) emphasise the importance of the European Approach towards policy-makers and (iii) ask for their action at national level to implement it.

The fourth and last article in this publication looks at the management of joint degrees. To date, more than half of all European HEIs run a joint or double degree programme. Out of about 20 reported reasons for developing Joint Programmes, the three which HEIs worldwide cite most are, in order of priority: (i) enhancement of joint research; (ii) increased internationalisation for purposes of strategic partnerships (iii) global visibility and prestige.

Joint programmes require a change in management strategies and will give HEIs the opportunity to rethink their approach. New management tools have emerged with the birth of Erasmus Mundus master programmes. Human resources represent a key component of joint programme design and delivery. Staff members need to be flexible and possess strong management and communication skills. Coaching, staff development and change management are sensitive issues that should be considered at a very early stage through a professional approach. In addition, the success of joint programmes will depend on the effective provision of a wide range of student services, supporting the specific needs of mobile students.

Furthermore, through joint programmes, institutions learn how to network, recruit qualified staff and manage larger budgets. New units need to be set up to mobilise additional resources from local and public authorities or from businesses through an entrepreneurial approach, right from the inception of a programme. Structured

Astrophysics
Forensic Science
Viticulture and Oenology
Flood Risk Management
Dance and Heritage
Public Health in Disasters
Tropical Forestry
Georesources Engineering
Bioethics
Neuroscience
Industrial Ecology
Cartography
Aquaculture
Food Identity
Tropical Biodiversity
Marine Engineering
Medieval German Literature
Documentary Filmdirecting
Nuclear Fusion Science
Animal Nutrition and Feeding
Cultural Narratives
Industrial Ecology
Geospatial Technologies
Advanced Robotics

**Table 1: Examples of topics of selected EM**

<sup>3</sup> European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes <https://www.eqar.eu/projects/joint-programmes.html>

<sup>4</sup> EHEA: European Higher Education Area

partnerships with industry should be developed in order to intensify placements for paid internships.

Sustainability is of high priority for the Commission because some institutions or academics fail to provide a strategy to maintain their programmes when EU funding ends. The partnerships that have managed to sustain are often based on shared financial understanding and planning. In 2016, the European Commission is carrying out a study about the sustainability of Erasmus Mundus programmes which no longer receive their funding, in order to identify the reasons why some projects have not been viable without additional funding and to identify good practices related to sustainability.

Overall, the Erasmus Mundus programme can be seen as a positive contribution not only to the development of Joint Programmes and Joint Degrees in Europe and the rest of the world, but also European higher education. The particular focus on "jointness" as one of the selection criteria has produced many high level integrated international study programmes which foster excellence, innovation and internationalisation in higher education. In addition, the emphasis of the Erasmus Mundus programme on the awarding of a Joint Degree can be seen as a trigger for EHEA Member States to implement the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, which will contribute to achieving many of the Bologna Declaration objectives.



# 1. Joint Programmes and Employability: Added value, current trends and future needs

By **Elizabeth Colucci**. Advisor, Higher Education Policy, European University Association

## Abstract

To what extent do joint programmes provide an added value in terms of graduate employability? Given that a prime motivation for incentivising joint programme development in the context of the Bologna Process has been to enhance employability of graduates on the European and global labour market, this question is a critical. However, it is rarely answered in a substantiated manner. This paper summarises current knowledge on the topic and points towards areas that still need to be explored. It cites the present European policy pressures and objectives regarding graduate employability, many of which are impacting the way in which joint programmes are framing their educational offer and promoting their added value. Evolving practices in student tracking and the gathering of student employability data are also touched upon, given that higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly pressured to do this. The article also examines some of the assumptions regarding the causality of international mobility and employability, a topic that has been a preoccupation, for example, of the Erasmus programme for many years. The link is made to joint programmes, given that mobility is an inherent feature of them and a proclaimed source of the international skills and competencies that students gain. By scanning several studies, notably produced for the Erasmus Mundus (EM) programme, different facets of employability and joint programmes are presented: in particular, disciplinary/study field implications, the structure of joint programmes and the career services and placements they provide, and the perceptions of students and employers regarding the competencies that graduates gain specifically from such programmes. The paper concludes with some observations on the extent to which joint programmes do provide added-value regarding employability and the policy and employer-targeted messages that should ideally encapsulate this. It also points to prospects for further research that may help to elucidate this recurrently difficult topic.

## Introduction

The motivations for both providing and participating in a joint study programme are manifold. From a higher education institutional perspective, this was traditionally seen as a means to integrate and internationalise curricula, develop international academic collaboration and provide a unique study experience to students, keen to learn from different education systems. This received further impetus with the launch of the Bologna Process, where it was recognized that joint programmes, and joint degrees<sup>5</sup> in particular,

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<sup>5</sup> A joint degree is a single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme. A joint programme entails a collaborative international approach to the design of a study programme with a highly integrated content, though it may not result in the actual award of a joint degree. Joint programmes are understood as an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions from EHEA countries and leading to double/multiple degrees or a joint degree. For the purposes of this paper, the term 'joint programme' will be used, though distinct references to joint and or dual degree will be made where relevant. Dual or multiple degrees are separate degrees awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme attesting the successful completion of this programme. (If two degrees are awarded by two institutions, this is a 'double degree').

For further definitional clarification, please see 'Joint Programmes: Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Awarded Degrees' by Axel Arden, published in conjunction with this paper. For further guidance please see "European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes October 2014, approved by EHEA ministers in May 2015":

could be a means to advance study recognition and mobility across borders and, indeed, enhance graduate employability:

*"In order to further strengthen the important European dimensions of higher education and graduate employability, Ministers called upon the higher education sector to increase the development of modules, courses and curricula at all levels with 'European' content, orientation or organisation. This concerns particularly modules, courses and degree curricula offered in partnership by institutions from different countries and leading to a recognised joint degree." (Prague Declaration<sup>6</sup>)*

In a further assessment of this topic, the European University Association (EUA)<sup>7</sup> produced a study in 2003 that in many ways pre-empted the European Union's Erasmus Mundus (EM) programme. It found that institutional motivations to develop joint programmes included quality enhancement – both of academic content and of the potential mobility experience embedded in the programme –, convergence and compatibility of degree systems, and enhanced employability of graduates. Many of the institutions interviewed projected that joint degrees would underpin a broader European labour market and increase, in particular, the cross-border employability of their graduates. Both the real and desired link between graduate employability and joint programme provision has steadfastly gained impetus since; in the context of the current Erasmus+ programme of the European Union (which has incorporated Erasmus Mundus), employability has become a key criterion on which applicant joint masters courses are evaluated<sup>8</sup> and on which selected courses subsequently need to report.

Of particular interest is a recent graduate impact study of the Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association (EMA) indicating that the majority of students that studied on an EM course perceived the greatest impact over time to be on their careers (as opposed to on their intercultural competencies, subject-related expertise or private life) (2014 survey results<sup>9</sup>). However, the principal question (that is not so easily answered) is to what extent joint programmes actually provide an added value in terms of employability, and whether or not this is linked to certain types of programmes, the services they offer, and/or certain types of careers. This paper will attempt to answer these questions, namely by scanning existing studies and literature on the topic, pointing to caveats and also to certain issues that should be further explored. Given that little literature has been produced on joint bachelor programmes, and that joint doctorates are of a rather different and complex nature, focus is placed primarily on collaborative masters' programmes.

## **General public policy attention to graduate employability and the pressure on HEIs**

Graduate employability has gained tremendous significance from a public policy perspective in recent years, which is shaping the way higher education institutions (HEIs) are teaching, researching, developing partnerships and collecting performance data. This has been clearly exacerbated by economic stagnation; pressures on the public purse

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[https://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/bologna/02\\_European\\_Approach\\_QA\\_of\\_Joint\\_Programmes\\_v1\\_0.pdf](https://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/bologna/02_European_Approach_QA_of_Joint_Programmes_v1_0.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/PRAGUE\\_COMMUNIQUE.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/PRAGUE_COMMUNIQUE.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> C Tauch, A Rauhvargers, "Survey on Master Degrees and Joint Degrees in Europe", EUA Publications, 2002

<sup>8</sup> See the Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2015 in reference to Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degrees, where 'improve the relevance of the Joint Masters for the labour market through increased involvement of employers' is listed as a key aim: [http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/discover/guide/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/discover/guide/index_en.htm)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.em-a.eu/en/erasmus-mundus/graduate-impact-survey.html>

have resulted in decreased and/or differentiated public funding for HEIs<sup>10</sup>. In some systems, this has translated into cuts to salaries, infrastructure, public scholarships and funding per student. In other systems, this has been channelled into performance-based funding, whereby HEIs compete for limited resources<sup>11</sup>.

The result of these developments has been a sharpened focus on learning outcomes, general educational 'outputs' and, more directly, labour market insertion of recent graduates. Different systems in Europe are increasingly requiring data on graduate employability and attempting to refine indicators to this effect<sup>12</sup>. Institutional practices are strongly impacted by national data reporting requirements such as external quality assurance (QA) and accreditation measures. A 2015 study by EURYDICE maps the number of countries in Europe with QA systems that require employability data from HEIs (often measured through graduate tracking, provision of career support services and the extent that employers are involved in course development). Most national QA agencies are indeed requiring some form of this.<sup>13</sup>

Graduate employability is also at the core of current EU policies for growth and jobs – namely, 'Europe2020'<sup>14</sup> – and subsequently is a main imperative of the education and training programmes that the EU supports. Employability has also become a primary rationale for academic/professional mobility programmes (like Erasmus) and a key driver for the modernisation of HE systems and institutions. The EU's 'Rethinking Education' Communication (2012)<sup>15</sup> states it bluntly: "European education and training systems continue to fall short in providing the right skills for employability, and are not working adequately with business or employers to bring the learning experience closer to the reality of the working environment. These skills mismatches are a growing concern for European industry's competitiveness". While many would contest the assertion that HEIs fail to work with employers and scarcely develop labour-market prepared graduates, there is admittedly work to be done, and positive examples must be better show-cased. The EU has launched the annual University-Business Forum<sup>16</sup> with this objective in mind, and incorporated several funding strands into Erasmus+ to incentivize university-labour market collaboration.

On the institutional level, employability pressures have had a transformative impact both on operations and on the general accountability culture: HEIs are forced to better consider the professional orientation of their study programmes and develop the metrics to assess this. They are also cultivating more and deeper industry-related partnerships (for research, curricula design and professional placements). Student tracking, alumni relations and general data system management have become increasingly important. A recent study by the EUA<sup>17</sup>, produced as an outcome of the two-year "Track-It" project, mapped institutional 'student tracking' practices, focusing on the student life-cycle (tracking during their educational career and into the labour market). A main conclusion was that institutions need their own data on student success, student employment, and

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<sup>10</sup> The European University Association (EUA) monitors the evolution of public funding to universities in Europe through a Public Funding Observatory: <http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/governance-autonomy-and-funding/public-funding-observatory-tool.aspx>

<sup>11</sup> See the results of the EUA project "Designing Strategies for Efficient Funding for Higher Education in Europe – DEFINE" regarding excellence funding schemes and HEI mergers: <http://www.eua.be/define.aspx>

<sup>12</sup> The 'Track-it' study mapped national approaches to graduate data tracking: M. Gaebel, K. Hauschildt, K. Muhleck, H. Smidt, "Tracking Learners' and Graduates' Progression Paths – Track it", European University Association, 2012

<sup>13</sup> EURYDICE Brief: Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Access, Retention and Employability, March, 2015: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic\\_reports/180EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/180EN.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/targets/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/targets/index_en.htm)

<sup>15</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/newsroom/cf/dae/document.cfm?doc\\_id=2877](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/dae/document.cfm?doc_id=2877)

<sup>16</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/events/2015/2901-euro-uni-business-forum\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/events/2015/2901-euro-uni-business-forum_en.htm)

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/building-the-european-higher-education-area/projects/tracking-learners-and-graduates-progression-paths.aspx>

also on mobility. Unless they track their graduates, institutions have difficulty assessing the real impact of study programmes and their relevance for the labour market. "Track-It" also pointed to the evolving alumni culture in Europe, addressing questions such as how to generate alumni commitment to an institution/study programme in the absence of a concerted cultural precedent for this. The recently released 'Trends 2015'<sup>18</sup> study reports positive developments in this regard; it finds that three quarters of the 451 institutions surveyed in Europe offer career guidance services to students before graduation, and that the same proportion fosters alumni involvement.

### **What does employability entail?**

In light of the current public attention that this topic has received, it must be reiterated that graduate employability is a complex concept that cannot be easily measured by employment data alone. It is dependent on a number of variables that are often beyond the control of the institution, the study programme and the student. In this regard, it is important to distinguish between employability and *employment*; a HEI can potentially do many things to enhance the employability of its graduates but it cannot guarantee their employment as such. The skills, training and general education that HEIs provide are indeed distinct from wider labour market conditions, on which HEIs may have little impact or control. Besides, universities in particular would argue that while one must keep the pulse on current labour market trends, higher education serves the purpose of training adaptable graduates that can also meet *future* labour market and (more broadly) societal needs, and not just those of today.

In addition, the evolving nature of high skilled jobs, to which higher education caters, and the motivations of diverse employers to hire, is increasingly difficult to dissect. Much rhetoric is provided on 'skills' and matching skills training to employer needs. The European Commission (2007)<sup>19</sup>, for example, defined eight key competences to frame the skills debate. It has invested substantially in plotting these skills against the needs of certain sectors and identifying perceived skills shortages<sup>20</sup>. As another example, Allen and Van der Velden (2012)<sup>21</sup> talk about '21<sup>st</sup> century skills' as essential in the current labour market, beyond 'basic' and 'specific' skills. Regardless of what these skills are, policy makers, HEIs and even QA agencies tend to have relentless and somewhat circular discussions about what employers want. The problem is, however, that truly assessing what employers want is a moving target. A recent study funded by the European Commission on higher education graduate employability<sup>22</sup> gets closer, and proposes a more methodologically sophisticated way of dealing with the topic. The diverse factors that may influence how employers from different EU countries may hire are correlated: Extent to which study profile matches the job description, sector and level of subject specificity/technical skills required for the job, value equated to generic skills, current needs and team composition of the hiring organisation, previous professional experience of the candidate, name recognition of the institution where the candidate graduated, desired starting salary, etc. It should be noted that the study tries to assess to what extent employers were looking for a 'right mix' of skills versus a single profile, something that can be hard to tease out in employer surveys. The fact that the study finds that professional skills are critical and that interpersonal skills are becoming more and more

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<sup>18</sup> A. Sursock, 'Trends 2015: Learning and Teaching in European Universities', EUA Publications, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> European Commission (2007), *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Framework*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

<sup>20</sup> EU Skills Panorama: <http://euskills Panorama.cedefop.europa.eu/>

<sup>21</sup> Allen, J. and Van der Velden, R. *Skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Implications for Education*, ROA-RM- 2012/11, Maastricht: ROA. *Higher Education: Recent Trends, Emerging Issues and Future Outlook*, Nova Publishers and M. Humburg and R. van der Velden, *What is expected of higher education graduates in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, Maastricht University School of Business and Economics, 2012:

<sup>22</sup> M. Humburg, R. Van der Velden, A Verhagen, "The Employability of Higher Education Graduates: An Employer's Perspective", Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market, Maastricht University, 2013



important is not revolutionary; but at least some light is shed on the complexity of assessing the skills that employers want, which is naturally contextual.

