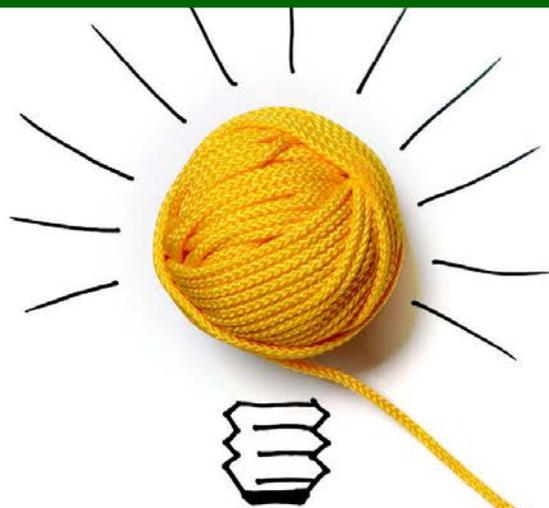


Joint Programme Checklist: inspired by quality assurance



Axel Aerden



europaean consortium for accreditation

Joint Programme Checklist: inspired by quality assurance

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“The Joint programmes portal provides information on the quality assurance of joint programmes, including accreditation issues, on the recognition of degrees awarded by joint programmes and on Erasmus Mundus.”



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The Joint programmes portal provides information on the quality assurance of joint programmes, including accreditation issues, on the recognition of degrees awarded by joint programmes and on Erasmus Mundus. In addition, the portal provides a check-list for joint programmes.

Terminology

A clear presentation of the joint programme terminology and its concepts, with background information and agreed upon definitions.

The Check-list

The Check-list provides the lessons learnt from quality assurance as good practices for developing and managing joint programmes.

Practical guidelines

These practical guidelines come from different sources and cover several topics, such as sustainability, employability, etc.

Key publications

An overview of the most relevant publications with for each a link to a dedicated article and the download page.

Quality assurance

How to deal with specific internal and external quality assurance and with varying national quality assurance regimes.

Erasmus Mundus

Everything you need to know about Erasmus Mundus, including an overview of all Erasmus Mundus Master and Doctorate programmes.

Recognition

Awarding degrees for joint programmes and the recognition of these degrees require specific information and documentation.

Article overview

All the articles which are part of the Joint programmes portal are available here and presented alphabetically.

<http://ecahe.eu/joint-programme-portal/>

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“

“How to award a joint degree in such a way that it is recognisable and indeed recognised? When is a joint degree regarded as an official degree in countries outside, but sometimes even inside, the joint programme consortium? How can the design of the joint degree and the Diploma Supplement facilitate access to the labour-market?”

”

Guidelines for
Good Practice for
Awarding Joint Degrees



Axel Aerden & Hanna Reczulska

1. Introduction

The last decade has seen the rapid expansion of higher education institutions offering joint programmes. That these joint programmes have been and still are confronted with – often unforeseen – challenges, is now understood by

all stakeholders. Several higher education stakeholders have therefore cooperated to facilitate the activities of joint programmes. These initiatives and projects have focused on practices and activities: on how to manage joint programmes, on how to quality assure and

accredit joint programmes, on how to award and recognise joint programmes' degrees. These issues are of course important.

This publication is however intended to be neither policy-based nor policy-oriented. It aims to present what quality assurance agencies have learnt from assessing joint programmes. The presentation takes the form of a checklist since this makes the information easily accessible and digestible.

This checklist is intended to increase the success of joint programmes by presenting elements deemed to be good practices. The good practices presented here come from

assessment reports, the formal outcomes of external quality assurance and accreditation procedures. They were thus put forward by peers and experts. The appraisal as good practice can be very explicit ("The panel regards this as a good practice.") but it can also be more

implicit ("The panel applauds the joint programme for this approach."). Inclusion into the checklist therefore involves some interpretation by the author. In addition, some

This checklist is intended to increase the success of joint programmes by presenting elements deemed to be good practices.

The checklist presents what quality assurance agencies have learnt from assessing joint programmes.

elements (“criteria”) from (inter)national quality assurance frameworks specific for joint programmes have been included as a standard-setting practice.

It is important to note that the checklist presented here is not a “to do list”. The checklist is to be interpreted as a list of things that might be checked, not as a list of things to be done. Joint programme consortia can use the checklist as a list of elements that might inspire their practice. Each element includes a short explanatory note or substantiation, mainly for inspirational purposes.

To conclude, and especially from a quality assurance point of view, checklists should not be used as a replacement for common sense.

2. Defining quality

Is there a more fundamental question for quality assurance, than the question “How can we define quality?”. The question is also readily used to oppose any approach to value quality. If you cannot define quality, how can you then assess quality?

