

## Report on Workshop series I

### Developing Successful Joint Master and Doctoral Programmes

#### 1. Organisation

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Locations and participant details:

| Date of Workshop | Location                   | No. of Participants | No. of Institutions |
|------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 19 October 2015  | Glasgow (Scotland)         | 17                  | 12                  |
| 22 October 2015  | London (England)           | 22                  | 11                  |
| 4 November 2015  | Cardiff (Wales)            | 13                  | 6                   |
| 6 November 2015  | Belfast (Northern Ireland) | 12                  | 5                   |

#### 2. Introduction

The first series of EHEA workshops across the UK were on Erasmus+ Joint Master Degrees and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Intensive Training Networks with a focus on Joint Doctoral programmes. The aim of these workshops was to help attendees gain a detailed understanding of how to develop high-quality applications under Erasmus+ and Marie Skłodowska-Curie. The workshops aimed to cover all the key elements of an integrated, successful joint programme and had a very practical focus. This included:

- an in-depth review of the key components of a Joint Master or Doctorate;
- an overview of current relevant EC policy and recommendations;
- an in-depth review of studying on a Joint Masters from the student's perspective;
- information on how to underpin Joint Masters or Doctorates with Bologna Process tools.

### 3. Workshop objectives and intended outcomes

The workshops were targeted at UK Higher Education Institutions which have plans to submit proposals for funding under the Joint Master Degree action (EMJMD) of Erasmus+ or under the Joint Doctoral degrees action (EJD) of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie programme. The planned impacts of the workshops were to ensure that participants were sufficiently informed about joint degree programmes to develop these at their institution and to encourage participants to submit an application.

The workshops benefitted from the in-depth experience of the UK EHEA Experts who have been involved with evaluating and quality assuring the programmes at the European level and in the planning and development of successful applications and their subsequent management. Furthermore, the student expert had participated in an Erasmus Mundus Masters and was able to provide the student's perspective on being part of one of these programmes. In addition a guest EHEA expert from another national grouping participated to provide a wider perspective on the value of international joint programmes, and practical experience of managing them.

### 4. Programme and Coverage

After an overview of the Workshop aims and structure and an introduction to the team and participants, a brief review of the policy context was presented.

There followed a session which put the student experience at the core of the Workshop. An EHEA student expert provided practical experience of participating in an international joint programme. They spoke about successes and challenges in areas of teaching styles and quality across multi-national courses, and also about assessment practice, workload and access to resources.

A session on the core components of relevance, quality, integration, and impact considered the major characteristics of Joint Master Degrees through the perspective of the Commission's evaluation criteria. Using practical examples it showed how applicants can focus on specific detail and practice when writing applications. It also emphasized that an international consortium must plan carefully to demonstrate how the pedagogy, the academic programme, the teaching and learning environments, and the institutional support show integration and jointness.

This was followed by a detailed overview of the key Bologna principles and tools, reference to which is essential to a successful proposal: national qualifications frameworks (NQF), ECTS, learning outcomes and student centred learning, the Diploma Supplement, and the recognition of qualifications.

Delegates then broke up into discussion groups, each with a collaborating EHEA Expert, with the aim of focusing on one of the four main evaluation criteria, considering how they would respond to the sub-criteria. Each group was able to work to a series of prompts relating to their particular criterion. The Group looking at *Relevance*, for example, considered

the following questions: How do you construct a competitive multi-disciplinary and multi-national course proposal? How will you recognise incoming student qualifications? How will you aim to ensure employability of graduates? Why should the EU fund this course? How will you plan for sustainability beyond the period of funding?

The Group looking at *Design and Implementation* considered: What innovative teaching and learning will be used? How is the proposed curriculum both jointly developed and jointly delivered? How will you ensure the recognition of the resulting qualifications(s)? What information will be provided to applicants? Outline the proposed student agreement. How will you integrate incoming students into the social and professional environments of the consortium members?

The Group looking at *Project Team and Cooperation* considered: Who is the team, why this set of people, and how have they worked together before? What management structures and processes will be used? How do you approach the issue of costs and fees? Draft a proposed consortium agreement.

The Group looking at *Impact and Dissemination* considered: How will the proposed programme impact at the institutional level? How will you promote the course and disseminate information? What is the coordinated evaluation strategy? How will you engage potential employers across the consortium? How will you aim to make course content openly available?

After lunch there was feedback from the groups and discussion on Joint Master Degrees, including a review of the key learning outcomes, and what the particular challenges are that need further attention by the EHEA experts, and the sector and stakeholders more widely.