### **Understanding employability and its link to joint programmes: Current research, causalities and caveats**

With the above in mind, what can be said about joint programmes and employability? And more precisely, what do joint programmes offer that is distinct from other programmes? To answer this question, one needs to consider the relationship between joint programme structure, curricula design, career support services and employer perception when it comes to the eventual employability of graduates. What is more, causalities may be misconstrued; Employers may want certain competencies (language competencies, flexibility, analytical thinking, etc.), for example, but does a student necessarily get these competencies through a joint programme? Or, are students that participate in joint programmes more likely to be pre-disposed with these skills to begin with? Regardless, could it be that a student is *more likely* to get these types of skills through a joint programme, which may be a strong selling point? What can the programme or institution do to enhance the likelihood of employability? There are also clear sector and discipline specific considerations: Are joint programmes of a technical/applied nature more inherently industry oriented, and thus able to boast better employability results? What can be said of joint programmes of a more 'academic' or humanities-related nature? And finally, to what extent is employability dependent on the previous work experience of the students, as well as what level of higher education they are completing (Bachelor-Master-PhD)?

The list of possible questions is long. However, both the anecdotal experiences of students and existing research suggest that graduates of joint programmes, for the most part, have certain advantages on the labour market, namely that they are perceived to have (or they themselves perceive they have) stronger 'transversal' (also referred to as 'generic' or 'soft') skills and intercultural skills, and often better foreign language (mostly English) competency. What is also certain is that many joint programmes have taken measures to enhance and promote this added value, both towards their potential incoming students and in some instance, towards employers in specific sectors. This will be further explored in the forthcoming sections.

In terms of literature, the most considerable evidence comes from studies and surveys that have been conducted for the Erasmus Mundus programme regarding the EM masters' courses (EMMC), funded since 2004<sup>23</sup>. These studies have scanned the opinions of course coordinators, academic staff and students but, to a lesser extent, have covered the perspective of employers. EMMCs are not representative of all joint programmes in Europe (the actual number of existing programmes is estimated to be the thousands<sup>24</sup>), but do provide orientation on the topic. The criteria that define their 'jointness' is dictated and monitored by the European Commission, which selects them according to perceived 'outstanding academic quality'. Of note, the EACEA<sup>25</sup> Synthesis Report<sup>26</sup> (2013) traced the experiences, achievements and lessons learned from 57 EMMCs selected in 2004, 2005 and 2006. By examining course evaluation reports and surveying course coordinators, the study looked at the 'joint nature of the programmes, the extent to

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<sup>23</sup> Evaluations of EM joint doctoral programmes (EMJD) have also been conducted though will not be reviewed in this article given the complexity and distinct nature of joint programme delivery in the doctoral cycle. EMJDs, are now part of the European Commission Marie Curie Skłodowska programme for researcher mobility

<sup>24</sup> Ref. A *European Approach to Joint Programme quality assurance and accreditation*- endorsed by Ministers in the Yerevan Ministerial Summit of the Bologna Process – May 2015

<sup>25</sup> Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission, which manages the Erasmus Mundus programme.

<sup>26</sup> "Joint and International Masters Programmes: Lessons learnt from Erasmus Mundus- The first Generation EACEA Synthesis report", EACEA, Brussels, October 2013.

which they enhanced employability of graduates, and the sustainability prospects for the course beyond EU funding'. In addition, a study explicitly on EMMC and employability was commissioned in 2012 (EMMC 'Cluster' study on employability<sup>27</sup>) which covered a range of topics: career orientation of both the EMMC and the students, alumni networks, assessment of work-related competencies, current employment status of alumni, impact of mobility on employability prospects and international residency issues. It was largely based on student and university staff perceptions from the EMMC. Finally, the aforementioned EMA Graduate Impact Surveys<sup>28</sup> have been conducted since 2009, which ask current EM students and alumni about their career status and the perceived impact of the EMMC on their employability. This relies exclusively on student opinion and tracks those who graduated up to five years ago (as far back as the programme goes). Beyond the assessments of Erasmus Mundus, few studies have reached further to look explicitly at joint programmes and employability, though some will be referenced below.

These studies provide insight on joint programme employability from a number of important angles: the **sectoral and disciplinary perspective** is clearly relevant. In addition, the **design of the programme** (whether or not it includes a **placement** for example) and the provision of **career orientation services** also clearly play. Furthermore, the **knowledge of employers** of joint programmes and their added value is another point of interest, though it has been less explored. Finally, the assessment of the **competencies that graduates of joint programmes demonstrate/acquire** (from the perspective of students, alumni and employers) is a key component of the relative employability of such graduates.

### **Joint programmes and employability from a sectoral/disciplinary perspective**

Little research has been conducted on joint programmes in specific disciplines and their related employability. This was touched briefly upon in the EM Employability Cluster study, which shows that employability does vary per discipline (across the EMMC), at least in terms of how the course orients its content and student services toward the world of work: humanities scored the lowest and 'agriculture and veterinary' and 'health and welfare' scored the highest. 'Career orientation', on which courses were evaluated, was described as career support, placements, cooperation with enterprises, etc. This study was mostly based on the perceptions of students and academics and did not examine employers. The EMA Graduate Impact Study (2014) breaks down course satisfaction by field of study (in relation to the overall quality of the academic provision and not necessarily of employability as such). However, the results are more or less equal across disciplines. Most graduates from social sciences, science and maths, humanities, health, engineering and architecture are 'rather satisfied' with their disciplinary quality, with 'health' yielding the highest satisfaction.

In terms of studies targeting specific fields, an additional Erasmus Mundus Cluster Study was produced in 2012 that related to climate change and sustainable development<sup>29</sup>. It covered 78 EMMCs and EMJDs (EM joint doctorates) connected to this field. Via surveys of students and faculty as well as workshops, the study came up with several observations and suggestions related to employability and linkages with the labour market (amongst other topics); they include enhancing cooperation between academics, business and policy, building internship periods into joint programmes, and, more

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<sup>27</sup> Erasmus Mundus Practical Guidelines – Clustering Joint Programmes and Attractiveness Projects: Joint programmes and Employability

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.em-a.eu/en/erasmus-mundus/graduate-impact-survey.html>

<sup>29</sup> [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus\\_mundus/clusters/documents/survey\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus_mundus/clusters/documents/survey_report_final.pdf)

specifically, the suggestion that supervision panels for joint programmes should incorporate a variety of stakeholders, including industry.

When it comes to what employers may think, the "ADDE SALEM"<sup>30</sup> project (Erasmus Mundus Action 3<sup>31</sup>) looked specifically at dual degrees and employability from a bi-regional perspective (Europe-South America). It focused on engineering and was based on the premise that joint programmes would greatly enhance the employability of South American engineering students. The project entailed local industry/university focus groups and questionnaires assessing need. The fact that the project involved employers from Latin America (Brazil, Argentina, Colombia and Chile) and considered employability from the perspective of European 'partner countries' is indeed novel. The results demonstrated that employers tended to value the additional 'soft' or transversal skills that the graduates of dual degree programmes seemed to obtain (growth, communication and cultural skills) as opposed to a heightened professional orientation or knowledge of the subject matter. The results also demonstrated that dual and joint degrees were scarcely known to employers in Latin American countries, and that, in hiring decisions, employers tended to look more at the fact that a reputable European university name was also on the diploma.

It would be clearly relevant to further explore the relation between joint programmes of specific disciplines and employability/employer perception. When it comes to climate change/sustainable solutions, the suggestions for enhancing employability echo the general recommendations of the Employability Cluster study (the need for more industry collaboration, more placements, etc.). These recommendations are not necessarily contingent upon the discipline. In ADDE SALEM, it is found that soft skills are clearly valued for engineers. One could question what the findings would yield for humanities and social sciences, and whether soft skill development would be as valued as with the engineering sector.

### **Joint programmes and student career services**

Irrespective of the discipline or the reputability of the institutions delivering the joint programme, career services and guidance can clearly impact a student's employability prospects. This is of course true regardless of whether a programme is 'joint' or 'normal', so to speak. According to the Employability Cluster Study, only 36% of the EMMC reviewed offered specific career support services (though the question can be raised, however, whether career services may be the job of the institution more generally, and not just that of the course as such). Certain EMMC course coordinators report on a number of measures they have undertaken to support the employability of their students<sup>32</sup>:

- The International Master in Service Engineering (IMSE)<sup>33</sup> includes companies in the kick-off meeting of the programme, has a 'Company Introduction Day' for students and organises company networking opportunities in both the start-up semester in Tilburg (to help students identify an internship) and during the summer modules. It is also continually adding associated partners from the industry sector.

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<sup>30</sup> ADDE SALEM: "Double degree in Europe, South America Leadership and Employability" Project Report - Ed. G Spinelli, Polyscript 2014, Politecnico de Milano

<sup>31</sup> Erasmus Mundus Action 3 project were EU co-projects funded to promote the attractiveness of European higher education and explore the effects of the Erasmus Mundus programme globally

<sup>32</sup> The examples provided are drawn from EMMC reports to the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) of the European Commission which monitors the EMMC. The information on career services is self-reported from the courses themselves.

<sup>33</sup> [www.erasmusmundus-imse.eu](http://www.erasmusmundus-imse.eu)

- The European Master in Lifelong Learning Policy (MA LLL)<sup>34</sup> organises job shadowing opportunities and involves an associated partner in the consortium (UNESCO's Lifelong Learning Institute, Hamburg) specifically for the purpose of facilitating placements.
- The MSc in Dependable Software Systems (DESEM) supports students to participate in industry sponsored competitions and also has a specific LinkedIn page for alumni.
- A number of EMMC have specific webpages where employability statistics are published, indicating the sectors in which alumni find jobs, the position and level. The Master in International Vintage, Vine, Wine and Terroir management (VINTAGE)<sup>35</sup> is one illustrative example, as well as IMSE and Theoretical Chemistry and Computational Modeling (TCCM)<sup>36</sup>, which has a specific alumni webpage.

While showcasing institutional good practice regarding career support services is clearly beneficial, information on the impact of these efforts could still be improved, particularly from the perspective of employers and students. In the recent EMA Graduate Impact Study, 66.2% of those surveyed felt that 'contacts to potential employers' were lacking from their programmes. Thus there is work to be done. It would be helpful to better understand to what extent the career support services that institutions put in place a) are used and b) have an impact on job insertion. This is once again a general matter for institutional data and tracking, and something that goes beyond joint programmes as such.

### **Joint programmes and placements/internships**

Another factor that plays greatly in the perceived employability of joint programme graduates is the extent to which practical work experience is facilitated by the programme. The EACEA Synthesis Report results echo those of general graduate employability studies (such as *Employability of Higher Education Graduates (2013)*): employability was enhanced by EMMC that involved employers in the quality assessment of academic provision and which provided professional placements during the course as well as strong career guidance. However, there can be difficulties fitting placements into joint programmes that have a high mobility component (e.g. students are already highly mobile for academic purposes thus it is difficult to logistically organise a placement as well). Relatedly, the Synthesis Report points to course length as a possible limiting factor: four semester courses, where the fourth was dedicated to masters' thesis writing and/or a professional placement, were deemed advantageous over two or three semester courses in which the placement simply could not fit. On a positive note, almost all EMMC examined for the Synthesis Report offered a practical placement/internship, though this was not obligatory. One of the recommendations of the report was, naturally, that the placement component should be enhanced. Students and alumni echo this; in the 2014 EMA Graduate Impact Study, 56% of respondents said that a practical experience was lacking from their course. In terms of good practice, a number EMMC, including those cited in the previous section, have included industry partners in the course consortium itself, which allows to both involve employers directly in the programme design and to assist students in planning a placement or internship from the start of the programme with a number of pre-selected industry partners.

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<sup>34</sup> [www.lifelonglearningmasters.org](http://www.lifelonglearningmasters.org)

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.vintagemaster.com>

<sup>36</sup> <http://emtccm.qui.uam.es>

## **Joint programmes and employer awareness**

Beyond placements and the career support services for joint programmes, it is clear that work must be done to study and target the employer side. This pertains to both obtaining feedback and more generally to raising awareness for the joint programme concept.

The previously referenced ADDE SALEM Project entailed a promotional dimension whereby the value of dual degrees towards employers was articulated. In a comprehensive student survey, it was asked “what aspect of the dual degree was promoted towards your employer?” Personal development and knowledge of new technologies ranked high for students and alumni. Employers, as mentioned previously, seemed to value soft skills of graduates over technical knowledge. These subtle mismatches between what the student and the institution may emphasize and what employers are interested in are critical to understand. The project also brought into play the question of employability in the ‘domestic’ labour market, and the fact that employers in different countries outside Europe may have little knowledge of what a joint programme is, not to mention confusion regarding the Erasmus Mundus label. Joint programmes were scarcely known in the Latin American market. A 2011 report of the EMA on EM recognition in Latin America<sup>37</sup> confirms this. Formal recognition, particularly of dual and multiple degrees, was a particular concern and sometimes legislatively impossible. This is primarily due to the fact that multiple degrees are awarded for one period of study, which some institutions and legislators view as fraudulent or unfeasible. Latin American students felt that they first needed their joint programme recognized in their home country/institution (which was exceedingly difficult in some cases) in order for employers to recognize it (and understand it).

One point to consider is that the current discussion on joint programme promotion towards employers tends to focus on the Erasmus Mundus label. While this label has been retained (which at one point was questioned during the development of the Erasmus+ programme in 2012/13), joint programmes exist and extend far beyond courses that bear the Erasmus Mundus brand name. As such, it would be interesting to dedicate more efforts to understanding how to communicate joint programmes as a general concept to the labour market. The Employability Cluster Study did touch upon which aspects of joint degrees can serve as promotional points in career searches, though this was based on the good practice of EMMC exclusively.

## **Joint programmes, (mobility), and competencies**

Contingent upon what institutions and students may communicate to employers are the concrete skills and competencies that students gain from such programmes. Before further examining what is known about joint programmes, competencies and employability, it is helpful to consider studies that have been done more generally on *student mobility*, competencies, and employability. There are indeed many parallels with what is expected from and provided by joint programmes: credit mobility (short-term mobility as opposed to degree mobility) is not typically required in a normal academic programme (as it is in a joint programme), but is often considered an advantage in that it yields certain ‘employable’ skills. The recent Erasmus Impact Study (2014) provides perhaps the most complete European assessment of this to date<sup>38</sup>. It compared mobile students to non-mobile students, as well as the perceptions of 1000 HEIs and about 650 employers. It also tested students both before and after going abroad, attempting to better correlate the development of certain skills to the abroad study period itself. It found that, on average, students have better employability skills after a stay abroad than 70% of all students. Based on their personality traits, they may have a greater

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<sup>37</sup> [http://www.em-a.eu/fileadmin/content/LA\\_chapter/Latin-America-Recognition-2011.pdf](http://www.em-a.eu/fileadmin/content/LA_chapter/Latin-America-Recognition-2011.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Effects of mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalisation of higher education institutions, Publications Office of the European Union, 2014.

predisposition for employability before going abroad, however they increase their employable advantage by doing so (by 42%). 64% of employers consider an international experience as important (which has basically doubled from 2006, when a similar study was done), though 94% admit that what most interests them are generic skills (which could be obtained in various ways): openness, curiosity, problem-solving, confidence, etc. 81% of Erasmus students perceive an improvement in their generic skills after going abroad. These findings are noteworthy in that they clearly associate a gain in employable 'soft skills' when it comes to mobility abroad. Students also expect this; the opportunities to live abroad, meet new people, improve language skills and develop transversal skills remain top motivators for students, whereas enhancing employability only comes after (though it still registers as important with 85% of the students).