Already in 200 BC, the Han dynasty introduced a system of quality control in the



"The wooden core by Yi, lacquering by Li, top-coat lacquering by Dang, gilding of the ear-handles by Gu, painting by Ding, final polishing by Feng, product inspection by Ping, supervisor-foreman Zong. In charge were Government Head Supervisor Zhang, Chief Administrator Liang, his deputy Feng, their subordinate Executive Officer Long, and Chief Clerk Bao."

production of their lacquer cups.

The lacquer industry was organised under government control and using early processes of mass production. Each lacquer cup produced was neatly engraved around the side stating where that cup was made and which six craftsmen were responsible for each step of the manufacturing process. This created a strong system of ownership and responsabilisation. And then, each cup goes on to list

the seven product inspectors, whose responsibility it was to guarantee the quality of the cup.¹ The focus of quality control was thus mainly on the manufacturing process.

¹ The British Museum, Collection Online, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=255610&partId=1 (retrieved 1 February 2014)

In the fifties of the twentieth century, a customer's definition of quality was introduced, first in US industry. An distinction was made between *freedom from deficiencies* and *features which meet customer needs and provide customer satisfaction*. Here, fulfilling a customer's requirements is seen as a product's *fitness for purpose* or *fitness for use*.²

The discussion of quality was gradually taken up in higher education and moved centre stage in the eighties of the twentieth century. Quality was defined differently in different contexts and higher education systems. The following approaches were distinguished:

- The notion of exclusivity and high class;
- Conformance to specifications ("the process", legal framework);
- Quality as fitness for purpose ("developmental", determining purpose);
- Quality as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals;
- Quality as meeting students' stated or implied needs (but not their wants);³

From the list above, it is clear that quality is a relative and contextual concept. The different stakeholders of higher education have different perspectives and priorities. It cannot be expected that employers and governments have the same perspective, let alone students and teaching staff. Quality is therefore never a one-dimensional concept. It is better to talk about the different dimensions of quality for higher education or the qualities of higher education. And even this is then for a given moment in time. Perspectives change, the dimensions of quality will also evolve.

When relating this to quality assurance, it must be clear that the basis for assessing quality is always a compromise. The different, competing perspectives are taken into account and priorities are attributed. By bringing the different dimensions of quality together we are temporarily creating a new dimension of quality. This is the defined quality.

² Defeo, J., & Juran, J. M. (2010). *Juran's Quality Handbook: The Complete Guide to Performance Excellence 6/e*. McGraw Hill Professional.

³ Green, D. (1994). *What Is Quality in Higher Education?*. Taylor & Francis, 1900 Frost Road, Bristol, PA 19007-1598.

3. Glossary

In previous projects regarding joint programmes⁴, quality assurance agencies and ENIC-NARICs explored the terminology involved in joint programmes. A glossary of terms and supporting background information was subsequently published⁵. The key terms are listed below. More information about joint programme terminology can be found on the ECApedia's Joint Programme Portal⁶.

Degree

Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme.

Joint programme

An integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions and leading to a (double/multiple or joint) degree.

Joint degree

A single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme.

Multiple degree

Separate degrees awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme attesting the successful completion of this programme.

⁴ *Transnational European Evaluation Project II* (TEEP II, 2004-2006), coordinated by [ENQA](#) and *Transnational European Accreditation decisions and Mutual recognition agreements 2* (TEAM 2, 2008-2010) coordinated by [ECA](#).

⁵ **Aerden, A., Reczulska, H.**, 2013. *Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees*. ECA Occasional Paper, The Hague, p. 11. <http://ecahe.eu/home/services/publications/guidelines-for-good-practice-for-awarding-joint-degrees/>

⁶ Joint Programme Portal: http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Joint_programme_terminology

Double degree

Two degrees awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme attesting the successful completion of this programme.

→ *A double degree is a specific type of multiple degree.*

Dual degree

Two degrees awarded individually, attesting the successful completion of two separate curricula, with potential overlap and efficiencies in course-taking, and, if more than one institution is involved, each institution is primarily responsible for its own degree.

→ *A dual degree is not awarded for a joint programme.*

Awarding institution

A higher education institution issuing qualifications, i.e. degrees, diplomas or other certificates. In the case of joint degrees, an awarding institution is one of the two or more institutions involved in conferring the joint degree thus formally recognising the achievements of a student enrolled in the joint programme.

(Joint programme) consortium

A group of two or more higher education institutions and potentially other contributors (e.g. research centres) with the objective of integrating teaching and learning activities for providing a joint programme; although not all participants necessarily award a (joint) degree.

To be complete, the Lisbon Recognition Convention defines **a qualification** as “*any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme*”⁷.

⁷ Council of Europe. 1997. *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region*, Art. 1.

4. The checklist

The elements learnt by quality assurance agencies when assessing joint programmes are divided into three sections. The first section presents issues that directly relate to the joint programme consortium, while the second section presents issues that relate to the governance of joint programmes by their consortia. The last section presents the issues that fall under actually offering or managing the joint programme.

