



Supplement to the EACEA synthesis report

Joint International Master Programmes: lessons learnt from Erasmus Mundus – the first generation

Introduction

This short report constitutes a supplement to the Synthesis Report produced on the first generation of Erasmus Mundus Master Courses.

It results from a statistical analysis of the 57 Erasmus Mundus Master Courses (EMMCs) covered in the Synthesis Report with regard to their course design, mobility patterns, degree of choice offered to students, as well as their opportunities for internships and for mobility beyond Europe.

Beyond a set of minimum requirements (i.e., courses must promote structured cooperation between at least three European HEIs, including a mandatory study period for students in at least two European countries and leading to the award of a joint, double or multiple degree), the Erasmus Mundus programme has never sought to prescribe the same structure for the master courses it has supported. Therefore, consortia were free to design their courses, tailoring them to fit the particular characteristics of their field and of their institutional partnership.

The purpose of this comparative analysis is therefore to offer a brief overview of the implementation models chosen by the 57 EMMC concerned by the Synthesis report in order to achieve the overriding programme objectives of excellence through cooperation, integration and mobility.

Instances of Mobility

In order to meet the EM requirements, the students were to study (or to perform academic activities) in at least two European countries. The analysis shows that the maximum number of instances of mobility per student in a single EMMC was five (this occurred in three master courses or 5% of the total) while for the majority of EMMCs (24 or 42% of the total) students have to visit three different hosting organisations. For the remaining EMMCs, the students visited 2 (16 or 28%) or 4 (14 or 25%) different organisations.

Course design

Looking first at the **type of courses** offered, the following broad structure can be observed for all of the EMMCs:

1. mandatory core courses (first and/or second semester, depending on the duration of the course); usually spread over a large number of consortium partner
2. advanced and elective courses (usually in the second semester);
3. specialized courses (third semester);
4. master thesis (last semester); the preparation and research work for the thesis was usually combined with an internship/work placement in a private/public organization, either participating in the consortia as a full or associated partner or on the basis of more informal cooperation.

With respect to the **student mobility pathways**, there is considerable variety as each programme displays different aspects in course design or other specific elements, depending on the nature of the studies, the discipline or the level of involvement of the partners.

In broad terms, consortia either offered students the opportunity to choose their own mobility destinations from one up to all four semesters, or, conversely, a fixed mobility pathway was imposed on all the students. For instance, it is common to have **closed mobility** (students travelling all together to destinations provided by the Consortium) for joint programmes in areas such as aeronautics, science or bioethics and a much more **flexible approach** with a personalized student trajectory for programmes addressing topics such as culture, history, humanitarian aid, food science or more research oriented (global studies, information and communication technologies).

More specifically, the most common patterns observed were as follows:

1) Master courses giving students full freedom of choice for mobility in all semesters and adapt according to the students' academic needs and expectations. In total, almost 30% of the EMMCs offered full choice to students regarding their mobility destinations.

2) Master courses offering no choice for the mandatory core courses (first semester for the 60 ECTS EMMCs and first two semesters for 90 and 120 ECTS) but were totally open with regard to the master thesis (22 courses or 39% of the total). Some of these courses also offered the same flexibility for their advanced courses in the second semester or their specialized courses in the third semester.

Within this group could also be added two more master courses offering the initial or core courses in the same university, followed by an internship in one case or a study block in the other, before continuing with their specialization and master thesis.

The patterns described above were by far the most frequent choice for consortia in terms of course design. However, a number of other patterns were also identified:

3) Another way of structuring the course was the opposite of the pattern described under 2) above, that is, letting the students choose their first mobility destination whilst giving no option with regard to the destination for the master thesis. Also included here are the courses that followed the pattern: home university - host university – home university, with an initial choice given to the students for their home university. This course structure was encountered in 6 programmes (11% of the total).

4) Similarly, 6 programmes (11% of the total) offered more than one specialization to the students at enrolment stage. In this case, the first hosting university determined the subsequent mobility paths.

5) Five EMMCs (9%) organized the study tracks in all the partner institutions, but the students formed a single group, going to a different partner institution in each semester. In this case, all students followed the same courses with the same specialization.