The sessions in the afternoon focused on Doctoral Programmes, with an emphasis on the core components of *Excellence, Impact and Implementation*.

The first session introduced the major challenges involved in Joint Doctorates, summarizing the key quality areas and focusing on the evaluation criteria.

This was followed – in a format corresponding to that of the Masters sessions in the morning – by break-out sessions, each group with a collaborating EHEA Expert, exploring one of the four main evaluation criteria, and considering how they would respond to the sub-criteria. Each group was able to work to a series of prompts relating to their particular criterion and could use the EMQA structure as a basis to discuss all the excellence criteria. The Group looking at *Excellence* considered the material and detail that can be drafted for a proposed multi-disciplinary and multi-national research programme, what training programmes (including placements) can be provided across partner sites for doctoral candidates, how they would deal with joint supervision, and how all partners would be involved in an integrated manner.

The Group looking at *Impact* considered the expected impact and added value of a European joint programme for the doctoral candidates, the partners (researchers, laboratory and support staff etc.), and the institutions, and examined what communication and dissemination plans they would propose.

The Group looking at *Implementation* considered how the research work plan can be developed to ensure coherence and balance across partner sites, how they would provide

an employment contract to doctoral candidate, what degree would be obtained (joint, double or multiple) and how it would be recognized. They also discussed what the proposed consortium management plan might be, what would be in the consortium agreement and how the doctoral programme might be rendered sustainable.

The breakout session was followed by feedback and further discussion.

For the last two workshops, since the number of attendees was relatively small a round-table format was utilized. This encouraged greater discussion between the participants and experts.

List of materials prepared before the event:

A number of materials were prepared before the event and circulated to delegates. The mind maps, reading lists and the attractive presentation by the international expert gave participants a wealth of information that was collated in such a way to help identify key documents and facilitate access. Informal feedback indicated that those attending appreciated the detail of the presentations. A list of the prepared materials is as follows:

- Two mind maps showing the structure of the two forms of joint degrees
- Compilation of links to relevant websites
- Set of core questions for workshop participants to consider
- Supporting PowerPoint slides.

## 5. Evaluation of Workshops

Feedback from participant questionnaires across the four workshops indicates that the majority of delegates were either very satisfied or satisfied that the aims of the workshop had been met and that the workshops were valuable and instructive. In general feedback was more positive in the last two workshops (Cardiff and Belfast), though qualitative feedback from individuals at the first two workshops indicate that they found the sessions very useful. Following feedback from the London workshop the format was changed for Cardiff and Belfast. Feedback was particularly positive in Cardiff when the format of workshop delivery was changed to a 'round table' approach. This enabled workshop leaders to tailor the presentations and discussions to reflect the profile and number of delegates and better respond to their specific interests and queries. This ensured that there was a richer sharing of experience and a more interactive approach between delegates and the expert team. The questionnaire included a question on follow up activities that would be helpful to delegates and we will investigate how we can respond to some of the suggestions as part of our dissemination.

Examples of comments from delegates:

*What was the most useful part of the workshop?*

*'Student perspective on Joint Masters Programme'*

*'The flexible, informal, 'round table' discussions, with experts, experienced staff and students, allowed for a very informative, easy to understand session where everyone could contribute and learn vast amounts. This format should be encouraged for future sessions.'*

*'Opened my eyes in this area and gave me some good pointers for future development and research.'*

*'Great session, very knowledgeable presenters, very informal format should be applauded and rolled out.'*

*'Being able to ask questions of EHEA experts and to network with colleagues from other universities'*

*'Great to hear the student voice'*

*'Hearing from experts with extensive knowledge of the detail'*

*'All sections were very useful and informative. The discussions were very informative gaining a range of perspectives and the international dimension provided added value'*

*'The practical nature of the discussions and tools, guidance and advice shared.'*

*Were there any areas not adequately covered?*

*'Examples of successful Joint Doctoral Programmes'*

*'ITNs in more detail. The regulations would have been helpful.'*

*'Horizon 2020 guidance/priorities for future funding'*

*'An introductory session for those not as conversant with Erasmus+ funding and processes'*

*What follow up activities would be useful?*

*'Input from someone active in teaching Joint Masters'*

*'Outcome of proposal 2015/16 – session covering what factors enabled certain proposals to succeed and why certain submissions didn't succeed-what lessons can be learned.'*

*'Would be good to be directed to resources regarding the nuts and bolts of managing Joint Masters'*

*'Greater promotion at Scottish level of Erasmus Master Programmes to senior management within universities including Academic Registrars'*

*'Links to successful programmes and people to contact who took part in the seminar as well as coordinators of successful partnerships.'*

*'More on practicalities of JM – UK issues, visa regulations'*

*'Discussion/access to template agreements and materials on common reasons for application failure'*

*'Seminar on drafting a proposal'*

Additional comments:

Prior to the events, information circulated to the attendees stressed that the workshop was predominantly aimed at those who were preparing a bid. (Delegates were asked to submit suggestions of topics or areas of interest they would like covered but no responses were received). However, it became clear during the events that the majority of attendees had relatively little knowledge of joint degrees.