4.1. Consortium

The consortium refers to the group of higher education institutions and potentially other contributors (e.g. research centres) that have integrated some of their teaching and learning activities in order to provide the joint programme.

4.1.1. Partner selection

- Partners have been preferentially selected from among the institutions, schools, research groups, or programmes with which good working relationships were already established.**

Partner selection forms the heart of a well-functioning joint programme consortium. Even if selection comes more or less naturally, it needs to be handled carefully. Pre-existing good working relationships are an advantage since they are an indicator of the future potential of the cooperation. If at least one of the partners has such a relationship with one of the other partners, it provides a sound basis for cooperation. If not, partners will need to gather essential information about each other, such as academic and administrative organisation, quality and quantity of staff, facilities, (inter)national reputation, etc.

- All institutions are recognised and/or accredited as higher education institutions in their (sub)national higher education systems.**

It is important that the higher education institutions involved in the consortium are allowed to offer the joint programme. This refers first and foremost to the fact that each institution needs to be recognised and/or

accredited as a higher education institution in the higher education system in which they operate. This also refers to the fact that the higher education institutions recognise the joint programme as their own.

- **Each institution can legally offer this type of programme (level, orientation, discipline) as a joint programme.**

Each higher education institution is (legally) allowed to offer the joint programme, even if the institution is not involved in awarding a degree. This refers to the concern that higher education institutions without the competence or appropriate recognition to offer a certain programme (e.g. master's programme) or award a certain degree (e.g. Master of Science), can use a joint programme to do so anyway. Joint programmes then provide an unacceptable escape route out of the national legal framework and the awarded degree could be flagged as illegal in the higher education system of the institution that uses this escape route.

- **The added-value of this joint programme is clear for all potential partners.**

The added value for offering a joint programme might differ between partners and between people involved at institutional and at programme level. It might be necessary to grasp the added value for all those involved in order to build on and further strengthen these.

The institutional added-value can refer to internationalisation strategies (such as internationalising the campus), reputation building, and strategic networking (for example in research).

The added-value at programme level can refer to internationalisation objectives (such as internationalising the classroom, mobility, etc.), offering different perspectives (both theoretical and practical), research collaboration and establishing mobility windows.

4.1.2. The consortium agreement

- **The consortium agreement is signed by the competent authorities of the partner institutions.**

The consortium agreement establishes a contractual relationship between the partner institutions. The agreement regulates the partners' responsibilities within the consortium and towards the joint programme. For an effective contractual relationship, the agreement needs to be signed by the competent authorities (rectors, vice-chancellors, etc.) of the partner institutions.

- **The consortium agreement ensures the necessary and essential support and commitment from all partners.**

It is clear from both the cooperation agreement and the subsequent implementation that the partners in the consortium agree on the following points:

- Overall coordination of the programme and/or sharing of responsibilities;
- Admission and selection procedures for students;
- Mobility of students and teachers;
- Examination regulations, student assessment and recognition of credits in the consortium;
- Type of degree (joint, multiple) and awarding modalities;
- Teaching language(s);
- Coordination and responsibilities regarding internal and external quality assurance;
- Administration of student's data and performance records;
- Support for student mobility;
- Public information on the programme;
- Financial organisation (including sharing of costs and incomes, charging registration and/or tuition fees, grants and fellowships);
- Change in partnership;
- Amending, renewing or terminating the agreement.
- The relevant national laws and/or regulatory frameworks under which the programme falls;.

Consortium agreements are regularly ratified (signed) before the competent body of the higher education institution has formally approved the joint programme and/or consortium agreement. The agreement can then include a clause indicating that the agreement enters into force once the relevant competent bodies have approved the joint programme and/or consortium agreement. Here, the full name of each competent body and its institution can be listed. An annex can then be added to the agreement outlining these bodies, their relevant approval and approval date.

4.2. Governance

Governance relates to consistent coordination, solid policies, and reliable decision-making within the consortium. This is how the consortium organises itself, sets rules and policies and implements these.

4.2.1. Coordination

- Each partner has identified a local coordinator.**

The overall agreement on how the consortium agrees to coordinate its activities is included in the consortium agreement. In addition, there are various approaches to coordinate the joint programme's activities within each partner. To smoothen practical matters and address accountability concerns, each partner identifies a person (or preferably a function) to act as the local coordinator. Local coordinators are responsible for the joint

programme within that partner institution and furthermore act as the main contact person for the other consortium partners.