This topic was also touched upon in the aforementioned study on *Employability of Higher Education Graduates (2013)*. Employers were asked about the importance of a study abroad experience on a CV when determining whether to invite a candidate for an interview. The results demonstrate that employers tend to prefer graduates who have studied abroad, whether for a whole degree or in part of one (though in a few countries, namely the UK, they may have concerns if the candidate has spent the whole degree abroad). Employers tend to associate studying abroad with a candidate's 'advanced international orientation' and enhanced language skills. They also believe that, in general, it shows the candidate's ability and willingness to deal with new situations, to take risks and to be open to new experiences. Of interest, the majority of employers do not associate study abroad with higher quality of education *per se*, which reinforces the notion that the added value of mobility is, most often, that of generating better 'soft skills' and transversal skills.

As with mobility, the notion that joint programmes enhance 'generic, 'soft', 'transversal' skills is recurrent; In a number of reports received by EMMC coordinators<sup>39</sup>, references are made to the skills that students obtain through their highly integrated mobility experience. This ranges from 'adaptability, flexibility and curiosity' (cited by MESC), to 'board knowledge, critical analysis, and ability to work autonomously and with teams' (cited by VIBOT<sup>40</sup>). One particular transversal skill to note is 'communication skills in a foreign language', about which a number of EMMC boast. One caveat, however, is that most EMMC are taught in English, thus there are limitations to the acquisition of multi-lingual communications skills.

As referenced earlier, in ADDE SALEM, students and employers were asked about 'perceived added value' of dual degree study, particularly related to competencies gained: 'respect for multiculturalism', 'teamwork and communication skills' and 'work in an international context' came out high. Impact on English language capability was also a highly ranked positive outcome. Whether these perceived values are related to the mobility component of the programme, the integration of the curricula or another factor is unknown, however.

In the 2014 EMA Graduate Impact Study, one interesting finding is that the impact of the course on intercultural skills was seen as strongest right after graduation but then faded as graduates gained work experience. This was also confirmed in ADDE SALEM. Regardless, intercultural skills were seen as a selling point for first jobs.

## Conclusions

Higher education institutions, governments, employers and other stakeholders need to adapt and innovate when it comes to addressing graduate employability today and also

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<sup>39</sup> Reports submitted to the EACEA for monitoring purposes. These reports are not public.

<sup>40</sup> EM Masters of Excellence in Vision and Robotics

for the future. It is not simply about getting graduates into jobs, but rather preparing them for a shifty economic and social landscape where creativity, innovation, flexibility, team work, intercultural skills and leadership will all be assets. This requires the deployment of diverse and inventive teaching and learning approaches that not only consider international competencies and skills (and how to teach them) but how to infuse education delivery and course structure with internationality. From both a policy and an institutional perspective, it is speculated that joint programmes have indeed become a pertinent vehicle to do this. What remains complicated is *proving* the linkages between joint programmes and employable graduates, particularly if one is to make the case for investing in such programmes. What is recurrent in the related literature (which tends to focus on the perceptions of students and staff at HEIs) and from the evaluations of the Erasmus Mundus experience in particular, is that graduates of joint programmes tend to have an enhanced repertoire of 'transversal', 'generic' and 'soft' skills, many of which are particularly relevant to international jobs: multicultural sensitivity, adaptability, ability to lead and manage in an international work environment, language skills, etc. What is not clear from the literature, and emphatically difficult to prove, is the added value of the joint programme as such, as opposed to other forms of international education and/or credit mobility plain and simple.

Regardless, emphasizing specific ways in which joint programmes contribute to employability remains important for public policy and for the institutions and students that invest in these programmes, for numerous strategic reasons. It is also important to raise the awareness of employers for such programmes. This remains an issue within Europe but in particular in other regions where the concept is less known and at times fails to be recognised legally (when it comes to joint and dual/multiple degrees specifically). 'Making the case' not only requires more research targeting students, institutions and employers alike, but also articulating the added value of joint programmes with precision: What is a joint programme and why is it unique? And, as opposed to making a broad-brush statement that joint programme graduates are employable, one should rather posit "for what types of jobs may joint programme graduates be most employable/or of most added value?" and "what types of skills do joint programme graduates generally offer, irrespective of their field?" The answer, at least according to the evidence that exists so far, is that such graduates are prime candidates for international careers, both the public and private sector, requiring intercultural awareness, linguistic competency and high adaptability. These graduates may as well, through their repertoire of soft skills, offer clear added value to any number of sector specific jobs, whether they be more locally or internationally oriented. In particular in the hard sciences and engineering, the development of soft skills and international outlook may offer a leg-up over other qualified, locally trained candidates. While students may enhance these types of soft skills through a general academic experience abroad (see the Erasmus Impact Study) and not simply through joint programmes, one must highlight the highly integrated nature of the joint programmes and the fact that the qualification is subsequently, and hopefully, recognized by multiple systems. The fact that Europe is slowly advancing towards the realization of a common quality assurance approach to joint programmes<sup>41</sup> is another potential selling point for employers, for example: Joint programmes are not only subject to the national criteria of quality evaluation and/or accreditation, but a more internationalised approach. This may be particularly relevant for lesser known, smaller and/or developing academic systems, where a local degree may not have as much currency as one from another more globally reputable system.

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<sup>41</sup> A 'European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes' has been adopted by ministers of the EHEA in Yerevan at the recent ministerial summit (May 2015)

These points alone may not sell joint programmes to employers or to funders and policy makers. Thus the case for joint programmes in general must be linked to the myriad other anecdotal and proven benefits: in particular, integration and internationalisation of curricula, heightened academic and institutional collaboration, and guaranteed recognition of studies performed in another institution/system. From this perspective, one can argue that joint programmes are instrumental in the realisation of the European and global labour market; Graduate employability should also be gaged in these terms.

Beyond the general public policy case, it would be important that future research on the impact of joint programmes on employability take up of a number of issues that have been less explored:

1) In the context of graduate impact studies, how are joint programme graduates selling their skills to employers? How is the joint programme 'concept' being communicated and are employers receptive to this? Understanding this question both within Europe, across sectors and in a broader range of non-European countries would be critical. While it is indeed interesting to survey employers, one should approach this with caution. Past research has demonstrated how complicated it is to obtain precise and consistent results on what employers want. In terms of joint programmes and mobility, it has already been demonstrated that employers tend to value the development of soft skills. The objective should rather be to show and better promote how joint programmes contribute to gaining these skills. If anything, employers could be consulted and/or surveyed to understand whether they would perceive a joint programme negatively (as may be the case in certain countries) and why, so as to adjust promotional campaigns.

2) More work should be done to explore joint programmes beyond the Erasmus Mundus framework and the way in which these programmes are tackling the issue of employability. There is a wealth of practice regarding industry engagement in joint programme consortia, student support services and industry placements. EM provides an interesting and vibrant sample, but the reality is that joint programme development is much wider and more stratified across Europe and globally.



## 2. The student perspective

**By Leasa Weimer, PhD.** Knowledge Development Adviser, European Association for International Education; President EMA 2013-2015 (Erasmus Mundus Student Association)

### Abstract

The Erasmus Mundus programme is a distinct academic experience for students. Since its creation in 2004, over 20 000 students from around the globe have pursued an Erasmus Mundus Master's or Doctorate degree. This article highlights the student perspective by exploring the tensions of mobility, academic and cultural learning, and issues surrounding course quality, belonging to a programme of 'excellence' and the benefits of a scholarship programme. First, a central aspect to the student experience is mobility; Erasmus Mundus students travel to and live in at least two countries during their programme. With this mobile experience come opportunities such as belonging to an international network and encountering different cultural understandings and situations. On the other hand, there are also challenges to a highly mobile degree programme such as visa processes, cultural adjustment, and the time and energy consumed moving from one location to another. Another unique feature of the Erasmus Mundus student experience is the intense learning that occurs both within an international classroom and outside the classroom leading to academic knowledge and intercultural competences. Inside the classroom, issues of quality surface related to teaching, an integrated curriculum and course management. The 'excellence' brand of Erasmus Mundus brings with it high expectations from students, yet alumni become loyal to this distinction. Overall, the scholarship scheme that accompanies the programme is perceived by students as a significant benefit to their experience.

### Introduction

From the student's perspective, the Erasmus Mundus experience is a novel academic experience. When alumni speak about it they often become nostalgic and talk about the European countries they have visited and lived in, the lifelong international friends they met, and the academic experience that is often the launching pad for employability: further academic studies and/or successful career paths. Nostalgia aside, the student perspective also comes with challenges such as the cultural adjustment of moving to and living in several European cities, long and complex visa processes and trouble having their degree recognised in their home country.

Since 2004, approximately 20 000 students have participated in the Erasmus Mundus programme. These students and alumni originate from close to 200 countries around the world. Most of the students (over 75%) come from non-EU countries so their perspective includes mobility, not only within Europe, but also intercontinental travel which includes visa applications, long flights, and intense cultural adjustments.

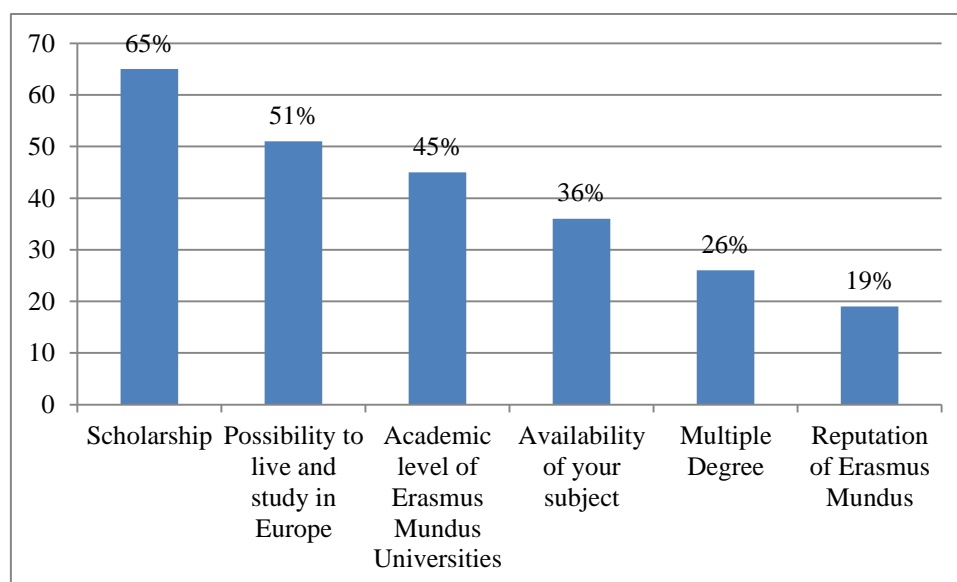
There are challenges with focusing in on the Erasmus Mundus student perspective due to the broad diversity of students and Erasmus Mundus programmes. No two student experiences are the same. This essay highlights a wide array of personal experiences including students pursuing Erasmus Mundus Master's and Doctorate as well as students from the European nations and outside the European borders.

### Influences & Motivation

The motivation to enrol in an Erasmus Mundus programme differs from student to student, as students come to the programmes with a variety of backgrounds and life

situations that influence their decision making process. Academic literature on the international student decision process highlights stages that students experience when deciding to study outside their home country. These five stages demonstrate the complex nature of the international student decision: problem recognition (to stay in home country or go abroad for higher education), information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and finally evaluation of their decision (Maringe & Carter, 2007). During these phases, students are influenced to apply and motivated to enrol in a specific programme due to *push* and *pull* factors (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). The push factors come from the home country that initiate a student’s decision to study elsewhere. The pull factors attract students to consider a specific host country. For Erasmus Mundus students, the influencing and motivating factors are a diverse combination of push/pull factors. Figure 1 reveals the top reasons (the pull factors) that students and alumni chose to enrol in an Erasmus Mundus programme.

Figure 1. The motivating factors influencing students’ decision to enrol in an Erasmus Mundus joint Master’s programme.



ICUnet.AG (2014): Erasmus Mundus Graduate Impact Survey

The scholarship is the highest cited reason for enrolling. The international student market is highly influenced by tuition fees; thus many prospective students base their decision on economic reasons. Some alumni explain how pursuing a Master’s degree in their home country would be a financial burden due to the tuition fees.

*'In my home country, I would have gone in debt while pursuing a Master’s degree and paying high tuition fees. The Erasmus Mundus scholarship allowed me to pursue a Master’s degree without the debt.'*

Other alumni simply explicate that the scholarship was a means to an end, allowing them to attain an international Master’s degree. For example, an alumnus explains, “I applied to gain more international experience and the funding made it possible to get my Master’s --I would not have been able to afford it otherwise.”

The second highest reason for enrolling in an Erasmus Mundus course is the possibility to live and study in Europe. Some students and alumni are influenced by the opportunity to experience European cultures. Others report how the values of the European society are

appealing and motivated them to enrol in the Erasmus Mundus programme. These values are analogous to the Founding Principles of the EU, “respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.” When asked what their motivation was to enrol in an Erasmus Mundus programme, an alumnus elucidates that European values were a driving factor in the decision.

*'... maybe the strongest reason, was to leave my country and move to Europe where tolerance towards LGBT was much better than back home. I wanted to be in a place where I didn't have to be afraid to be myself and Europe was/is that place!'*

During the decision making process, students and alumni may consider several different Masters' programmes. One alumnus describes how they considered not only Europe in their search for a Master's programme, but a few other countries. Yet, at the end of their search, Erasmus Mundus was the most rationale choice.

*'I considered USA, EU, and Australia. The States were very tempting (especially if you are in Computer Science) but it was the most demanding with respect to the requirements. I wanted to start as quickly as possible so I didn't want to spend six months to study/take the GRE, etc. I thought living in the EU for two years would be a good experience and the lavish scholarship was definitely a bonus. So I started to look for courses and found one that matched my background and career plans. The universities were not as highly ranked as in the US, but my Erasmus Mundus course had several professors who were quite well-known in their respective fields. Honestly, I was doubtful whether I took the right decision when I decided to come to EU instead of the US. Now thinking back, I think career wise I might have had better chances in the US but the overall EM experience is something I believe I wouldn't have anywhere else. So I am convinced I made the right decision'.*

## **Mobility**

Mobility is central to the student perspective, as students must live in at least two countries during their joint degree experience, and it makes the programme “stand out of the crowd” as an alumnus reports. Each Erasmus Mundus programme offers a unique mobility scheme within a consortium of partner universities. For example, in the European Literary Cultures programme, students study in both Greece and France while having an option to write their thesis in either Greece or Italy. Some programmes offer a semester in a non-European partner institution. The Master's in Research and Innovation in Higher Education (MARIHE) is an example of this as it includes mobility to four different universities including one semester in a non-European country. The MARIHE students begin the programme in Austria, then move to Finland, the third semester is in China, and the final semester is in Germany. Every incoming student in the PhD in Marine and Coastal Management (MACOMA) studies the first year in Cadiz, Spain and then depending on the student's individual research agenda they spend the second and third year in one or two consortium universities. Thus, the student perspective concerning the mobility of the Erasmus Mundus experience is not universal; it is unique depending on the programme and the mobility scheme.

## **The Opportunities of Mobility**

From a general perspective the frequent mobility inherent to the joint nature of the programme makes the Erasmus Mundus unlike any other educational brand in the world. “In this open communication era, hard knowledge and technical material are no secret any more, but soft knowledge is what makes one university or program more appealing than the others” says an alumnus. The ‘soft knowledge’ of the Erasmus Mundus mobility

experience includes many opportunities for personal growth and learning that comes with moving to multiple different countries over a short period of time, learning new languages, and living in a few cultures unlike their own while being surrounded by classmates, roommates, and people from a diverse array of nationalities.