This meant that presenters had to adjust their approach to ensure that participants developed a full understanding of basic issues and expectations in developing joint programmes.

It was agreed amongst the team of experts that the 'round-table' format of the last two workshops (Wales & Northern Ireland) was more suitable to promote discussion between attendees and experts. It allowed for a more intimate approach to discussions and allowed the experts to focus on the participants' questions and ensure that they fully understood the requirements and the challenges involved.

## 6. Dissemination

We promoted EHEA, the workshops and associated resources at appropriate times over nine months from August 2015 until April 2016 through various British Council and UK Erasmus+ National Agency (NA) channels, including:

- The International Higher Education digest – a bi-monthly online news round-up sent to over 3,600 HE contacts;
- The Erasmus+ newsletter sent out to over 4,000 contacts;
- The British Council Erasmus+ Higher Education newsletter;
- A [blog](#) on EHEA and the workshops on the Erasmus+ website;
- Key information about the workshops on both the [Erasmus+](#) and British Council [IHE](#) websites;
- Published all the workshop presentations and associated information on the British Council [IHE](#) website;
- Promoted the workshops on the Erasmus+ NA Facebook page which has over 6,000 followers as well as via the NA Twitter account;
- This report will be sent to attendees and published on the British Council [IHE](#) website.
- Providing a printed information sheet for the Erasmus+ Learning Networks Event (May)

*Also:*

- Promotion of the workshops and resources through the International Unit channels, including a printed information sheet at the Go International Conference;
- All reports and presentations will also be published on the EHEA Peer Community portal <http://eheacommunity.ning.com> which is accessible to all EHEA Project Coordinators.

## **7. Conclusion**

### **Assessment of workshops - have the objectives and intended outcomes been achieved?**

It is too early to evaluate fully the impact of these workshops, since one of the key aims was to increase the number of joint degree applications featuring a UK HEI. However, the experts believe that raising awareness of such initiatives and the overall Bologna Process has been achieved, for those that attended the workshop.

### **Challenges identified to be taken forward at policy level:**

Two significant challenges identified for UK HEIs relate to visas for international students and fees. Visas were raised as a problem for joint degrees, since regulations restrict the flexibility that can be provided to students in regard to mobility to the UK. A related problem, raised subsequently, is that the level of financial guarantee required before a visa can be issued has been increased, and the minimum guarantee is now significantly higher than the value of the Erasmus Mundus Masters student grant of €1000 per month.

A third challenge identified during discussions in the workshops regards fees associated with joint Master and doctoral programmes. As the programme regulations restrict the amount HEIs can charge students on these courses, joint degrees generate a lower level of income for UK institutions. UK HEIs may therefore be discouraged from submitting applications or participating in joint degrees funded through EU programmes.

### **Lessons learned for the planning and delivery of future events:**

It would be beneficial to review the channels used for promotion to ensure an increased level of attendance and also greater involvement of academic staff and those with influence on policy development at senior management level.

It was agreed amongst the team of experts that the 'round-table' format of the last two workshops (Wales and Northern Ireland) was more suitable to encourage discussion between attendees and experts. This allowed for a more intimate approach to discussions and allowed the experts to focus on the participants' questions.

### **Assessment of impact in terms of a wider and deeper sectoral understanding of the Bologna Process and how it relates to national priorities in higher education**

There were a significant number of attendees who knew little about European Joint Degree Programmes and the broad European policy framework and objectives. The promotion of internationalisation is an important element of the strategy of UK HEIs, and the workshops helped to promote joint degrees as an opportunity to contribute to the implementation of these strategies. However, it is important to note that as the number of attendees represented a relatively small proportion of the total of UK HEIs there remains a significant number of UK HEIs which may be unaware of the significance of these programmes and their potential.

The workshops helped to raise awareness of the Bologna Process through focusing on the context and potential of joint programmes as well as providing a concise explanation of Bologna Tools that UK HEIs should be aware of, such as the role of the European Quality Assurance Register, and the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG).