

Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorate Programmes (Action 1)

Recommendations and examples of good practice applied by Erasmus Mundus EMJD project consortia

DRAFT

The Executive Agency is providing the following information based on the discussions at the meeting held on 16 March 2012 (Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorate coordinators' technical meeting) as well as ongoing project monitoring and reporting. The points outlined below are intended as a non-exhaustive list of good practices and recommendations from current coordinators of joint doctorate programmes. They are intended to inform and support other coordinators with respect to the many aspects of running a successful programme.

This document should also be read in conjunction with the recommendations and examples of good practice published in February 2012 (available here: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus_mundus/tools/documents/good_practices/em_a1_goodpractice.pdf). Although the earlier document has a particular focus on Erasmus Mundus Master Courses (EMMCs), many of the recommendations and examples are also helpful for Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorates (EMJDs).

Following the examples given here is not a mandatory requirement for consortia, and the Agency is not responsible for any use made of them. Nonetheless, we strongly advise EMJD project consortia/coordinators to assess how this information might be used or adapted to your own specific joint programme in order to enhance its quality and success.

Please contact EACEA-EM-consortia@ec.europa.eu if you have any questions or comments, or if you have an additional good practice that you would like to suggest to the Agency.

PREPARATION AND DOCTORAL CANDIDATE SELECTION

Programme promotion

- Targeted promotion aiming at quality rather than quantity. For example, targeted Google advertising campaigns, sending brochures and posters to selected universities and sending personalised emails directly to professors (this latter has proved to be very effective).
- Extracurricular activities: in one programme, doctoral candidates work together in editing groups to support the promotion of website (online visibility) and one candidate works as web designer.
- Activating partner institution networks and contacts: meeting regional and local authorities, attending scientific conferences and job fairs.

- Attractive, informative and accurate website is important for promotional measures (see also the EACEA “website recommendations”: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus_mundus/beneficiaries/documents/action1/website_recommendations.pdf)
- Facebook groups of students and former students that have already been set up can help to promote the programme.
- Asking applicants to indicate on the application form how they found out about the programme may also help to target future promotion activities.

Management of candidate selection

- Skype or telephone interviews help to assess the language level and motivation of the candidates.
- Reference letters have proved problematic as they may vary considerably between countries. Some consortia have found it more effective (i.e. in terms of comparability) to provide an online form to referees, or to use other strategies such as sending an email to referees asking them to rank the students.
- More often than not, only project themes rather than doctoral projects themselves are predefined at time of candidate selection in order to make best use of candidate's skills and competences.
- An ethics check should be carried out in relation to all projects when these have been selected and defined. More information regarding ethics issues in general is available at http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/ethics_en.html

Communication of results

- Send extensive information (a "welcome package") to the selected fellowship holders following the selection notification from the Agency. In addition to any academic information, this should also include information on what candidates are expected to do in practical terms prior to arrival. Information on financial arrangements should be provided (i.e. how the grant will be paid and what tax and social security rules apply).
- Communicate quickly and clearly and keep the appeal procedure manageable. Bear the lengthy visa process in mind. A recent EM visa survey by the Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association has indicated that this can sometimes take five months or more.
- Be prepared for possible drop-outs and quick promotion from reserve lists. As far as possible, ensure that the compatibility of research topics and supervisors with the available candidates on the reserve list.
- Be very clear on the category A and category B eligibility rules and the category of fellowship offered to candidates, especially for third-country nationals.

Support for preparation activities/visas/residence permits

- Provide clear, reliable information on visa and resident permits and be prepared to give advice to candidates; know who to contact if you have complicated or tricky questions and develop a good working relationship with the relevant embassies and immigration authorities. Make early contact with these authorities (i.e. send them the list of selected doctoral candidates as soon as these have been confirmed by the Agency).
- Introduce a 'buddy system' – i.e. an experienced doctoral candidate helps to provide support and advice for installation and integration issues.

IMPLEMENTATION AND COURSE MANAGEMENT

Funding of the fourth year

- In one EMJD, doctoral candidates are assigned to specific research lines and the funds to support the doctoral candidates during the fourth year come from companies interested in those research lines.
- Doctoral candidates could also be deployed for teaching activities in the fourth year.
- If the fourth year activity is limited to thesis defence, the Doctoral Candidate Agreement can specify that a part of the travel and installation grant should be held back to allow candidates to return to the HEI hosting his/her thesis defence.
- Tuition fee waiver should be provided if necessary (e.g. for seventh semester during examination period).