4.2.2. Learning outcomes

- The intended learning outcomes are developed and shared by all partners.**
In European higher education, learning outcomes are considered the most transparent way to present a programme's aims and objectives. A joint programme's intended learning outcomes make clear what a student is expected to be able to know, to understand and to be able to do after having successfully completed the curriculum.⁸
- The intended learning outcomes align with the corresponding level in the relevant qualifications framework.**
When defining the joint programme's intended learning outcomes, the consortium takes great care to align these to the corresponding cycle or level in the relevant national and/or overarching qualifications framework. This correspondence ensures that the level of the joint programme is indeed regarded as at Bachelor's, Master's or Doctorate level.
- The intended learning outcomes satisfy the requirements of the joint programme's (research) discipline(s) and, where applicable, the professional field.**
The consortium takes into account the relevant requirements from the joint programme's field of study and underlying subjects or disciplines. These requirements come from current (research) development in that subject/discipline and from the professional field relevant for this joint programme. In addition, relevant regulatory frameworks regarding professional regulation and professional titles need to be accommodated. For example, if the joint programme's graduates are expected to fall under one of the professions included in the European Union Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications⁹, the consortium can demonstrate how it adheres to this directive.

⁸ Bologna Working Group. (2005) *A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*. Bologna Working Group Report on Qualifications Frameworks (Copenhagen, Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation).

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/policy_developments/legislation/ (retrieved 1 February 2014)

- **The relevance of the joint programme’s learning outcomes is confirmed by alumni, employers, professional organisations and/or a specific professional field.**

To nurture sustainability and effectiveness, the programme’s intended learning outcomes are shared by the joint programme’s (external) stakeholders. Shared means that all stakeholders can identify and confirm the relevance of the joint programme’s intended learning outcomes. This can be done in many different ways: an advisory body, a regular survey, focus groups, sporadic questionnaires, etc.

4.2.3. Financial issues

- **The consortium recognises the required financial (and administrative) resources**

The consortium clarifies the financial (and administrative) resources required at the level of the consortium and, where necessary, at the level of the partners. Especially during the development phase, the resources required will come from the individual partners and not from the joint programme as such. To avoid financial complications, these resources are budgeted beforehand and allocated accordingly. Once the joint programme is offered, the required resources are included in the consortium’s budget.

- **The consortium applies clear and transparent budgeting.**

The joint programme budget includes all flows of money. This refers first to incoming and outgoing flows of money but it also refers to the identification of flows of money between partners.

The incoming flow of money refers to all income received for the joint programme by the whole consortium. It includes external funding and tuition fees but also the contribution of partners, both financially and in kind (e.g. staff). The outgoing flow of money refers to all expenses. This includes both direct and indirect costs¹⁰ incurred by the consortium in offering the joint programme. (Some indirect costs might be balanced out across all partners and might therefore be perceived as virtual. In reality, this largely depends on usage and thus student mobility.) Specific attention can be given to the way insurance is dealt with by the consortium and whether this needs to be covered and budgeted.

¹⁰ Direct costs are directly attributable to the joint programme. Direct costs are those for activities or services that benefit the joint programme, for example salaries for dedicated joint programme staff and facilities required only for the joint programme. Because these activities are easily traced to the joint programme, their costs are usually charged directly. Indirect costs are not directly attributable to the joint programme. They are typically allocated to the joint programme on some basis. They are for activities or facilities that benefit more than just the joint programme. Their precise benefits to the joint programme are often difficult or impossible to trace. For example, it may be difficult to determine precisely how much activities of administrative faculty staff benefit the joint programme.

The identification of flows of money between partners ensures transparent information regarding each partner's contributions and returns.

4.2.4. Internal quality assurance

- **The consortium has a common understanding of the joint programme's internal quality assurance system.**

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area¹¹ state that higher education should commit itself explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, joint programmes develop and implement a strategy for the continuous monitoring and enhancement of quality.

Since each of the partners needs to know that the quality is actually assured, this requires governance of quality assurance at the consortium level. This might include reports, peer reviews, cross-partner analysis of data (from for example questionnaires), etc.

- **Responsibilities for internal quality assurance are clearly shared and coordinated.**

Two main approaches towards internal quality assurance of joint programmes can be distinguished. First, a system build on existing institutional procedures. In this approach, each partner uses its own approach to quality assure that part of the joint programme for which they are responsible. In this case, all partners need to know exactly what each partner is responsible for and how the outcomes of each partner's procedures are shared. Partners jointly discuss these outcomes and jointly decide on relevant improvement measures. Second, the consortium can establish a dedicated internal quality assurance system. In this approach, the partners use a joint approach to quality assure the totality of the joint programme. In this case, responsibilities can be attributed to specific persons (functions) and/or group of persons (commissions, etc.). Most often, a dedicated internal quality assurance system is actually developed from a system in place at one of the partner institutions.

In both cases, consistency, reliability and simplicity are keywords for the quality assurance of joint programmes. A consortium knows whether its internal quality assurance system functions if it can demonstrate effectiveness ("we know when things go wrong") and continuous improvement ("we act when things go wrong").

¹¹ ENQA (ed.) (2005) *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area*. Brussels. http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/ESG_3rdedition.pdf (retrieved: 1 February 2014)

- **The consortium's quality assurance policy covers both the academic and administrative aspects of the joint programme.**

When joint programmes commit themselves to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, they develop and implement a policy for the continuous monitoring and enhancement of the quality of all aspects of the joint programme. Academic aspects are readily included in quality assurance approaches of joint programmes. Administrative aspects can however also have an impact on quality. It is important to be selective. Not all administrative aspects of the joint programme need specific and continuous attention. A consortium is however able to monitor administrative processes enabling a response when the monitoring shows significant variations. An example of the latter would be quantitative data and automated (comparative) reports regarding application, selection and enrolment figures.

- **The stakeholders are involved in internal quality assurance activities.**

The stakeholders of the joint programme can play an active role in any of the quality assurance activities. A joint programme of course identifies its stakeholders itself but typically includes at least students, staff, employers and graduates.

Stakeholder groups prioritise differently and can therefore define the quality of the joint programme in a different way. These different perspectives are beneficial for joint programmes. It gives the joint programme more information to deal with stakeholder input. If a joint programme for example asks the employers about the employability of its graduates, it needs to contrast the employers' input with responses from graduate surveys regarding employability issues.

4.2.5. External quality assurance (and accreditation)

- **The joint programme is offered in accordance with the relevant legal frameworks.**

Some higher education legal frameworks have specific requirements regarding joint programmes. In these systems, a joint programme needs to be explicitly identified, recognised and/or accredited as a joint programme.

In the most restricted interpretation, 'relevant legal frameworks' refers to the frameworks in place in the locations where students actually study.

- **The joint programme is quality assured and/or accredited as a joint programme.**

In higher education systems where programme assessment is required, the totality of the joint programme is taken into account. This prevents the assessment of only the credits offered at partner institutions, while the quality of the joint programme is directly linked to its joint offering.

But joint programmes can then be subjected to external quality assurance by different quality assurance agencies; once in each of the higher education systems where the joint programme is offered. These external quality assurance procedures can lead to the accreditation of the joint programme, but normally only in one higher education system.

This issue has been tackled by a group of quality assurance agencies. They established a formal agreement (“MULTRA”) through which accreditation decisions are recognised (more or less) automatically in several countries.¹² For ad hoc procedures, the single accreditation framework has been developed. This framework complements the MULTRA and prevents the need for joint programmes to still undergo accreditation procedures in the higher education systems that are not part of the MULTRA.¹³

The European Consortium for Accreditation offers guidance and assistance for quality assurance and accreditation of joint programmes: <http://ecahe.eu/services-for-joint-programmes/>.

4.2.6. Information provision

The partners agree on the proactive and reactive provision of information.

Information provision is proactive when it precedes demand. This refers to establishing and updating a dedicated website, the use of recruitment portals and the production of (downloadable and/or printed) brochures. Information is provided consistently by all partner institutions.

Information provision is reactive when it is the result of demand. Partners agree on who is responsible for answering questions which come in via e-mail and the website. It is important to distinguish between types of questions. Answering potential applicants is different from answering employers about degrees and diploma supplements.

The consortium has a dedicated website.

The joint programme information is provided by one original source, preferably a dedicated website. The original source enables localising information for the (websites of) participating institutions.

The joint programme website at least outlines the application and selection procedure, the programme’s learning outcomes, the course catalogue (including the credit system(s), workload and student assessments), relevant academic policies, mobility (study path ways) and corresponding visa requirements, the degree awarded (and awarding institutions), services to support mobility (e.g. information about

¹² Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes (MULTRA), <http://ecahe.eu/home/services/joint-programmes/multra/> (retrieved: 1 February 2014)

¹³ Assessment framework for joint programmes, <http://ecahe.eu/home/services/joint-programmes/single-accreditation/> (retrieved: 1 February 2014)

housing), relevant labour-market (employability) and (financial and practical) facilities to foster accessibility.

The website can be offered in different languages since this can be useful for recruitment purposes. Limiting the website to the language(s) of instruction might however also function as an informal selection tool.

Localised information is easily available.

Localised information is information which is only relevant when studying at one of the participating institutions. Since students in a joint programme regularly study at different locations, they need to have access to all relevant information regarding these locations. Such information can be national, such as visa requirements, and institutional, such as academic policies. Academic and other relevant policies of partner institutions are particularly relevant when incoming students fall under these institutional policies.

Student information is jointly archived.

Some joint programmes regularly change their coordinator and/or coordinating institution. This might make it difficult for employers and recognition bodies (e.g. ENIC-NARICs) to contact the joint programme regarding (the degree of) one of their graduates. To overcome this, the information regarding the joint programme and the graduates (archive) is kept available by one partner. This partner ("archive keeper") is explicitly mentioned on the Diploma Supplement.

4.3. Management

Management is understood to be the continuous enactment of the consortium to run the joint programme. This is how the consortium deals with the lifecycle of offering the joint programme itself.

4.3.1. Application

The application procedure is outlined on the joint programme website.

The information presented includes the application process, the timeline with application deadlines and periods of communication, the admission document and document requirements, the selection criteria, the date(s) of selection and the expected arrival dates at the start of the programme.

Whether the application process is organised centrally or decentrally, all partners are informed of or have access to the application information.

Applications can be organised centrally or decentrally. A centralised application approach aims to unify application information and communication. This increases the transparency and consistency of the

procedure for all applicants. The centralised application procedure is organised by the responsible partner institution(s). In all cases, each consortium partner is informed of or has access to the application information.

If all partners organise their own application procedure, the consortium establishes a system to keep all partners informed about the applications received. In addition, the partners understand how each partner's application system works.

The application procedure is organised transparently for all those involved.

A database-driven online system facilitates the application and selection procedure. The database can make application information accessible to all relevant consortium partners and it can be used throughout both the application and the selection procedure.

This system can also be used to update applicants about the procedure in a standardised manner.

The consortium has agreed on responsibilities regarding the verification and evaluation of documents submitted during the application procedure.

Verification of documents relates to credential evaluation and the detection of fraud. All institutions already have systems in place to deal with this. Consortia agree on how this is handled during the application procedure. In addition, communication with recognition bodies (such as ENIC-NARICs) is agreed upon beforehand and can be channelled through one of the partners.

4.3.2. Selection

All responsibilities for (and in) the selection procedure are clearly assigned.

Selection acts as a gatekeeper to the joint programme and requires the involvement of all partner institutions. It is clear to all concerned who will assess applications on behalf of the partner institutions. "Who" here refers to individuals or to positions in the joint programme and/or partner institutions. In case a selection commission is responsible for this procedure, it is clear for all (internal and external) stakeholders which persons actually sit on this commission.

The selection criteria are shared and unambiguously understood by all involved in the selection procedure.

Selection criteria relate to formal academic requirements (level and disciplines or subjects), language proficiency (achievement level and scale) and experience (such as in research). In addition, motivation and references can be included as distinguishing criteria. Shared criteria are essential to match incoming students knowledge and skills with the joint programme's curriculum. It is important that the consortium is aware of

regulatory requirements of participating institutions. These may influence the overall selection criteria or demand a certain level of flexibility.

□ The same evaluation scale and decision rules are used when assessing students' applications.

To ensure consistency, the consortium agrees on an assessment methodology that includes a system of evaluation and the manner in which decisions are taken.

Final decisions are formally taken by or on behalf of the relevant governing body (of the joint programme or institutions). In case decisions are taken on behalf of the governing body, this body has mandated persons, partners or a body, such as a selection commission, with this task.

4.3.3. Enrolment

□ It is clear where students are enrolled and, if relevant, registered.

Enrolment is defined as the inclusion of a person on the roll of the higher education institution thus granting student status resulting in entitlements and commitments. Entitlements refer to access to teaching, facilities and services while commitments refer to issues such as fees and credit attainment. Registration is used to refer to the inclusion of a student, someone already enrolled elsewhere, in the records of the higher education institution thus conferring certain entitlements. The entitlement of an enrolled and a registered student are most often identical.

Students cannot be enrolled by the consortium since enrolment is typically regulated by national or institutional legislation. Students thus need to be enrolled in at least one of the participating institutions and most often at all the institutions where the student studies or which award a degree to the student.

□ The consortium's approach to enrolment and registration take into consideration the manner in which degree awarding takes place.

Degree awarding impacts the way enrolment and registration is organised by the consortium. The award of joint degrees on the one hand might require registration (not necessarily enrolment) at all partner institutions which award the joint degree, even if the student has not studied at all the institutions in the consortium. A joint degree here demonstrates that all partner institutions are jointly responsible for the programme, the students and the awarded degree.

The award of multiple degrees on the other hand is dealt with differently and mainly depends on the relevant national regulatory framework. Most often, only institutions where the student has had a period of study will award their degree. In that case, it is sufficient that the student is at least registered at those institutions.

- **Student visa requirements of all the relevant countries are taken into consideration when organising enrolment and registration.**

The way enrolment and registration is organised by the consortium depends largely on national and/or institutional regulations. In addition to regulations regarding tuition fees and degree awarding, student visa requirements play a pivotal role. These requirements are of primary consideration when developing the enrolment and registration approach. This is essential for a smooth and unburdened mobility experience by all students.

4.3.4. Tuition fee

- **The consortium has a common policy on tuition fees.**

A common policy on tuition fees does not necessitate a common fee structure. Such a common fee structure can be difficult as a result of national and institutional regulations. A common policy outlines how tuition fees are calculated irrespective of the actual approach for individual students. Several different fees policies are possible: from quasi individually tailored fees to the same fee for all students.

Many consortia have a differential approach to tuition fees based on student nationalities, for example between state and non-state, national and non-national and between European Union and Non-European Union citizens. It might be necessary to have national students of partner institutions enrol at their national institution in order to apply the national tuition fee, e.g. when a country does not allow or has very low tuition fees. This is however not always a solution and consortia regularly opt to (partly) reimburse students from countries with a completely incompatible tuition fee regime.

- **The published fee takes into account any supplementary fees.**

Institutions can charge supplementary fees on top of regular tuition fees. These fees can play an important role when the payment of tuition fees is decentralised in the consortium. In general, these supplementary fees will not be calculated as income for the consortium.

- **Tuition waivers are budgeted and determined before applications open.**

Tuition waivers can be granted on both socio-economic and performance criteria. Socio-economic criteria can relate to both personal aspects (e.g. income) as well as collective aspects (e.g. GDP per head of a country/region). Performance criteria can relate to prior degrees and to received awards.

4.3.5. Teaching and learning

- **The content and structure of the curriculum offered across all partner institutions provides the necessary means for achieving the joint programme's intended learning outcomes.**

A curriculum is understood to be the coherent and structured set of educational content (courses, modules, etc.) covered by a programme and, when completed successfully, leading to a degree. The curriculum provides students with the necessary learning opportunity to achieve all the intended learning outcomes.

For example, if a joint programme intends its student to acquire intercultural competences, intercultural learning needs to be integrated in the curriculum (i.e. addressed in specific courses) and in the joint programme's pedagogical approach (e.g. group work).

- **A common thread in the curriculum facilitates mobility throughout the joint programme.**

A common thread can help students in understanding the curriculum's coherency. It prevents students from losing the thread and facilitate students to pick up the threads when moving between partner institutions.

A common thread is a theme or pattern included in the courses offered throughout the curriculum. It offers a means of interconnecting courses and/or partners and these connections can be made through topics, skills or concepts.

- **A joint teaching methodology supports the jointly offered curriculum.**

The teaching methodology refers to the principles and methods of instruction and to the ways of presenting teaching materials or conducting teaching activities. The choice of the teaching methodology depends mainly on the joint programme's intended learning experience, but it may also be heavily influenced by the aptitude and interest of the students.

The overall methodology corresponds with the intended learning outcomes of the joint programme and answers the question "How do we need to teach for our students to achieve our intended learning outcomes?"

Teaching methods need not be identical across all partner institutions. They do need to be compatible though. A well implemented compatibility between teaching methods strengthens the learning experience of all students.

4.3.6. Student assessment

- **Student assessments are joint programme-specific and applied in a consistent manner.**

Suitable assessments transparently demonstrate whether students achieve the learning outcomes the joint programme aims for. All types of assessments are here taken into account (such as interim assessments, final examinations, final projects, research assignments, theses and performance evaluations).

The examination regulations and the student assessments are applied in a consistent manner among partner institutions and need to be oriented to the intended learning outcomes of the course/module or overall curriculum. Where the same courses/modules are offered by different partners, the same assessment methodology is applied.

- **The consortium has a transparent and common policy on grading.**

A common policy on grading does not imply the same grading across all locations. When partners apply their own national or institutional grading scale, the system their staff is most familiar with, they develop an interface. The staff involved in the joint programme is familiar with this interface. The ECTS grading scale is the most often referred to as the interface between these grading systems.

Some consortia apply a dedicated joint programme grading system and then convert grades to the relevant national or institutional grading scales.

A common policy on grading also implies that the consortium recognises how student failure (course/module, internship, thesis) is dealt with, since retaking courses might be unfeasible and resitting exams might not be allowed at some partner institutions.

- **An appeals procedure is available for students.**

The fact that assessments lead to formal decisions necessitates an appeals procedure. An appeal is a process for requesting a formal change to an official decision. Decisions can for example be challenged by arguing that the assessment regulations or procedures were misapplied.

4.3.7. Students

- **Students receive all the necessary and relevant information before (and on) arrival.**

Students receive necessary and relevant information before arrival. This explicitly includes information regarding visa requirements throughout

the joint programme (such as applying for visa when already in Europe¹⁴), regarding practical issues when studying (such as housing and student welfare) and regarding introductory courses (such as language courses). Students receive necessary and relevant information on arrival. This usually concerns a welcome package and practical information about being a student in this joint programme.

□ The model of student mobility is clearly outlined

Mobility is organised in either a fixed or an elective system. In a fixed system, the students follow predefined study paths across the partner institutions. In this case, student mobility will follow clear trajectories.

In an elective system, students are free to choose and build their own study path throughout the partner institutions.