*'The mobility was very challenging, especially because I had never lived in another country. In the first year, I had to move five times. I remember that I was happy but I wished I had some stability in my life. I felt very motivated that I was able to prove myself within a couple of weeks of arriving to a new country; I was capable of learning the language, taking lessons, making friends and adapting to my new life.'*

The logistics of mobility facilitate personal growth and soft skills development. For example, the art of moving multiple times requires practical skills, flexibility and the ability to adjust to new environments. A great deal is learned from the mobility of the programmes: researching travel and moving options, packing needed belongings, coordinating accommodations in a new location, resettling in a different environment, learning a new language, and building a local support system. Yet, with all of these challenging logistics, some students and alumni embrace the experience.

*'The intense mobility of the Erasmus Mundus programme was the highlight of my Master's degree experience. If I had only studied in one university and one country, I would not have had the rich, challenging, and deep personal growth and intercultural experiences that I had. I really enjoyed moving every six months and became a highly efficient packer, cultural ambassador and savvy traveller.'*

More specifically, the Erasmus Mundus programme allows students to experience multiple European cultures, societies, and languages first hand. According to the Erasmus Mundus graduate impact survey (2014), students and alumni rate their attitude towards Europe and the European Union as one of the greatest impacts of the Erasmus Mundus experience. Often, these personal experiences of living in Europe help in breaking down and transforming negative opinions, as an alumnus explains.

*'The modern world is a global village but opinions and impressions are based on our interactions with various forms of media and not always on direct human contact. In two years, I found myself much more informed about these two European countries and their people than I ever was before. I also got to know people (and their culture) from other European countries that were also doing a mobility programme. The languages and the culture provide you with an insight into social behaviours. This could greatly impact your impressions and opinion about people from other parts of the world. Many people subconsciously become two way ambassadors: the place they come from and the place they have lived.'*

## **The Challenges of Mobility**

There are challenges that come with frequent mobility, including, but not limited to, finding accommodations, working through visa processes, and learning new languages add to the foundational challenge of adjusting to a new culture.

*'The challenges are huge. Moving into a new country is never easy: new language, new norms and new culture. Before [the Erasmus Mundus experience] becomes interesting, there are the usual inconveniences. Accommodations issues, differences in work culture and tiny but delicate differences in social norms can often make you feel uncomfortable before you really begin to adapt.'*

What is essentially unique about the Erasmus Mundus experience is that students do not only experience these challenges once. Due to the joint nature of the programme all students live in at least two countries, thus they are likely to encounter visa processes, new languages, and cultural adjustment more than once and perhaps a little differently from a student who studies at the same university for the full duration of their degree.

One of the most often cited challenges by students and alumni are the visa processes and accompanying expenses. Depending on the home country of the student and the destination country, the visa process varies. For Non-EU/EEA students, visa processes may consist of several forms to fill out, submission of letters of acceptance, higher education institution registration documentation, proof of health insurance, proof of sufficient financial resources to live/study in the host country (i.e. scholarship letter), demonstration of a high level of English language proficiency, and a criminal record from their home country. In some cases, visa processes can be completed online, whereas others must be completed in person with an interview. Visa fees vary between country to country with an estimate of EU€50-600. The number of visa processes an Erasmus Mundus student experiences depends on the mobility scheme of their particular programme.

For some Erasmus Mundus students, the visa challenges begin before they even arrive in Europe and start as early as when they receive the acceptance letter. One alumnus explains how their visa challenge resulted in arriving later than the programme's start date.

*'I received a scholarship letter, and later an invitation letter; both letters were from two different universities; Finland and Sweden. Two letters from two different countries made the embassies get confused and therefore unable to deliver my visa!! I missed the introductory course (in Sweden) which lasted one month. The visa situation took about three months to get a one year resident permit stamped in my passport.'*

Other students in the programme experience visa challenges during their academic programme. An alumnus explains how their first year visa process in France was easy, but the second year proved to be much more difficult.

*'... in order to get a Portuguese visa you need your criminal records. This document can only be requested by the person that the criminal records belongs to and has to be done in my home country. Plus, it only has a validity of 10 days. I couldn't go to my home country because of economic reasons and I would have had to take many days off the Master's. The easiest way to get a visa was renewing my French visa. Of course, I had to return to France for a month and it was almost impossible to rent an apartment and get the documents needed to prove I was living in France.'*

In addition to the challenges of differing visa processes, students are challenged by cultural and language adjustments. The management of some Erasmus Mundus programmes, however, are proactive and help minimise the initial cultural adjustments by helping students with mobility logistics, language translation, and other services. For example, many European universities offer a buddy system, matching local students with international students, to help integrate international students into the local environment. Here, a student explains how helpful the Erasmus Mundus course coordinator and buddy were in facilitating the mobility logistics and helping them overcome the initial cultural shock of moving to Spain.

*'Our Spanish coordinator ensured that all of us were picked up by somebody in the main train station who personally escorted us to our accommodation. [The coordinator] helped view and book accommodations for us, explained the contract and translated to us all that the landlords said. [The coordinator] also brought us to the police station to get our residence card settled, etc. Without the coordinator, we'd be so lost.'*

Some alumni share stories of how the local language served as an initial barrier.

*'...the first month I was alone because my flatmates/colleagues at the University came in late. I barely spoke the language and because our flat was the old one, I needed to buy gas or "butano" which was being sold very early in the morning by a person roving around. At the time, I did not know how to buy it and how to set that up so I ended up boiling water for my bath using my small water boiler. I adjusted quite fast because except for the problem with hot bath, I just got my food from the Moroccan cafe and University cafe.'*

### **Learning: In- and out-of-the-classroom**

Another distinctive aspect of the Erasmus Mundus experience is the intensive learning that occurs both in- and out-of-the-classroom. The formal learning outcomes of each programme are unique according to the discipline and specific coursework, yet the curriculum is integrated across the consortia members. Over the life of the Erasmus Mundus programme approximately 300 joint degree programmes have been funded. With this number of programmes, there's a lot of diversity, but there are also a few exclusive aspects of teaching and learning that are similar among Erasmus Mundus programmes.

Erasmus Mundus classrooms are international in the sense that the students come from different countries and the professor is either from the local country or an international scholar invited to teach in the programme. Most students come to the Erasmus Mundus classroom with other degrees and years of practical experience. In many programmes, the students come in as a cohort wherein they take courses together and in essence become an academic family. As an alumnus explains, the essence of this international classroom makes the Erasmus Mundus student perspective unique.

*'There were 17 in my cohort and we represented 12 different countries, which made the classroom environment dynamic and extraordinarily international. I learned a great deal from my classmates, not only from the cultural perspectives they offered, but also from their professional and practical knowledge of the field.'*

The academic learning that occurs in Erasmus Mundus is not only dependent on the coursework and professors, but also from the interaction and engagement with others inside and outside the international classroom.

*'My classes were extremely diverse and I think one of the best features of my studies was the opportunity to interact with students from all over the world. I learned as much if not more going to coffee with my classmates as I did in the classroom.'*

Some Erasmus Mundus courses are taught by invited international scholars. One alumnus speaks to how this was the highlight of their academic experience.

*'In my Master's programme, the founders/gurus of the subjects were teachers. What more can a student expect in terms of getting educated under the guidance of the best in the subject?'*

Since many Erasmus Mundus students come from different academic settings, adjusting to the style of teaching by European and international scholars added to the learning.

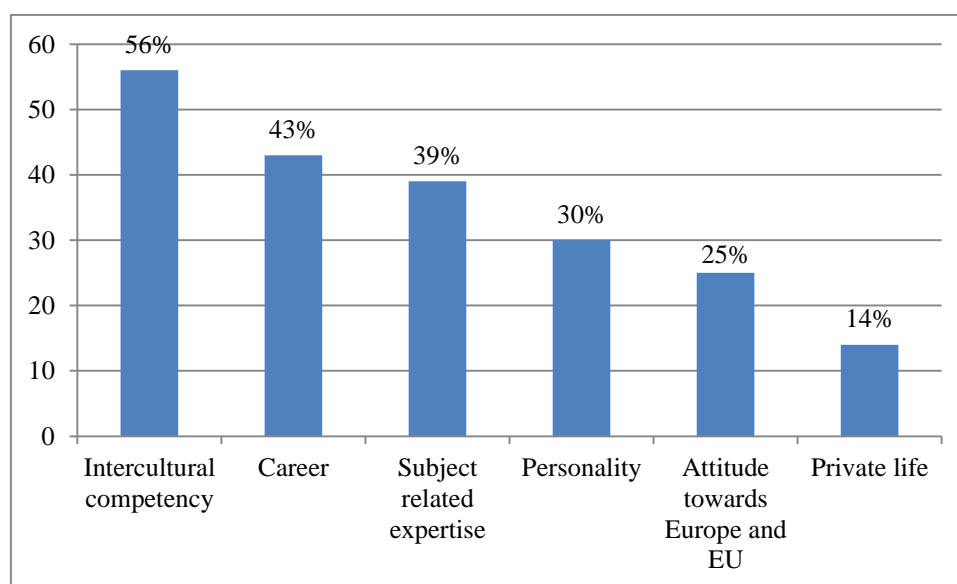
*'I come from India and the Erasmus Mundus programme was my first experience of living and studying abroad by myself. As such, the learning curve, both inside and outside the classroom was very steep! Within the classroom, I was introduced to a completely different style of teaching and learning than what I was used to back home, and I benefited immensely from it.'*

This alumnus addresses how the classroom, integrated curriculum, and out-of-classroom experiences come together to make for a holistic Erasmus Mundus learning environment.

*'The student needs to adjust to the learning/teaching methodology adopted from each university which is very different and at the same time quickly adapt to the social environment and become an active part of the student life. Imagine a study space consisting of different nationalities; different beliefs, cultures, religion etc. come together for a common collective objective of studying in an Erasmus Mundus Master's programme. This helps a student to critically evaluate the affairs related to the world, education, and lifestyle. The experiences help the student to break down cultural, educational, and other barriers. So all in all the quality of Erasmus Mundus Master's programme combined with learning outside the classroom is what make an EM course so attractive and one of the best experiences a student can have. After all it's not just about how smart or knowledgeable you are in the subject, it's also about what attitude you have and develop through life experiences.'*

Whether it is in the international classroom or outside the classroom, students develop their intercultural skills. As demonstrated in figure 2, the most cited impact of the Erasmus Mundus programme for students is intercultural competency. This is a key point as it relates to the overall objective of Erasmus Mundus. Also high on the greatest impact list is subject related expertise which results from the academic rigor of the integrated curriculum.

Figure 2. The greatest impact of Erasmus Mundus joint programme.



ICUnet (2014): Erasmus Mundus graduate impact survey

## Quality & Excellence

Erasmus Mundus is promoted as a programme of excellence. It has been compared to and described as Europe's response to the USA Fulbright program (Weimer, 2008). When Erasmus Mundus was in the early stages of being envisioned, the aim was to promote the European higher education profile as a centre of excellence in learning (European Commission, 2002). Throughout the evolution of the programme, the policy documents describe Erasmus Mundus as a programme of excellence. For example, in the 2003 decision to create the programme, the objectives included offering a quality higher education flagship product and recruiting highly qualified graduates and scholars to participate (European Commission, 2003). In 2008, the discourse around excellence continued, "It helps attract the best students from third countries due to the quality of the studies on offer, the quality of the reception arrangements and a scholarship scheme that can compete with any in the world" (European Commission, 2008). As the global market for international talent continues to grow, the Erasmus Mundus programme offers the EU a competitive advantage in the market. "The Erasmus Mundus programme contributed to strengthen Europe's competitive advantage in higher education by helping higher education systems to offer a more homogeneous image under the joint programmes" (EC, 2012). Within the Erasmus+ programme, Erasmus Mundus continues as a programme of excellence.

The Erasmus Mundus Student and Alumni Association (EMA) works closely with the European Commission to promote the brand around the world at universities and educational fairs. EMA established 12 regional chapters covering 174 countries with the main aim of promoting European higher education and specifically the Erasmus Mundus programme. Over the 10 years of the programme's existence, alumni from around the world continue to market the brand as a programme of excellence for the best and brightest global talent. Students and alumni of the programme often discuss how the element of excellence translates in the international classroom.

*'The excellence of Erasmus Mundus Master's and PhD students has met more than my expectations. Almost all of the Erasmus Mundus students are excellent in terms of academic and interpersonal skills. Many of them have chosen the Erasmus Mundus programme instead of going to traditional top universities in the US and worldwide. Having said this, there is a lot of room for improvement on the academic and administrative quality of the Erasmus Mundus Master's and PhD programmes.'*

With the branding of excellence, though, comes a high expectation for quality. During the programme students expect high quality courses, professors, mobility logistics, management of the programme, and coordination and integrated curriculum across the university partners. Throughout the evolution of the programme, students voice their concerns about the expectations that come along with the excellence brand and the quality of their experience, as this alumnus addresses.

*'Not all courses (or universities) offered the same quality and for some courses the level was not 'excellent' (I would define them as 'acceptable'). I did expect a bit more on this level. So in general, while I'm quite happy with Erasmus Mundus, I do think that the 'excellence label' is in my experience, a bit exaggerated'.*

In 2012, the Erasmus Mundus Student and Alumni Association created an advisory board, Course Quality Advisory Board (CQAB), explicitly focused on the programmes' quality. The aim includes helping students address complaints related to quality, conducting an annual student survey to assess the quality of student services, and training and supporting the elected programme representatives to work with their



consortium coordinators on quality assurance. Every year CQAB volunteers disseminate the signature course quality student survey results to each course coordinator and programme representative as a way to encourage and facilitate two-way communication -- between coordinators and students -- on quality issues. The survey serves as a valuable feedback mechanism to maintain and improve the excellence of courses.

## Scholarships

The Erasmus Mundus scholarship programme has undergone several significant changes since its inception in 2004. The first funding cycle (2004-2008) offered scholarships to only non-EU/EEA students and scholars. The second funding cycle (2009-2013) opened up to include European students and scholars, in addition to the non-EU/EEA students and scholars. However, the scholarship amounts between European and non-EU/EEA students were not equal. The Erasmus+ (2014-2020) funding continues offering scholarships to both non-EU/EEA and European students and scholars and now the monthly scholarship allowance for European and Non-EU/EEA scholarship amounts are equal. Therefore, depending on which year a student participated in the Erasmus Mundus programme, the dynamics of their classmates depended greatly on the scholarships offered. For example, an alumnus from a programme funded in 2006 to 2008 explains how there were no Europeans in their cohort which made the classroom lack the European student perspective.

The Erasmus Mundus scholarships add to the overall distinction of the programme. "The scholarship acts to recognise your previous education and kind of validates you as an elite, high performing student." Scholarship programmes are inherently competitive; prospective students are attracted to them for obvious economic rationales, but also intrinsic and extrinsic factors. It is prestigious to have a scholarship. A scholarship programme has a dimension of merit; there is an assumption that only those deserving students with excellent academic and professional backgrounds are selected. The scholarship serves as a competitive instrument to recruit global talent. The scholarship is a way to recruit the best students by offering a lucrative offer to study in Europe. It makes the joint degree more attractive when compared to offers in other countries without financial assistance.

*'When I received the scholarship letter, I felt very proud that they had recognized all of the hard work I have put into my previous studies and professional work. At the same time, I was humbled by the prestigious offer of a scholarship in Europe.'*

The scholarship also allows students coming from unequal socio-economic backgrounds the opportunity to participate in the same programme. As one alumnus explains, "being from a humble background, the scholarship makes you believe that quality education is not just for the rich ones."

## Conclusion

The Erasmus Mundus experience is unique for every student depending on what motivated them to enrol, the specific mobility scheme of their programme, the dynamics of the international classroom and the teaching/learning experience, and their perception of the excellence and quality of the programme. There is, however, a common experience that every Erasmus Mundus student experiences: moving to, studying and living in multiple European countries for the pursuit of a distinct joint degree.

From the students' perspective, the Erasmus Mundus brand and experience is special when compared to other traditional degree programmes. The scholarship scheme and opportunity to study and live in multiple European countries entices prospective students to select and enrol in Erasmus Mundus programmes. While there are challenges to

moving, studying, and living in several European countries within the short duration of a degree period, the opportunities for personal growth, intercultural and soft skills are viewed as key beneficial aspects of the joint programme. Learning in an international classroom with integrated joint curriculum, a cohort of people from around the world, and being taught by international scholars in the field also adds to the distinction of the programme. The excellence brand of the programme, however, brings with it high expectations; as students expect a high quality academic experience and efficient and supportive student services. Overall, the uniqueness of the programme leads to an enriching life experience, one in which alumni never forget.

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### 3. Joint Programmes: Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Awarded Degrees

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#### Introduction

Under the impulse of the Erasmus Mundus programme, the last decade has seen a rapid expansion of higher education institutions offering joint programmes. According to the European Association for International Education (2015), the development of joint programmes has not halted. A majority of internationalisation practitioners reported that they perceived an increase in joint programmes at their institutions over the last three years. Nevertheless, joint programmes are still considered a challenge for both higher education institutions and national authorities. Institutions organising joint programmes are confronted with some of the most enduring incompatibilities of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Over the last twenty years, this context of incompatibilities has highly influenced the quality assurance of joint programmes and the recognition of the degrees they award.

Joint programmes are now understood to be "*An integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions and leading to double/multiple degrees or a joint degree*" (Aerden & Reczulska, 2013)<sup>42</sup>. Although this is a rather recent definition, international joint programmes have been around for quite some time. In the nineties of the twentieth century, the amount of joint programmes was small and only few were - in hindsight - considered successful. Some of the pioneering and successful programmes are still around though, such as the European Master of Law and Economics founded in 1990<sup>43</sup>, the Master in International Humanitarian Action founded in 1993<sup>44</sup>, and the European Master in Human Rights and Democratisation founded in 1997<sup>45</sup>. Joint programmes would probably have remained a marginal phenomenon if it was not for the Bologna Process and the European Commission's Erasmus Mundus Programme.

In the preparatory report for the Bologna Process' ministerial meeting in Prague in 2001, joint programmes were actually introduced as an indicator. Their increase would indicate the development of European co-operation and the concretisation of the European Higher Education Area. (Lourtie, 2001) The same report also forewarned that the quality of these programmes should be ensured with the same standards as traditional provision. In the resulting Prague Communiqué (2001) of the ministerial conference, the Ministers called upon the higher education sector to increase the development of "*curricula offered in partnership by institutions from different countries and leading to a recognized joint degree*". It is after the ministerial meeting in Prague that joint programmes started to be regarded "*as a means of achieving the objectives set in the Bologna Declaration*". (Zgaga, 2003) A Bologna Seminar on Joint Degrees organised in May 2002 basically foresaw the developments for the coming decade: joint degrees require national recognition, these degrees should be documented in a single document issued by the participating institutions, the programmes should require student and staff/teacher mobility, general standards for quality assurance and accreditation should be developed,

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<sup>42</sup> As included in the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes* adopted by the European ministers in charge of higher education in May 2015 (Yerevan Communiqué, 2015)

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.emle.org/index.php/why-emle/what-is-law-economics> (retrieved 21 May 2015)

<sup>44</sup> [http://www.nohanet.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&id=178&Itemid=648](http://www.nohanet.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=178&Itemid=648) (Retrieved 21 May 2015)

<sup>45</sup> [http://eeas.europa.eu/human\\_rights/ema/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/human_rights/ema/index_en.htm) (retrieved 22 May 2015)

and, finally, an EHEA label should be introduced. (Ministry of Education and Science of Sweden, 2002)

By 2003, joint programmes had not really taken off. The Trends 2003-report made clear that neither joint programmes nor joint degrees received sufficient attention and that most ministries and rectors' conferences attach only medium or even low importance to these. This explains why in 2003 in practically all of the Bologna Process countries, legislation did not allow the awarding of joint degrees. (Reichert & Tauch, 2003) This is not something to be glanced over. In spite of the appeal in the Prague Communiqué (2001), joint programmes and joint degrees did not figure in national higher education policy. Nevertheless, the Trends 2003-report also signalled that this inertia might change soon and that both higher education institutions and governments would be strongly encouraged to realise the full potential of joint degrees by a new initiative proposed by the European Commission.

With the start of the Erasmus Mundus Programme in 2004, joint programmes really took flight. The appeal of this funding programme decisively put joint programmes on the agenda of national authorities. And then when the first students graduated, questions about the degrees to be awarded and degrees actually awarded were brought to the attention of national authorities and attracted attention of recognition bodies, such as ENIC-NARICs.

## **Recognition of degrees**

In European higher education, recognition is defined as "*a formal acknowledgement by a competent authority of the value of a foreign educational qualification with a view to access to educational and/or employment activities*". This definition was coined in 1997 by the *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region*, also known as the Lisbon Recognition Convention. It stipulates that degrees and periods of study must be recognised unless substantial differences can be proven by the institution or authority that is charged with this recognition. In the large majority of European countries, higher education institutions are autonomous regarding recognition and take their own decisions when admitting students with foreign degrees. Recognition bodies such as ENIC-NARICs generally do not take recognition decisions, but offer information and advice on foreign degrees and education systems. Still, ENIC-NARICs have played an important role in bringing degrees awarded by joint programmes to the attention of national authorities and institutional credential evaluators.

In the year that the Erasmus Mundus Programme kicked off, the Committee of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, responsible for promoting the Convention and overseeing its implementation, adopted the *Recommendation on the recognition of joint degrees* (2004). This Recommendation brings joint degrees under the legal framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. It underlines that the basic principles regarding recognition also apply to joint degrees (and multiple degrees, since the Recommendation's definition is quite broad). In addition, it sets specific requirements that these degrees should fulfil, such as the use of ECTS and the award of a Diploma Supplement describing all parts of the degree. This Recommendation is currently under revision and a revised version is expected to be adopted in 2016.

Since the Recommendation, ENIC-NARICs have continued their efforts to build on the Lisbon Recognition Convention and establish a common 'framework of practice' for the recognition of degrees, including those awarded by joint programmes. This eventually led to a recognition manual. In the Bucharest Communiqué (2012), the European ministers responsible for higher education recommended the use of the *European Area of*

*Recognition Manual "as a set of guidelines for recognition of foreign qualifications and a compendium of good practices"*. This manual provides a practical translation of the abstract principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. It builds on the *Recommendation on the recognition of joint degrees* and includes specific recommendations on how to recognise joint and multiple degrees awarded for joint programmes.

The most important aspect of the common 'framework of practice' is the encouragement to recognise joint degrees at least as favourable as any other foreign degree that is (nationally) recognised. This really captures the issue well. A degree awarded for a joint programme is in fact not really a national one and, if a home institution is involved in the joint programme, it is not entirely foreign as well. To explain this, we need to explore the ways degrees can be awarded.

## Degree awarding

When higher education institutions involved in offering the joint programme award separate documents after successful completion of this joint programme, this award is referred to as a **multiple degree**. It is important to stress here that only the combination of the separate documents should be regarded as the degree. It is in fact a multiple degree because there are multiple documents that combine to create the degree; not because a graduate receives multiple individual degrees. In reality, in most higher education systems it is difficult to distinguish a degree awarded for a regular programme from a document awarded as part of a multiple degree. This means that generally a multiple degree is perceived as a combination of several individual degrees. (Aerden & Reczulska, 2013)

A **double degree** is a type of multiple degree but here only two documents are awarded. Double degrees are often referred to in one breath with dual degrees. Where double degrees are awarded by joint programmes, dual degrees are not. **Dual degrees** are awarded for two programmes separately. These two programmes have some coordination and coordinated elements but, contrary to joint programmes, the curriculum is not integrated and not jointly offered. In case of a dual degree, each institution is primarily responsible for its own curriculum and its own degree. Dual degrees have also been awarded by single institutions offering their students "*efficiencies in course taking*". (Olds, 2011)

A **joint degree** is a single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme. It therefore replaces all institutional or national degrees of the joint degree awarding institutions. A joint degree is indeed awarded jointly by higher education institutions that offer the programme but not necessarily by all. The awarded single document is nationally (i.e. in all higher education systems) acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme. Each institution involved in awarding the joint degree therefore cannot award an additional nationally recognised degree. (Aerden & Reczulska, 2013)

## Multiple degrees

In general, multiple degrees are regarded as the easiest form of degree awarding for joint programmes. This is mainly due to the fact that most higher education institutions interpret multiple degrees as the combination of individual, regular degrees. And if an institution can award a regular, nationally recognised degree, it can also award this regular degree as part of a multiple degree. The joint programme consortia even use this interpretation to market themselves. The multiple degree is often presented as one of the

joint programme's key features and it is explicitly pointed out that all the awarded degrees are officially recognised in the countries involved.<sup>46</sup> This approach however comes with its own problems. First, the award of multiple, nationally recognised degrees can be regarded as the double counting of academic work *"thus jeopardising the integrity of a university qualification, and moving towards the thin edge of academic fraud"* (Knight, 2014). Second, the documents awarded are not always all nationally recognised, not as a degree and/or not as part of a multiple degree. There can be innocent reasons for this, such as the case of an institution that is not allowed to award degrees for students that were not actually enrolled at the institution but the institution does so anyway in the framework of a joint programme. But there can also be more malicious motives, such as institutions that are not allowed to award degrees at a certain level or in a particular discipline but does so anyway (most often by calling it a "certificate"). In this way, multiple degrees can facilitate institutions in evading their national legislation. (Aerden & Reczulska, 2010) Third, as a result of the way joint programmes "market" their multiple degrees, graduates include the distinct individual degrees on their CVs. This conceals the joint programme and confuses potential employers. These issues with the multiple degree undermine the reputation and the perceived excellence of joint programmes.

The award of multiple degrees is often preferred by joint programme consortia because of legal and practical reasons: either it is impossible to confer a joint degree (e.g. the legal framework of one of the partner institutions does not allow this award) or the legal preconditions bring about too many practical problems (e.g. the legally prescribed template). In fact, almost none of the European legal frameworks create specific conditions for awarding multiple degrees, thus treating these degrees as conventional degrees. This exacerbates the issues outlined above.

For the sake of transparency and legality, national and institutional authorities should create specific conditions for awarding documents as part of a multiple degree, and prohibiting the award of a regular degree as part of a multiple degree. The conditions for awarding a degree as part of a multiple degree should make the awarded documents distinguishable from regular degrees and identify them as one of the documents comprising the multiple degree. For this, the document should for example explicitly state that it has been awarded as part of a multiple degree and thus void if not presented alongside the rest of the multiple degree. And because of the problems outlined above, the award of a multiple degree should come with the same rights and obligations as the award of a joint degree.

## **Joint degrees**

Joint degrees are regarded as the toughest type of degree awarding. It requires the institutions in the joint programme consortium to replace their institutional or national degrees with one document and this single document needs to be issued as stipulated in all the institutional and national legal frameworks of the awarding institutions. Given the required effort, joint programme consortia regard the award of a joint degree as a demonstration of responsibility and ownership. It is even claimed that joint degrees reinforce a joint programme's credibility towards its (internal) stakeholders. When the Erasmus Mundus Programme started, the award of a joint degree was more or less impossible because most institutional and legal frameworks did not make allowance for such degrees. The joint degrees that first appeared were therefore not really joint degrees but cover certificates. Here, institutions award their own national degrees and in addition award a "cover certificate" jointly. The cover certificate carries all the logos of the institutions but is in itself not a recognised award, the underlying national degrees are. Indeed, joint degree awareness was not that high when the Erasmus Mundus

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<sup>46</sup> See for example: <http://www.emle.org/index.php/why-emle/advantages/multiple-degrees>.

Programme started.<sup>47</sup> Still the Programme has kept requesting the award of joint degrees from potential and existing joint programme consortia. The appeal of Erasmus Mundus and the European Commission's focus on joint degrees kept joint degrees high on the agenda of European higher education. The resulting pressure of higher education institutions on their national authorities to implement or adapt the legislation governing the award of joint degrees can be regarded as a demonstration of how the Erasmus Mundus Programme acted as a lever for changes in national legal frameworks. As a result, practically all national legal frameworks now accommodate the award of joint degrees. The legal reality however still discourages joint programme consortia from doing so. It is not difficult to find examples of these discouraging legal realities. First, some legal frameworks require the use of a specific template to award a joint degree. This rather imperialistic requirement ignores the fact that if other countries also require their own template, institutions from these countries cannot jointly award a degree. Second, some legal frameworks require that degrees or qualifications are awarded in the national language. This constraint is sometimes limited to the section regarding the institution, the legal basis and the (national) title on the degree but it can also extend to a part of or even the full degree. As a result, a combination of such requirements can make a joint degree incomprehensible. This undermines the efforts of joint programme consortia to make their degrees as transparent and informative as possible for the labour-market. Third, institutions do not always have the right to award and/or sign the degree themselves, obliging the joint degree to go through a national awarding and/or signing procedure. The whole procedure to have the joint degree signed by all competent authorities of the awarding institutions can then take a tiresomely long time. This in turn leads to complaints from graduates and harms the reputation of the joint programme. Fourth, some institutional and legal frameworks only allow the award of a joint degree to students actually enrolled (thus not just registered) at the institution, to students who physically studied at the institution and/or to students who completed a minimum amount of credits (e.g. 15 ECTS). This can be a tall order for joint programme consortia. It requires several different designs of joint degrees. Each version restricted to the institutions where that student actually enrolled, physically studied and/or completed the required amount of credits. Each of these versions then necessitates different procedures to get them signed by the corresponding competent authorities of the institutions involved. The simplest solution is often to have the institutions under such regulations to award their own national degree while the rest of the consortium awards a joint degree. This combination of a joint degree with (a) national degree(s) is in fact a multiple degree, although, as mentioned above, none of the documents will probably state this.

The discouraging institutional and legal realities listed above obstruct the award of joint degrees. The current state of affairs shows that these idiosyncratic regulations are difficult to overcome. European higher education therefore requires coherent deregulation and coordinated legislation. Coherent deregulation eliminates all regulation that actually extends beyond national borders and imposes requirements on foreign partner institutions. Coordinated legislation is the result of a joint identification of minimal and maximal preconditions for the award of the joint degree and the requirements for the content and design of such a document. National and institutional legal frameworks should then be aligned to the bounds of these preconditions. Coordinated legislation requires a framework of cooperation, a method of coordination, and a system of monitoring, such as the Bologna Process provides. To be effective however, the European Commission will need to act as a catalyst and include the identified minimal and maximal preconditions in its funding instruments.

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<sup>47</sup> This also explains how one such cover certificate made a short appearance on Erasmus Mundus' Good Practices webpage as an example of a joint degree.

## Recognisable degrees

As a result of an increasing body of evidence, such as the degrees awarded by Erasmus Mundus joint master's programmes, and of projects co-funded in the framework of the Erasmus Mundus Programme<sup>48</sup>, there now seems to be agreement around the (additional) minimal requirements for recognising a joint degree. First, the information provided by the joint programme consortia on their degrees and Diploma Supplements support readability towards recognition. Second, the awarding institutions are recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries and each institution is legally entitled to award a joint degree for this type of programme (level, orientation, discipline, professional title). Since these requirements are now widely communicated and because of the European Commission's effort in globally branding 'Erasmus Mundus', the problems first encountered with the recognition of multiple and joint degrees have dissipated.

Some problems persist though, mainly in higher education systems where even the recognition of regular degrees is already perceived as burdensome. Two important elements can be distinguished. First, in these higher education systems foreign degrees can only be recognised if the same or almost identical degree is also awarded by its higher education institutions. Joint programmes are however most often excellent examples of interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary and innovative approaches. This means they award degrees that do not have a counterpart in most of the higher education systems worldwide. The recognition of these degrees is then by default problematic. Second, in these higher education systems the body of evidence is still rather small. As a result multiple and joint degrees are still regarded as curiosities.

The further opening up of Erasmus Mundus consortia to institutions from the rest of the world is increasingly helping to overcome the issues above. A more concerted approach within Erasmus Mundus, and the European Commission as a whole, towards the award of the degree, the design of such documents, and the branding of 'Erasmus Mundus' should further alleviate persisting recognition issues.

In addition, more authoritative information on the awarded degrees is required. A joint programme platform under the label of Erasmus Mundus could provide such information. The platform should include a Google-like search engine to find all joint programmes (offered in Europe) and the degrees they award. It would present the essential information for making the degrees awarded by joint programmes recognisable.

## Quality assurance of joint programmes

In addition to the requirements mentioned above, the *EAR-Manual* points out that for recognition purposes the joint programme for which the joint degree is awarded, should be quality assured and/or accredited. Since joint programmes involve many different higher education institutions, their quality assurance necessitates either separate quality assurance and accreditation procedures in all relevant countries or the recognition of one agency's results in all other relevant higher education systems.

Already in 2002, European higher education institutions agreed that "*institutions awarding the joint degree are responsible for quality – in line with the principles stipulated by their national systems*" (Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002). By 2003, 80% of higher education institutions in Europe were undergoing external quality assurance procedures in some form or another. (Reichert & Tauch, 2003) The introduction of Erasmus Mundus master's programmes into higher education systems really drew the attention of quality assurance and accreditation agencies. Their procedures towards joint

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<sup>48</sup> E.g. the JOQAR-project, Joint Programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of degrees awarded (2010-2013)



programmes were however not coordinated and this led to approaches that are still in use today.

When classifying the quality assurance procedures regarding joint programmes, two elements are decisive: who is responsible for the procedures and what is actually assessed in the procedure. A procedure can be the responsibility of one quality assurance agency (i.e. a single procedure) or of several agencies (i.e. a cooperative procedure). This procedure can be used to assess only a part of the joint programme (i.e. limited assessment) or the whole joint programme (i.e. comprehensive assessment). These elements can be combined to classify quality assurance procedures regarding joint programmes.

In a **single, limited procedure**, one quality assurance agency undertakes the assessment of a part of the joint programme. Most often this means that a national quality assurance agency only looks at the teaching and learning offered by the national institution(s) involved in the joint programme. A **single, comprehensive procedure** on the other hand denotes a procedure undertaken by one quality assurance agency in which the whole joint programme is assessed. Here, the teaching and learning across the different locations is explicitly included. The **cooperative, comprehensive procedure** refers to a procedure in which two or more quality assurance agencies are responsible for the procedure and jointly assess the whole joint programme. The **cooperative, limited procedure** concerns two or more quality assurance agencies assessing a part of the joint programme. Globally, this is the least common procedure. There are however examples of quality assurance agencies cooperating regionally and assessing the components of the joint programme offered in that region.

### Cooperative, comprehensive procedures

With the advent of the Erasmus Mundus Programme, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) initiated the Transnational European Evaluation Project II (TEEP II). The final report of this project (2006) recommended cooperative, comprehensive procedures to externally quality assure joint programmes. These joint procedures would have to be carried out by two quality assurance agencies from two of the relevant higher education systems. The outcomes of these assessments would then *"be recognised as valid, after mutual agreement, for all the countries whose universities are involved in the programme"*.

There have been examples of ad hoc arrangements, but the cooperative nature proposed by TEEP II never really took hold among quality assurance agencies. As a result, the cooperative, comprehensive procedure never methodologically matured and was not incorporated into any legal frameworks.

### Single, comprehensive procedures

In 2007, the members of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA) adopted the *Principles for accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes*. These principles regard single (accreditation) procedures and explicitly state: *"The panel makes its assessment on the totality of the joint programme, including taking into account the learning outcomes aimed for by the joint programme irrespective of the individual study pathways"*. Since this procedure provides a complete perspective on the quality of the joint programme, the single, comprehensive procedure is indeed the most correct, especially if an accreditation decision is called for. It is however less favoured by joint programmes if the outcome of such a procedure (e.g. assessment report, accreditation decision) is not recognised in all or most of the relevant countries. Without this cross-border recognition of the outcomes, joint programmes will need to be comprehensively assessed by all the competent quality assurance agencies undertaking programme assessments. Depending on the size of the consortium a joint programme

might then be under more or less continuous external assessment. This approach can also be embarrassing for the quality assurance agencies involved. Since they use different assessment standards and criteria to assess the same joint programme, they can come to conflicting outcomes. This has indeed happened occasionally in the past but is now a rather exceptional phenomena.

## **Bilateral and mutual recognition**

From its inception in 2003, the primary aim of ECA is the mutual recognition of quality assurance and accreditation decisions. The members of ECA developed common practice and principles which eventually led to *Bilateral Mutual Recognition Agreements* of which twelve were signed in 2007. The bilateral approach is not easily transferable to the whole of Europe and beyond since it requires ten bilateral agreements to cover just five agencies. In 2010, ECA initiated the JOQAR-project, a project co-funded by the Erasmus Mundus Programme. This project led to the *Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes* (MULTRA). To be admitted to the MULTRA a quality assurance agency must be externally evaluated<sup>49</sup>. The MULTRA has been signed by agencies from Austria, Belgium, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and Spain. These agencies can use their own assessment methodology while their accreditation decision regarding a joint programme will be recognised by all the other MULTRA signatories. For agencies not willing or able to join the MULTRA, the JOQAR-project developed an *Assessment Framework for Joint Programmes in Single Accreditation Procedures*. When a joint programme is assessed using this framework, i.e. the common assessment methodology, the outcomes can be recognised in all other relevant higher education systems. To achieve this goal, the framework consists of two building blocks: the European shared component and the relevant national components. The European shared component covers the core elements of European programme assessment. The national components on the other hand cover (sub)national legal requirements considered to be a precondition to take legal accreditation decisions in that higher education system. The MULTRA and the *Assessment Framework for Joint Programmes in Single Accreditation Procedures* have indeed led to accreditation decisions by one quality assurance agency which in turn were recognised in other relevant higher education systems, e.g. International Master of Science in Marine Biodiversity and Conservation, Master of Law and Economics, and recently the European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management.

Although the approaches listed above can be considered significant improvements, they also quickly encountered difficulties. The different singular legal and methodological realities required substantial efforts to overcome and even then were often insurmountable. First, some of the assessment frameworks (standards and/or criteria) of quality assurance agencies include elements of the legal framework that need to be checked. These elements most often do not refer to quality, e.g. a certain required workload. If one framework requires "max. 30 ECTS credits" and another "at least 35% of the total number of credits" for the master's thesis, these elements contradict each other for a joint master's programme of 120 ECTS. Another popular example of such prescriptive standards are the national interpretations of the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area, e.g. minimum and maximum amount of credits per cycle or for the first and second cycle combined. Second, some legal frameworks impose stringent regulations on joint programmes or joint programme consortia which do not relate to quality or to the current reality of European higher education, e.g. a joint programme consortium can consist of maximum five partners. Even when a quality assurance agency comes to a positive outcome, national authorities refuse to accept such

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<sup>49</sup> Against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), against ECA's Code of Good Practice or against another set of standards that can be considered as equivalent..

an outcome since it is not in line with its regulations. Third, the legal frameworks can restrict the operation of quality assurance agencies, in fact obstructing them in organising single, comprehensive procedures and/or in producing outcomes that can be used in other higher education systems. For example, some agencies cannot accept requests to assess a joint programme from the coordinating institution if that institution is from outside its higher education system, its remit. To circumvent this the local institution needs to act as an intermediary. Other such restrictions are the requirement to organise the site visit in-country, and not for example at a foreign institution hosting a consortium meeting, and the necessity to communicate in a national language and/or to produce the assessment report in a national language. Fourth, some of the agencies have developed methodologies that are in line with the legal framework of one higher education system but not open enough towards other developments. When such a development comes along, they can be unable to adjust. In one case, an agency realised they could not accept a request to assess a joint programme because its own regulations stipulated a timeframe before the end of the current accreditation period in which such a request could be accepted. For this agency, the current accreditation period of course only referred to the institution(s) under its remit, while that joint programme had different periods of accreditation in the other higher education systems.

As an example of good practice, some countries have deregulated joint programmes explicitly stating that the quality assurance of joint programmes can be discharged from using certain national standards if they contradict others. This of course only solves the problems regarding the standards.

### **The European Approach**

In May 2015, the European ministers in charge of higher education adopted the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*. (Yerevan Communiqué, 2015) The *European Approach* is a methodological framework that presents the standards and procedure for the assessment of joint programmes, in fact drawing inspiration from JOQAR's *Assessment Framework for Joint Programmes in Single Accreditation Procedures*. Outcomes from quality assurance agencies in compliance with the ESG, and thus duly registered on the European Quality Assurance Register, using the *European Approach* should be recognised in all other relevant higher education systems. By setting EHEA-wide standards this should provide joint programmes a means to avoid discouraging national standards and criteria. While the MULTRA and the *Assessment Framework for Joint Programmes in Single Accreditation Procedures* were voluntary approaches, the *European Approach* is a Bologna instrument. As such it intends to set the norm for the quality assurance of joint programmes.

But the proof of the pudding is in eating it. Although the European ministers have adopted the *European Approach*, it is by no means directly implementable. It still requires a concerted effort of deregulation by national authorities since many of the obstacles the *European Approach* intends to overcome, as outlined above, are embedded in legal frameworks. In addition, national authorities and quality assurance agencies will need legally sound procedures to make the outcome of an assessment based on the *European Approach* (e.g. a positive accreditation decision) applicable in its higher education system. In this sense, the *European Approach* still requires national solutions. The *European Approach* is indeed European. Without proactive communication and diplomacy, both joint programme consortia and quality assurance agencies might interpret it towards their non-European partners as an obligation without benefits beyond the EHEA. Can we expect all quality assurance agencies worldwide to comply with the ESG and have themselves EQAR-registered? Can we expect these agencies to use the *European Approach* instead of their regular assessment methodology? Another solution

might actually be to use the MULTRA, or a similar agreement, for cooperation beyond the EHEA thus providing a feasible alternative for non-European joint programme partners. To make the *European Approach* successful will also require a certain amount of constraint from all actors not to demand additional quality assurance procedures on top of the *European Approach*. The European Commission's Quality Review is an example of a recent procedure that was added on top of regular quality assurance procedures. This review was introduced under Erasmus+ as a pilot exercise and has fortunately not been continued. Still, the justification for the review as a means to inform decisions regarding continued funding was illuminating. This is the same argument national authorities could use for adding national reviews on top of the *European Approach* since most also provide funding to "their" joint programmes. In addition, they also assign the status of student to those enrolled in the joint programme, which can be of paramount importance for social security and visa reasons, and they confer degree awarding power giving institutions the right to award multiple or joint degrees for joint programmes.<sup>50</sup> It will therefore demand concerted efforts before the *European Approach* can make the impact joint programmes require.

### **A supranational solution**

In some sense, the *European Approach* can be considered a supranational circumvention of problems created by national authorities and by quality assurance agencies. Higher education is a national competence and both degree awarding and quality assurance are emanations of this competence. As a result of the Bologna Process and, in the case of joint programmes, of the bottom-up pressure created in consequence of the Erasmus Mundus Programme, quality assurance has become increasingly European. The ESG were established as a common denominator for European quality assurance and EQAR as the supranational entity interpreting the ESG and registering compliance with the ESG. The *European Approach* has then made the ESG and EQAR directly tangible for joint programmes. The same is now required for joint programme consortia, degree awarding and recognition. In the first years of the Bologna Process, there was "*reluctance towards and no legal foundation for establishing joint degrees at the supranational level*". (Ministry of Education and Science of Sweden, 2002) Given the enduring obstacles joint programmes are confronted with, a real supranational solution for joint programmes and their degrees should be reconsidered.

### **Erasmus Mundus**

As already mentioned, the Erasmus Mundus Programme has acted as an essential lever for changes in national legal frameworks. It thus created the right circumstances for other joint programmes to take root in Europe. Another often overlooked aspect of the Erasmus Mundus Programme has been its role as a laboratory for joint programme management and as a trailblazer for good practices.

The management of a joint programme should not depend on the goodwill of individuals and institutions, but this was in essence the case before the advent of the Erasmus Mundus Programme. The management approaches in place now have been mostly developed and tested with Erasmus Mundus funding. Its impact was immediately visible in the way quality assurance was organised by Erasmus Mundus Master's programmes. They developed a joint approach in which partners are informed about what happens at other locations through continuous monitoring and regular evaluations. In addition, Erasmus Mundus Master's programmes distinguished themselves by the way they include internal and external stakeholders in their activities. This then provided essential feedback which these consortia used to enhance the quality of their teaching and learning activities.

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<sup>50</sup> A notable exception is the UK.

The Erasmus Mundus Programme also actively pursued the identification of these good practices and the sharing of these practices among Erasmus Mundus Master's programmes. This has been vital for the further development of other joint programmes in Europe and beyond. This pursuit and its results have however not always been very visible for higher education institutions and their stakeholders. A global outreach strategy for good practices under the label of Erasmus Mundus would further facilitate the development of joint programmes and harvest the available potential. The joint programme platform, suggested for recognition purposes above, could actually play a pivotal role in this strategy.

## Concluding remarks

In many ways, joint programmes have acted as the indicator the Bologna Process envisaged. Their increase followed the development of European co-operation and the concretisation of the European Higher Education Area. (Lourtie, 2001) It was however an indicator for an easy target and quite doubtful that this indicator would have worked well without the introduction of the Erasmus Mundus Programme. In reality, joint programmes have acted as the proverbial canaries in the coal mine. While European higher education systems became more comparable, compatible and coherent, joint programmes exposed peculiar national rules and regulations, laying bare the incompatibilities of the national and institutional regulatory systems. The Erasmus Mundus Programme thus directly contributed to the implementation or adaptation of legislation extending beyond the remit of joint programmes.

Joint programmes have also continued to make clear that European higher education requires robust, compatible approaches to quality assurance and recognition that do not simply hinge on trust and confidence alone. The Erasmus Mundus Programme has been essential in keeping the quality assurance and recognition challenges – some might say, plight – of joint programmes and their degrees on the agenda of national authorities. As evidenced by this article, a lot has been achieved. Still, national authorities should realise their role in further alleviating the challenges joint programmes are confronted with. If national authorities fail to do so, Erasmus Mundus might once again act as a lever for more supranational solutions for joint programmes and their degrees.

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## 4. Managing Joint Programmes

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### Introduction

The first generation of Erasmus Mundus aimed to contribute to the convergence of European Higher Education and to increasing the global attractiveness of European Universities<sup>51</sup>. Joint programmes (JPs) were seen to have a key role in both respects. During the last ten years the Erasmus Mundus JPs have attracted thousands of high calibre students at Master and Doctoral level and have awarded a large number of scholarships. Around 18 600 students were selected in the period 2004-05 to 2015-2016 for participation in Erasmus Mundus Master courses and around 1,400 for participation in Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorates. The Erasmus Mundus JPs also had a role in terms of capacity development: the programme has funded well over 200 Erasmus Mundus JPs<sup>52</sup>, many involving higher education institutions (HEIs) that had not been engaged in JPs in the past.

More generally, HEIs see JPs today as a tool to develop their internationalisation strategies, together with other initiatives such as international mobility, the establishment of campuses abroad or MOOCs, expand their educational offer and raise their visibility. In the case of Europe, the policy interest in the context of the Bologna Process and at an EU level in joint master and doctoral programmes remains strong, as they are seen as a means to further advance the European Higher Education and Research Areas (EHEA and ERA).

However, there is still room to increase the number of JPs: the 2015 Bologna Process Implementation Report<sup>53</sup> suggests that in the majority of European countries less than 25% of HEIs are participating in JPs, and the number of students taking part in those programmes is unknown. While JPs have advantages for students<sup>54</sup> and HEIs, their management can be complex and time-consuming.

JPs have many unique features, ranging from integrated curricula, to common admission and examination practices amongst partner institutions, or mandatory student and staff mobility, all of which necessitate elaborate management structures. To respond to the needs of HEIs various manuals of good practice have been created to help HEIs to navigate these issues. For example, the 'JOIMAN' (Joint Degree Management and Administration Network)<sup>55</sup> project under the framework of the LLP/Erasmus/Structural networks produced a range of publications concerning different aspects of JP management and administration. It also organised events to bring higher education and other key stakeholders together to exchange experiences and best practice. Erasmus Mundus Action 3, a funding strand to support the promotion of European higher education, has been instrumental in supporting the development of manuals and collating good practice such as the 'JDZ' (Joint Degrees A to Z)<sup>56</sup>, a 2012-2015 project that collected existing wisdom and produced a comprehensive reference guide for management. The Erasmus Mundus Quality Assessment (EMQA) project also provides guidelines for coordinators and partners of Erasmus Mundus Master Courses on how to

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<sup>51</sup> EACEA (2013) Joint International Master Programmes. Lessons learnt from Erasmus Mundus. The first generation. EACEA Synthesis Report. Brussels, EACEA. Foreword by Jordi Currell.

<sup>52</sup> EACEA (2013) Joint International Master Programmes. Lessons learnt from Erasmus Mundus. The first generation. EACEA Synthesis Report. Brussels, EACEA. Foreword by Jordi Currell.

<sup>53</sup> See [eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic\\_reports/182EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/182EN.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> On advantages for students, also see Weimer, L., Erasmus Mundus Policy Paper - Student Perspective (2015)

<sup>55</sup> [www.joiman.eu/default.aspx](http://www.joiman.eu/default.aspx)

<sup>56</sup> [www.nuffic.nl/en/expertise/jdaz](http://www.nuffic.nl/en/expertise/jdaz)

manage Erasmus Mundus JPs, with a strong focus on quality and excellence in these programmes. The project produced, for instance, 'Handbooks of excellence', which cover the issue of quality of teaching, management and recruitment of students in the context of JPs. The project also produced a self-assessment tool to monitor performance against these dimensions of quality and excellence.

This article draws upon these initiatives, as well as current research and practice, to look at five key issues in the management of JPs: ensuring the right institutional framework to support the programmes; programme design and development; programme management and execution; programme evaluation; and programme sustainability. These aspects of management of JPs are defined in section 3 of this article.

In doing so, the review will address a number of questions such as: what are the basic principles of JP management? To what extent has Erasmus Mundus (EM) influenced HEIs in the development of JPs? How do these programmes impact curriculum design? What are the administrative and governance implications for institutions? And how can these programmes be sustained, both financially and in terms of partnerships?

The review draws on the experience of Erasmus Mundus Master programmes in particular, but looks at the experience of JPs more generally when appropriate. It aims to provide a useful starting point and also to signpost interested readers to a wider set of resources on the above topics.

## **Diversity in joint programmes**

A key feature of JPs is their diversity, which tends to impact the way in which they are managed. Not all types of JPs require the same extent of integration, or the same level of student mobility between institutions, to provide just two examples.

JPs can be understood as: "an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered by a consortium of two or more HEIs<sup>57</sup>", and often integrated learning outcomes. They are associated with different forms of degrees. Most JPs require or highly encourage inter-institutional mobility which is embedded in the course structure.

The simplest model from an administrative point of view is the 'bilateral double degree', jointly developed by two or more institutions and implying the award of two or more separate degrees. The most legally complicated model is the 'joint degree', where one diploma is issued to students who successfully complete the JP, and this diploma is recognised as the legitimate award for the programme.

Erasmus Mundus favours joint degrees but supports both models; Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees start with a consolidated consortium and requires that the institutions involved produce an integrated structure for programme and its management.

According to the results of research from the LLP JOIMAN and JOI.CON<sup>58</sup> projects, in order to determine the degree of integration of JPs<sup>59</sup>, several factors are considered: whether the programme uses existing curricula or is being created ex-novo; the extent to which mobility is embedded within the programme; the pedagogy utilised; the profile of students in the programme and the balance between national and international students; the types of student services (related to housing, linguistic support, etc.) provided to students; fees and financial management; quality assurance; and the approach to sustainability.

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<sup>57</sup> [eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic\\_reports/182EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/182EN.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> [ecahe.eu/w/index.php/JOICON](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/JOICON)

<sup>59</sup> Girotti, F. (2012). Joiman and Joicon projects

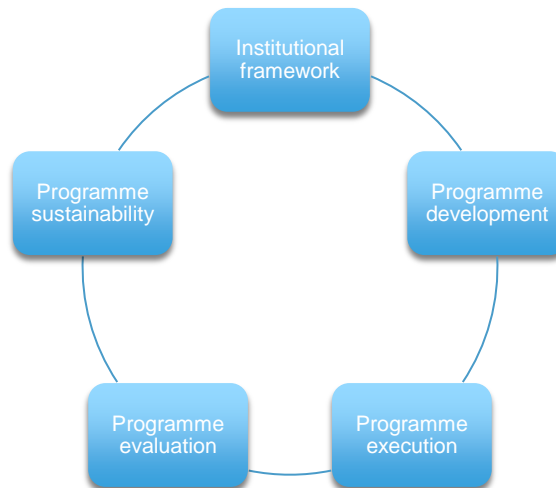


The following sections will touch upon these issues, though some will be more relevant than others to institutions involved in JPs.

### **JP programme management: Main aspects**

The management of JPs can be viewed in terms of five major areas, as illustrated in Figure 1 below:

*Figure 1: Key areas for the management of JPs*



These aspects are defined as follows:

- a. Ensuring a supportive institutional framework: including the agreement of a strategy by the partners involved in the JP, and, crucially, buy-in from programme, departmental and university leadership. The partnership must also establish and clearly define the key roles within the partner institutions covering all aspects of the programme: design, implementation and support services.
- b. Programme development: including all steps both definition of programme content and also associated services and financing. This entails the development of: marketing and recruitment strategies; curriculum; study guidelines; rules and regulations; consortium agreements; and issues related to the fee structure and funding.
- c. Programme execution: including programme implementation, for example: implementation of marketing strategies; student selection/admission; student support services (including support services for mobility); examination procedures; and award and recognition of the degree which is complex in the context of joint degrees.
- d. Programme evaluation: namely, defining the strategy for continuous quality assurance and evaluation of the programme, as well as the internal and external stakeholders in both processes.
- e. Programme sustainability: such as funding diversification, sustained leadership commitment, the relevance of the course vis-à-vis social needs, the evolution of international policies and priorities amongst the consortium partners.

Naturally, there are many links between these different areas. For example, funding decisions may affect the institutional framework, may evolve in function of the evaluation of the programme, and are key to programme sustainability. Their division in the list above is presented for analytical purposes.

### **a) Institutional framework**

Available data suggests that around 60% of the institutions involved in JPs have an internationalisation strategy for partnership development<sup>60</sup>. Partnership formation and development decisions are critical, as they have a significant impact on the successful implementation of the JP at all levels, and also shape the sense of purpose behind the programme. The JOIMAN study suggests that the implementation of an internationalisation strategy yields significant returns in the area of student enrolment, and reduces legal hurdles related to JPs. A carefully designed strategy considers the consequences of partnership development for the visibility of the institution and its future involvement in structured networks, yielding benefits beyond the individual JP and also contributing to programme sustainability<sup>61</sup>.

HEI involvement in international partnerships enhances the likelihood of participation in JPs and institutional effectiveness in JP management<sup>62</sup>. The interim evaluation of Erasmus Mundus II (2009-2013:<sup>63</sup>), noted that many institutions used Erasmus Mundus as a tool to formalise and strengthen existing networks and improve their quality assessment, selection and student retention in JPs. Partners with prior experience of working together also find the methods for successful JPs easier than those who only start cooperating under Erasmus Mundus<sup>64</sup>. Nevertheless, the programme has provided opportunities for experience sharing and the development of better quality practices around JPs, including opportunities for HEIs that may have had limited prior experience working in JPs.

Those institutions that collaborate in JPs may decide to extend their collaboration to other areas, helping to obtain buy-in for JP development at various levels within HEIs. Those institutions involved in JPs, for instance, may further develop their collaborations by submitting applications within the framework of other major funding programmes such as the EU Framework Programmes for R&D including the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions. These institutions learn how to network, how to work in partnership to achieve common goals and develop a better understanding of and trust in each other through their involvement in JPs<sup>65</sup>.

While buy-in from different parts of a HEI, including university management, is essential in order for institutions to become involved in JPs, these programmes normally originate at Faculty or Departmental level. Commitment at this level is essential in order to agree on the scope of the JP, its unique selling points and strategy and a suitable division of roles in relation to its implementation. A central administration that is experienced with JPs and commitment from university management, who need to formally approve the establishment of the programme, are nevertheless crucial to facilitate the implementation

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<sup>60</sup> 2014, IIE- Institute of International Education, - Global Perspectives on International Joint and Double Degree Programs

<sup>61</sup> 2014, ADDE SALEM project

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*<sup>63</sup> PPMI (2012) Interim evaluation of Erasmus Mundus II (2009-2013). Final report to the European Commission. [ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/more\\_info/evaluations/docs/education/mundus2012\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/evaluations/docs/education/mundus2012_en.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> PPMI (2012) Interim evaluation of Erasmus Mundus II (2009-2013). Final report to the European Commission. [ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/more\\_info/evaluations/docs/education/mundus2012\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/evaluations/docs/education/mundus2012_en.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*<sup>65</sup> EACEA (2012), EM Practical Guidelines - Clustering Joint Programmes and Attractiveness Projects: Lot 1 – Thematic Cluster on Sustainability.

<sup>65</sup> EACEA (2012), EM Practical Guidelines - Clustering Joint Programmes and Attractiveness Projects: Lot 1 – Thematic Cluster on Sustainability.

of JPs or determine their existence.

Beyond strategies and networks, JPs require solid institutional governance, within individual institutions and within the partnership as a whole. Heads of institutions, academic boards, and relevant administrative and service offices and departments need to collectively draft cooperation agreements that establish parameters for JPs but are also flexible. These various levels of the institution must be effectively articulated. Setting up internal committees within the JP consortium may help to ensure the quality of all aspects of the JP.

In addition, a supportive institutional framework requires policy support and the situation has evolved in this respect in Europe over the lifetime of Erasmus Mundus I and II. For example the challenges faced by European HEIs in relation to cross-border JPs have been quite wide-ranging. One of the main issues for governments has been “the creation of a legal environment where JPs could be established and recognised without undue problems”<sup>66</sup>. A majority of European countries have now amended their legislation to take into account the various specificities of JPs and joint degrees.

## **b) Programme development**

### ***Institutional structures and services***

Firstly, introducing a JP requires, a common or complementary objectives and understanding between all partners. JPs also place significant operational demands on HEIs, in terms of the development and delivery structures (marketing and recruitment, course content, student information and induction, and financing). All these aspects can be articulated in a MoU, which helps to structure the coordination between faculties and different institutional services in the different partners. This can be complemented with direct information targeting students, which helps them understand the academic system within which they will work. Induction sessions organized before the academic year provide students with information about the national higher education system, its main characteristics such as grading systems, internal regulations, plagiarism regulations, approach towards independent study or critical thinking. This is particularly important for courses such as Erasmus Mundus Master programmes, where students have very diverse academic and cultural backgrounds and probably lack essential information about the higher education systems and institutions in which they will study. A buddy or mentoring system helps to complement such induction sessions.

Legal considerations are critical to support the set-up of a JP. Although 75% of Bologna Process member countries have legalised JPs and the award of joint degrees<sup>67</sup> there is often a lack of knowledge about the legal framework surrounding the award of the JP, their recognition, and in many cases the external quality assurance or accreditation dimensions, particularly amongst students and staff not directly involved.<sup>68</sup> In addition to the diversity of national laws, HEIs also have their own internal regulations, practices and policy frameworks, including regulations regarding financing and fee structures. Therefore, a number of institutions have set up internal services or offices in charge of international partnerships, recognition and other legal matters, which can help the HEI adapt to national laws and European-level agreements regarding JPs. These services also support academic and administrative staff to better understand such regulations and the regulations of partner countries and institutions.

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<sup>66</sup> [eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic\\_reports/182EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/182EN.pdf) p.218.

<sup>67</sup> Eurydice 2012, The European Higher Education Area in 2012, Bologna Process Implementation Report

<sup>68</sup> For more information and discussion about quality, accreditation and recognition in the context of joint programmes, see Aerden, A., Joint Programmes: Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Awarded Degrees (2015)

### ***Joint curricula development***

Joint curricula development can be a complex and daunting task that must, to a large extent, come from 'the bottom up', from willing academic partners. According to programme evaluation surveys, JPs typically involve willing and internationally engaged academics, often early in their careers, who are favourable to mobility and can teach in several languages<sup>69</sup>. Those academics often develop curricula in conjunction with partners –rather than 'in addition' to partners, have exchanges about teaching methods, openly debate evaluation methods and grading systems, and accept when necessary differing practices. They are familiar with European developments in higher education reform and efficiently apply the principles of the Bologna Process, especially with regards to ECTS, Diploma Supplements, modules, learning outcomes, competence-based approaches and quality assurance. They often report that JPs are intellectually stimulating and they show high levels of professional commitment to these kinds of programmes.

Assessment practices are key for students and need to reflect course content and modules potentially taught in different ways in different countries. It is crucial that each partner institution and its academic coordinators is willing to diverge from traditional teaching methods and be flexible, in accordance with different practices in different education systems\_(e.g. written and oral examinations, case studies and problems, multiple choice tests and analytical study, field visits and internships and traditional teaching, language and subject-specific courses, science courses and ethics courses). The need to identify differences yet converge on learning outcomes and compare evaluation methods inspires reflection and scrutiny on these and related aspects –such as teaching methods-, and arguably enhances the quality of programmes.

In developing the programme, differences between local, national and international student enrolment must also be taken into account. Conflicts may arise in agreeing on joint academic calendars, admission cycles and procedures applicable to both international and local or national students. Such differing practices provide HEIs with opportunities to reflect upon their own practice and render their own rules and procedure more flexible, to better accommodate the specific needs of international students, and better define course prerequisites to facilitate the student selection. The quest for a good balance between the number of local, European and international students from outside Europe is an opportunity for HEIs to rethink their strategy in relation to marketing and recruitment regulations.

### **c) Programme management and execution**

#### ***New Management tools***

Strategies and regulations need to be implemented effectively. Erasmus Mundus has provided a framework to enhance and share management tools across institutions as Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses, in particular, have gained in popularity in and outside Europe. Such tools are a key contribution from the programme, and include the development of guidelines for management of joint degrees and the development of dynamic web sites. For instance, JDAZ guides provide information on the development, establishment and sustainability of high-quality international JPs, which lead to a joint or multiple degree. The Portal of Joint Programmes from E.C.A.<sup>70</sup> provides information on various studies on JPs, which contain practical information on, for instance, management and quality assurance.

The Eurydice database, National Agencies and recognition support services (Erasmus+

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<sup>69</sup> 2012 JOIMAN project ; 2014 ADDE SALEM project team

<sup>70</sup> European Consortium for Accreditation: [ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Portal:Joint\\_programmes](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Portal:Joint_programmes)

National Agencies, ENIC/NARIC, Euraxess) provide HEIs with relevant information for implementation of JPs, e.g. on how to compare diplomas and detect fake certificates. International conferences and projects for sharing information and best practice, for the implementation of new communication strategies and development of online management databases have also contributed to enhance institutional knowledge of the management of JPs.

### ***Student recruitment***

JPs are unique in that marketing, student selection and admission criteria are shared across partner universities. There is a need to define joint marketing actions and objective criteria that are internationally understandable, comprehensive and transparent. The duration of studies, flexibility of educational paths, language of programme delivery, admission of mature students or students with special needs, and the ratio of international to local or national students impact on student recruitment and need to be considered by the partnership. Partner institutions need to generate a common understanding between the services that manage selection and enrolment and those of the JP itself, given that special provisions may need to be made, that differ from typical selection procedures within the HEIs.

The level of integration within the partnership is conditioned by to the quantity and quality of elements that partners manage jointly and covers all aspects of the JP, including the marketing for national and international students and the review of applications. These aspects need to both satisfy the members of the partnership, and their internal regulations, and be compatible with national rules. In practice, the management of admission processes can be undertaken separately, twice, or be joint. Joint management of admissions is more demanding but often more transparent and consensual for the different partners, and more comprehensive in the sense that it takes into account criteria developed by the different partners. Candidates are judged on their academic record, their CV, their letters of motivation/career motivations and expectations. Some partners include interviews with the shortlisted candidates as part of the admissions process.

### ***Student services***

Effective provision of a range of student services<sup>71</sup> is a key component for the success of JPs. Students need additional assistance to navigate the distinct nature of JPs. Support services must address the specific needs of JP students, both domestic and international who will have questions about the award of their degree, the language of instruction, and mobility possibilities. Some institutions choose to have specific support services at the level of faculties that deal with specific JPs, while others rely heavily on their international office, particularly to organise mobility and to providing general welcome services, mentoring schemes (sometimes using alumni) or other channels to provide information to JP students, and in particular international students in those programmes. Visa procedures, social security, accommodation, can all be complex issues requiring special attention. In some JPs mobility is organised each semester; in other programmes each term. Finding suitable accommodation in time and solving visa problems can be challenging. Students can be diverted from academic matters if practical problems are not foreseen and solved well in advance: underlining the necessity to offer solid support services to JP students.

## **d) Programme evaluation**

Defining a for monitoring and evaluation strategy for JPs, upon which all partners agree

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<sup>71</sup> Example given in JDAZ and JOIMAN projects ;  
[http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/JDAZ\\_Joint\\_Programme\\_Management#Student\\_services](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/JDAZ_Joint_Programme_Management#Student_services)

and which is in line with the different institutional quality assurance practices, is another crucial element for JPs requiring the involvement of diverse stakeholders (students, academics, administrative units). Studies<sup>72</sup> on JP management stress that collaboration in the evaluation and quality assurance of JPs is a challenging, yet essential task.

In addition, promoting/utilizing evaluation results is also essential, and helps to raise awareness for the JP more broadly in the institution.<sup>73</sup> Lessons learned can then be applied to other JPs developed in different departments. The use of feedback to review the curriculum, as well as other aspects of the programme such as student services, must be on-going. One approach is the establishment of joint committees in which student feedback is collected and discussed<sup>74</sup>. Ongoing student-teacher dialogue is of critical importance. Dialogue between institutions is also essential, to share information on student views, and good practice. The issues that need to be addressed in JP may not relate to a single institution, but to the connection between the different institutions involved in the JP, for example the integration of the different components of the programme that they deliver.

### **e) Programme sustainability considerations**

#### ***Sustainable partnerships***

Sustainability of JPs is an important issue<sup>75</sup>. This is driven to a large extent by the fact that many such programmes emerged from personal collaborations between faculty members, in a bottom-up and organic way. These faculty members may not foresee how to embed the JP within the HEI in the longer term.

Partners should fully participate in all stages of the definition of the JP and of its execution in order to generate shared ownership. Balanced mobility flows between all partners can also help to build-up mutual trust, which will contribute to the achievement of quality, pertinence and sustainability of the programme. Each partner should be able to expect either a roughly equal number of students or roughly equal length of stay at their HEI. When the balance of student mobility is not achievable, the mobility of teaching staff can compensate and balance the inputs of different JP partners. The exchanges and increase in awareness of the work that takes place at other institutions may lead to the creation of synergies among partners and generate new common projects, contributing to the sustainability of the partnerships articulated in JPs. Most importantly, HEIs need to work hard to avoid that the JPs are compartmentalized within institutions, and remain dependent on the exclusive relationship between a few individual faculty members, making the JP excessively vulnerable to staff changes. Thus, embedding the JP in an institutional strategic partnership is key to its sustainability.

Some JPs involve partnerships with a variety of non-academic partners including companies, local authorities, NGOs, other government partners and social actors as part of their approach to sustainability<sup>76</sup>. These external stakeholders can, for instance, co-finance student grants, host student placements which are embedded into the

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<sup>72</sup> 2015, [http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Portal:Joint\\_programmes](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Portal:Joint_programmes)

<sup>73</sup> ADDE SALEM project team (2014)

<sup>74</sup> 2012, JOIMAN project, The JOIMAN report observes that in the 36 institutions surveyed, in most cases, monitoring of academic progress is performed by the institution that delivers the course programme. In most cases surveyed, students on joint programmes are assigned a local coordinator who is responsible for monitoring their academic progress. Further, all academic staff, teaching in the programme, are responsible for monitoring courses and examinations. Local coordinators generally report their observations to joint programme boards or quality assurance boards.

<sup>75</sup> EACEA (2012), EM Practical Guidelines - Clustering Joint Programmes and Attractiveness Projects: Lot 1 – Thematic Cluster on Sustainability

<sup>76</sup> For examples on this see EACEA (2012), EM Practical Guidelines - Clustering Joint Programmes and Attractiveness Projects: Lot 1 – Thematic Cluster on Sustainability.

programme and/or be used in marketing activities, or contribute to curriculum development to ensure its relevance to the labour market and societal needs. JPs can identify niches for employability by offering unique sets of competences. Institutional and industry partnerships should also provide a springboard to respond to calls for tender and joint research projects or other joint actions, or to develop staff exchanges.<sup>77</sup>

Finally, alumni networks can help partnerships build a reputation and create new forms of cooperation and engagement with external stakeholders and attract prospective students. Alumni may also be involved in JP development or review and generally serve as ambassadors for the programme<sup>78</sup>.

### ***Sustainable Funding***

JPs can be financially demanding, and may require substantial investment in terms of staff time. Management costs for JPs are estimated to be three times higher than those for regular programmes based in a single institution<sup>79</sup>. Staffing is also a concern: JPs may require hiring new personnel to support and manage the programme, and/or any grants or funds tied to the programme. Awareness of these specificities is fundamental to ensure realistic JP budgeting.

Erasmus Mundus has been a transformative development in the JP landscape in the last decade. It directed a considerable amount of European funds to scholarships for Erasmus Mundus JPs, which in turn became a primary means of subsistence for many of these programmes. It also provided a "quality label" that incentivised university investment and participation in the programme. Erasmus Mundus JPs can continue after the Erasmus Mundus financing has ended, but may face greater difficulties to attract international students due to reduced scholarships.

For a number of EM JPs financial sustainability becomes a major issue when the EU funding expires. As such, HEIs involved in the programme are increasingly aware of the need to reconsider financial resource management with regard to JPs, and the need to better balance external and own funding and develop a strategy to transition towards a self-funding model. With regards to external funding, the question has become "How much do we need in order to be operational?" and "How much can our institution co-finance?" as opposed to "How much we get from European, or other, funding programmes and for how long?" To answer these questions, institutions must thus have a sound knowledge of the real cost (ideally full cost) of the programme. One key problem for the sustainability of JPs are differences in fee policies and the sometimes large disparity of tuition fees normally charged by different partners for their programmes. This poses an issue for the consortium in terms of a) defining a fee and b) assessing how income generation should be distributed and used.

Differences in the management of JPs have forced institutions to compare their operating costs. In the face of non-harmonised financial rules, HEIs need to calculate the cost of each programme, thus developing a new cost-benefit culture, considering tuition fees, teacher salaries, running costs, investment costs and consumables. While some European institutions are already advanced in terms of calculating real costs, others are less concerned with this aspect because the state may fully subsidise programmes.

Sustainable JP partnerships are often based on shared financial understanding and planning. The Erasmus Mundus programme has been instrumental in drawing attention

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<sup>77</sup> On employability of Erasmus Mundus graduates and business' involvement in JPs, also see Colucci, E., *Joint Programmes and Employability: Added value, current trends and future needs* (2015)

<sup>78</sup> e.g. [www.lotus.ugent.be](http://www.lotus.ugent.be); [www.basileus.ugent.be](http://www.basileus.ugent.be)

<sup>79</sup> University Leipzig, JOI.CON project team (2012), *Practical Approaches to the Management of Joint Programmes: Results from the JOI.CON Training Project*

to the need for change in these respects<sup>80</sup>. Common financial and management rules must be discussed in detail and HEI leadership must take part in the discussions and support operations.

Erasmus Mundus consortia have used various strategies in order to sustain their programmes financially<sup>81</sup>:

- Many HEIs have set up administrative teams in charge of drawing up and managing JP budgets. These teams can also be used to mobilise additional resources from local and public authorities or from businesses through an entrepreneurial approach, from the inception of a JP.
- Some institutions have created structured partnerships with industry in order to provide placements and paid internships. Other HEIs have involved businesses in the admissions process, or involving them in some teaching. Businesses may lower costs for students and enhance the attractiveness of the JP by offering scholarships.<sup>82</sup>
- Other institutions define a fee policy to enhance student recruitment. This could entail reducing the fees to increase the number of students. The Digital Library Learning (DILL)<sup>83</sup> Erasmus Mundus JP took advantage of national legislations and promoted low course fees which enabled the consortium to secure finance to offer scholarships for participation.
- An additional strategy is to provide clear information about potential sources of funding for which the students can apply<sup>84</sup>.
- Financial reserves for partnerships can be accumulated over a number of years, to enable financial planning and hedge against variations in recruitment between academic years. However, this approach may not be possible in all European countries. In some countries, the revenue generated by projects can be kept for only one to three years in a specific project account. After this period, all the funds are directed to the general accounts of the HEI. In this context it becomes particularly difficult to collect external funds and co-financing funds for grants with a long-term perspective. Some HEIs have created foundations to raise external funds from non-academic stakeholders including local authorities to co-finance projects in a more flexible way.

### **Communication and dissemination**

Effective external communication is an important determinant for the smooth running of JPs generally, and for sustainability in particular. Some JPs adopt a joint communication strategy to impact both employers and potential students, to exploit outcomes, and to convince other potential investors (such as companies, local authorities, public institutions) about the relevance of the programme. These communication strategies often highlight the technical and transferable skills of programme graduates and advertise best practice with industry placements.

Internal communication at an institutional level is vital in order to ensure each institution's commitment to the partnership, and a sense of collective responsibility and

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid*<sup>81</sup> Examples of this can be found in the report: EACEA (2012), EM Practical Guidelines - Clustering Joint Programmes and Attractiveness Projects: Lot 1 – Thematic Cluster on Sustainability.

<sup>81</sup> Examples of this can be found in the report: EACEA (2012), EM Practical Guidelines - Clustering Joint Programmes and Attractiveness Projects: Lot 1 – Thematic Cluster on Sustainability.

<sup>82</sup> E.g. EM in Computational Mechanics (MSCM), EM in Photonics (EMSP), EM in International Master in Management of IT (IMMIT)

<sup>83</sup> [dill.hioa.no/](http://dill.hioa.no/)

<sup>84</sup> E.g. EM in International Master in Economy, State & Society (IMESS),



ownership. Studies<sup>85</sup> underline the importance of the full commitment of each consortium member to reputation building. Partnerships should design strategies that enable them to reach out to new countries (if the aim is to diversify the international student body) through various promotion tools and media channels, having a dedicated website and using alumni as ambassadors. One example is "The Internationalisation of Higher Education: an on-line training course for Erasmus Mundus Administrators (INTER-HED)<sup>86</sup>", which provides information on the sharing of best practice to disseminate the JPs and the definition of an integrated communication strategy.

## Conclusion

The development, management, execution, evaluation and sustainability of JPs are multifaceted. Erasmus Mundus and the role it has played in developing JPs have been crucial in bringing about change in the management of JPs. With Erasmus Mundus Master degrees, HEIs have become more aware of the need to re-organise their activities to fit the specific demands of JPs. Ten years after the launching of the Erasmus Mundus I programme, HEIs have a rich set of resources and good practices to draw on and Member States have taken into consideration the need to reform national regulations to better take into account the specific nature of JPs.

At the institutional level, the development of a strategy, internationalisation or otherwise, in which JPs have an explicit and central role, is critical in generating a sense of purpose and also in justifying the resources and support needed for the running of this type of programmes. Beyond the academic partnership, which is the cornerstone of the curriculum design, the orchestrated action of a wide range of administrative and support services in HEIs is needed to optimally deliver a JP. Moreover, these services must be articulated across the partners delivering the JP. By 'de-compartmentalising' and working in multidisciplinary and international teams, institutions involved in JPs develop flexible organisational models, and encourage synergies between teaching teams, administrative and support services, as well as the effective involvement of all partners before and throughout the JP design and implementation.

There is a need to remain vigilant concerning several, complex management-related issues. Human resources are an essential component of JP design and delivery. JPs require well-trained staff at faculty and central level for their management. The staff needs to be flexible and possess strong communication and management skills. Coordinating such staff across the partnership and defining their roles from the inception of the programme is also the key to success. Financial issues must also be tackled proactively: the costs of setting up and operating a JP must be adequately foreseen and shared across the partnership. Cost considerations must feed into a sustainable funding model that, ideally, has a diversified income structure and is not entirely dependent on programme grants and scholarships.

The sustainability of JPs must be reflected upon during the programme conception, implementation and evaluation. This can be stimulated in various ways: embedding the JP in a strategic partnership that goes beyond the individual member(s) of academic staff implementing the programme, diversifying funding from the start and giving due consideration to full-costing, and developing jointly-agreed evaluation methods for the programme and strategies for communicating results internally and externally. The ability to develop linkages beyond academia, especially with the world of work (via internship placements, joint research and start-ups, etc.), enhances the sustainability prospects of the programme as well as its relevance and quality.

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<sup>85</sup> EACEA (2012), EM Practical Guidelines - Clustering Joint Programmes and Attractiveness Projects: Lot 1 – Thematic Cluster on Sustainability

<sup>86</sup> [www.erasmusmundus.it](http://www.erasmusmundus.it)

Finally, it is critical that all interested HEIs consider the wealth of good practices that has been published and draw upon them. This has been greatly facilitated by the Erasmus Mundus programme, and also the development of a European Higher Education Area. Such practices, including projects and various manuals, provide a valuable resource that should be further promoted within and outside Europe. Strategies should be developed at different levels (European, national, HEI including central and faculty level) to integrate the best practices identified into their management of JPs. The establishment of new platforms to share good practices and management tools, to develop common understandings, concepts and regulations, and provide illustrative case studies should facilitate the further development of JP in HEIs in the future and could even help to modernize the management of HEIs in other activities.

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