Employment contracts

- In one EMJD, candidates are employed by one of the three different partner members of the consortium for the full duration of the programme. All candidates receive the same net amount. The consortium makes an average of all costs for residence, tax and social security. A complementary insurance is offered to all candidates to ensure that they all receive the same treatment in terms of health and social security rights.
- Another way to avoid large discrepancies in the candidates' net salaries is to employ all candidates at the same institution, i.e. the one where the net amount is the highest.
- Before deciding what employment arrangement to adopt, ensure that there are no conflicting residence/tax/social security rules between consortium countries. An example of this was highlighted by one EMJD, which provides mobility tracks to both Italy and France. All candidates are paid from Italy (by the coordinating institution) but French residence rules state that candidates are liable to pay tax in France if they are resident for six months or more.
- Make contact with concerned National Structures and/or ministries for more information on employment contracts in each country. The EURAXESS website (giving details of national contact points) is also a useful resource: <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/general/index>

- Whatever employment contract arrangement is adopted, describe very clearly what the net salary is (on the website) and indicate clearly (on the salary slip) what the gross amount covers.
- Include a trial period in the contract to safeguard standards and minimise any drop-outs at later stages of the programme.

Joint supervision and evaluation mechanisms

- Establishment of doctoral guidance committees and supervision boards to oversee supervision.
- Nominate a supervision coordinator to keep track of information and progress for all the EM doctoral candidates. This coordinator liaises with the supervisors for each candidate and follows up the collaborative work done together
- Organise a monthly teleconference between all the coordinators to discuss ongoing activities and bring up new issues. Apply standardised supervision guidelines for the whole consortium (see the example from one EMJD in annex).
- Provide an E-platform containing a separate private space for each doctoral candidate and each supervisor as well as a forum for discussions for different categories of users.
- Set up a conflict resolution team in order to help PhD candidates face problems they have during the preparation of their thesis. Election of one fellow per cohort as a link between students and the EMMC coordination team.

Internships and joint training activities

- Enable doctoral candidates to work in research groups with companies.
- One programme provides a very comprehensive training catalogue which is annually updated through a call to all 23 consortium partners (using a Google form). Students are first consulted as to what training would be useful to them. The training catalogue is also a useful resource beyond the EMJD, accessible to a wider audience and providing a single access point for training and networking in this field. Income gained from this training programme is used as seed money to fund more training and travel grants.

ASSESSMENT AND IMPACT

Internal and external quality assessment

- Have an external observer monitor the selection process.
- Include doctoral candidates in the management of the EMJD and invite representatives to participate in coordination board meetings in order to provide student feedback (suggestions, complaints and proposals). Provide regular opportunities for student evaluations (e.g. through questionnaires).
- Ask associate partners to contribute to the evaluation of the programme.

Recognition/accreditation issues

- Accreditation at national level can be a lengthy process. Be aware of the European Consortium for Accreditation's multilateral agreement on mutual recognition of accreditation results. More information can be found at: [http://www.eacaconsortium.net/admin/files/assets/subsites/1/documenten/13010504_02_multilateral-agreement-on-the-mutual-recognition-of-accreditation-results-regarding-joint-programmes-\(multra\)-signed-without-annexes.pdf](http://www.eacaconsortium.net/admin/files/assets/subsites/1/documenten/13010504_02_multilateral-agreement-on-the-mutual-recognition-of-accreditation-results-regarding-joint-programmes-(multra)-signed-without-annexes.pdf)

Sustainability

- Some consortia actively seek discussions with potential sponsors in order to raise private funds for more fellowships and to develop other activities. In one programme for example, a longer term promotion policy is being considered to prepare a portfolio so that the consortium can develop (with the help of a marketing and sponsoring expert in the field) contacts with the private sector to raise funds for sustainability.

Employability

- In one programme, in addition to two advisors from two partner institutions, each PhD candidate has an advisor from an industrial partner, whose role is to 'broaden the vision of research beyond academic standards and to prepare future professional integration'.
- All work placements, internships and any other (non-academic) training activities related to the qualification should be clearly listed in the Diploma Supplement to be issued together with the doctoral degree (i.e. section 6.1 of the DS template as developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES is intended for this type of information).
- Collect systematic information on alumni activity (i.e. types of employment gained, etc.) in order to develop a coherent employability strategy.