A combination of both offers students the possibility to choose from a set of fixed study pathways.

□ The programme provides adequate services to students in order to facilitate mobility.

The student group, types of study pathways and mobility directly affects the range of student services. Different types of study pathways and mobility require different services, such as housing assistance, guidance for incoming and outgoing students, visa support, etc.

Students are provided with a range of integrated services before, during and even after their mobility. These services can be offered reactively, when demanded by students, but also proactively, in advance of demand and to ensure better students' use.

A wide range of extra-curricular services can provide additional support. Red-tape-to-red-carpet initiatives are an example of how mobility can be streamlined.

□ The joint programme has a dedicated alumni network

Joint programmes develop and coordinate an alumni network. This ensures that alumni do not need to start their own network (and the joint programme consortium loses a central role in this network). The most common approach to network alumni nowadays is via social media (LinkedIn, Facebook, Google+, etc.). International alumni networks can include national and regional chapters with dedicated activities.

The alumni network is a valuable resource for a joint programme. Members of the network are used in feedback panels (for quality assurance purposes) and on the joint programme's "advisory board". Specific members of the network are asked to act as "joint programme ambassador" (with title) on social media.

¹⁴ Generally, non-European students must apply for student visa from their home country. Students need to be informed whether there are exceptions for students admitted to a joint programme and whether the joint programme facilitates this in any way.

The alumni network enables the monitoring of alumni and their career paths, for example through regular surveys. This provides information about the joint programme’s labour-market relevance and employability. An alumni network offers its members benefits beyond the social networking component: professional networking (with relevant captains of industry, research groups, etc.), career guidance (events), status (member, chair of a national/regional chapter, “joint programme ambassador”), privilege (e.g. seat on the joint programme’s advisory board), etc.

4.3.8. Degree and diploma supplement

- **The degree is awarded in accordance with the legal frameworks governing the awarding institutions and is recognised as a degree in the higher education systems of the awarding institutions.**

In order for a degree to be recognised and recognisable, it needs to be acknowledged as the recognised award for this joint programme. This means that the joint degree or each individual degree, in case of multiple degrees, is issued and signed as stipulated in the relevant national legislation.

- **The joint degree is awarded in accordance with good practices.**

Degree awarding powers are still -most often- a national competence. The award of a degree, even a joint degree, is therefore regulated. This means that there are no common regulations for awarding joint degrees. To facilitate and improve the full recognition of joint degrees, these degrees need to be awarded in line with the relevant legal frameworks and in accordance with good practice.

The European Consortium for Accreditation in cooperation with the ENIC-NARIC network developed Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees.¹⁵ These guidelines provide higher education institutions (and their joint programmes) that award joint degrees with good practices. They clarify the expectations regarding the design and the content of the degree and the Diploma Supplement.

- **Multiple degrees are clearly identified as being awarded by a joint programme.**

If the consortium partners are not able to award a joint degree, they can each issue their own degree: a multiple degree. To avoid misinterpretations (e.g. employers) and misrepresentations (e.g. CVs), each of the degrees making up the multiple degree includes a statement

¹⁵ Aerden, A., Reczulska, H., 2013. *Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees*. ECA Occasional Paper, The Hague. <http://ecahe.eu/home/services/publications/guidelines-for-good-practice-for-awarding-joint-degrees/>

that (1) this degree has been awarded for the successful completion of a joint programme; (2) other identified degrees have been awarded; and (3) this degree is presented together with these other degrees.

- **The Diploma Supplement enables individuals with no prior knowledge of the joint programme to fully comprehend the awarded degree(s).**

Joint programme consortia bear in mind that those reading their documents need to be able to authenticate that information. The perspective of the potential recipient (credential evaluator, employer, professional body, etc.) is taken into account when designing the Diploma Supplement. It therefore presents the joint programme information as clear and concise as possible.

5. Conclusion

It cannot be stressed enough that the Joint Programme Checklist is not a “to do list”; it should not be regarded as a list of things to be done. Since all items on the list are inspired by quality assurance, the list needs to be interpreted as the elements that

might inspire joint programme practice.

All practices in this publication need to be regarded as contextual.

Although this publication mainly endeavours to present what quality assurance agencies have learnt from assessing joint programmes, the overall intention has been to demonstrate that

there are many joint programme practices which can be regarded as good practices. A good practice can take many different forms and surpasses singular activities. It is a practice that has been demonstrated by an independent source to reliably lead to positive and intended results and to be transferable to other contexts.

All practices in this publication need to be regarded as contextual. The reports outlining the results of joint programme assessments show how creative joint

programmes are in developing new approaches, approaches that fit their reality. That also means that some of these approaches are not transferable to other circumstances. In this sense, and in its strictest interpretation, such intransferable practices are not good practices.

The practices presented are thus intended to inspire good practice and increase the success of joint programmes.

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