6) Another specific mobility track is illustrated by one master course that chose to apply a rotation system among its participating universities and to organize each edition in two different partner institutions. The students spent the first year at one location and then moved to the second one for their second year. The participation of the "non-hosting" universities in the EMMC was ensured by the presence of visiting professors.

7) Finally, another course chose to split the students in three separate groups (depending on their language skills and the language of instruction at their destination) who moved together to the same three partner universities.

For all of these master courses, however, the course design was implemented in a flexible way so as to take specific/unforeseen circumstances into account (e.g. sabbatical leave by staff, changes in the provision of local courses, specific and justified needs expressed by individual students, need to extend the time devoted to thesis preparation, etc.). In addition, with respect to the models under which the students could choose their study destination(s), the final decision was frequently taken by the consortium in order to achieve an even spread of all students over the consortium members.

Joint events

60% of the EMMCs organised joint events as a compulsory part of the programme, offering the EM students the possibility to meet, present and discuss their research thesis, thus building integration within the EM community. Although these joint events took a number of different forms, the most common events in which all the EM students were present were the **induction weeks**, usually organised in only one university for all the students from the same cohort, and the **graduation ceremony**. For the majority of consortia, it was convenient to organise these two events simultaneously, usually in the month of September, so that three cohorts of students had the opportunity to meet. For some of the programmes, these induction days coincided with intensive language courses or with an intensive study module.

In addition to the "induction week / graduation ceremony" event, 40% of consortia (21 in total) organized other types of joint events to bring added value to the programme and enhance their students' academic performance. These events took the form of workshops, summer/winter schools, international conferences and/or joint study trips organised on a yearly basis, in order to bring together all of the enrolled students, as well as teaching staff and experts from the field. These events were an opportunity for students to demonstrate and deepen their skills and competences.

Due to budget constraints one programme organized a "virtual" joint event in the form of an online thesis seminar.

Internships

Given the diversity of the disciplines among the EMMCs, the specific type of internship varied according to the programme.

15 out of the 57 EMMCs (26%) reported that they had no internships or research training provisions at all, or did not provide any information on internships in their report.

While 9 EMMCs (16%) expressed clearly in their reports that the possibility of an internship was **optional**, 25 EMMCs (44%) had **compulsory** internships that covered between 6 and maximum 30 ECTS. Most of the optional internships were carried out during the summer break or the final semester.

Compulsory internships were in many cases combined with the master thesis. During this period, partner or non-partner organisations (private companies/public bodies) hosted students for their research projects or fieldwork.

8 EMMCs (14%) reported that, although some students were offered internships or found them by themselves, these activities were not formally recognised as part of the study programme.

Third country mobility

Under the first phase of the EM programme, EMMC consortia were exclusively composed of European universities. The possibility to cooperate with non-European universities was limited to those consortia that had successfully applied for an EM Action 3 Partnership. Four master programmes from 2004 and two from 2005 benefitted from an Action 3 funding, thus enabling European students to spend part of their EMMC period in one of the consortium non-European partners. In most cases, this mobility took the form of an internship.

As from the second phase of the EM programme, non-European universities could be included directly in the consortium composition. Nine of the EMMCs with a Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) from 2006 thus reported third country mobility for at least some of their student cohorts – this higher number is explained by the fact that the final cohort for this group of EMMCs was managed when third country mobility was mainstreamed as part of the second phase of EM.

Of the master courses offering third country mobility, most offered a choice of only two or three destination countries (most frequently the USA, with India, South Africa and Australia also offered by several EMMCs). Only one programme offered ten possible destinations and this was consistent with the nature of the course (humanitarian aid).

Language courses

To facilitate integration into the local community, almost all EM partners hosting students offered language classes. In a few cases, this was due to the fact that some of the core courses were taught in the local language. In this case, language classes were also compulsory and credit-bearing. Beyond this, 72% of the EMMCs offered language learning on an optional basis, covering a range of 13 different languages.

For some of the EMMCs, language classes were integrated into the induction weeks at the beginning of the year. More usually, students were able to attend courses over one or two semesters or even for the whole duration of the EMMC.