

# Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees Cluster meeting on Sustainability and Employability

## Conclusions

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*Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency  
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Degrees*

## **EMJMD Cluster meeting on Sustainability and Employability**

### **Conclusions**

#### **“Ensuring employability through links to the world of work”**

#### **Workshop 1**

##### Resource Person

- Ms Anna Horvath, Erasmus+: Education and Youth Policy Analysis Unit at EACEA
- Ms Martina Friedrich, OeAD-NA Erasmus+ Education, Austria
- Mr Alessandro Leonardi, ECOSTAR (Knowledge Alliance), University of Padova, Italy

##### Background

[Europe 2020](#) is the European Union's growth and jobs strategy for the current decade. To reach its objective, the EU has adopted eight ambitious targets to be reached by 2020, employment being a key policy component.

The European employability of graduates is one of the most important goals of the Bologna Process. The 2012 Bucharest Communiqué highlights the importance of 'cooperation between employers, students and Higher Education Institutions', to ensure that students are equipped with a combination of transversal skills and up-to-date subject-specific knowledge, enabling them to 'contribute to the wider needs of society and the labour market'.

In line with these objectives, the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (EMJMDs) focus on the improvement of the level of competences and skills of Master graduates and their international employability, contributing to the creation of a broader European labour market.

The yearly "Graduate Impact Study" of the [Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association](#) shows that nearly 40% of Erasmus Mundus Master Course graduates found a job within the first two months after their graduation and confirms that EMJMDs play a key role in the support of young graduates to acquire the knowledge, skills, experience and intercultural competences needed to succeed in the labour market.

##### Proposed discussion questions

1. What actions and initiatives have you taken to encourage employability and entrepreneurship through the joint master programme? What has proven particularly successful and which obstacles did you encounter?
2. How can the development of professional competencies and "soft skills" be integrated within the master programmes? How can we design academic programs that will give students the knowledge and skills that today's job market demands?

3. How does your EMJMD stimulate cooperation and build up trust between universities and the world of work? What are the mutual benefits for all actors involved?

### Introduction

Ms Anna Horvath's introductory presentation provided an overview of the results of the study “Structural Indicators on Graduate Employability in Europe 2016”<sup>1</sup>. The report examines whether countries use regular labour market forecasting to improve the employability of graduates. Moreover, other indicators include the involvement of employers in external quality assurance procedures, requirements or incentives given for student work placements, the availability of career guidance services, and the use of regular graduate tracking surveys.

The Yerevan Communiqué states that the objectives related to the employability of graduates have the goal to support Higher Education Institutions in strengthening their dialogue with employers implementing programmes with a good balance between theoretical and practical components fostering the entrepreneurship and innovation skills of students following graduates’ career developments and, promoting mobility.

Ms Anna Horvath underlined that in most countries, requirements on the involvement of employers in external quality assurance are the same for the "academic" and "professional" specialization tracks in Higher Education. However, in France, Poland and Portugal for example, employers are more involved in the professional than in the academic aspects.

Regarding employability, a fundamental role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is to provide graduates with skills that will enable them to find jobs after graduation. A common practice to ensure that graduates gain the necessary competences is to include work placements as part of higher education programmes. Seven countries have requirements in place for internships (Belgium German-speaking community, Spain, France, Italy, Lithuania, Romania and Montenegro). In many other countries this requirement applies only to professional higher education programmes or specific types of HEIs. Besides the regulatory framework, other countries also use financial incentives to encourage institutions to include internships as part of study programmes by funding the costs of these placements, either fully or in part.

Graduate tracking surveys seek to track the employment destinations and early careers of higher education graduates. Regular surveys are conducted at national and/or regional level in the majority of the education systems covered. Nevertheless, while graduate tracking surveys are conducted in nearly every country, only 16 education systems make systematic efforts to use the information collected. At European level, a Europe-wide graduate tracking survey is being implemented through the Eurograduate project<sup>2</sup>.

Ms Horvath finished her presentation explaining that an increasing number of countries is introducing new measures and monitoring tools to enhance graduate employability. However, the social dimension of graduates' employability is not prominent in the higher education policy agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> See: EC/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016. *Structural Indicators on Graduate Employability in Europe – 2016*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

<sup>2</sup> See: [Eurograduate.eu](http://eurograduate.eu)

## Good practices

Almost all coordinators of the EMJMDs highlighted the fact that their programmes have already good and strong links with the labour market. Some of them argued that it is wise to integrate the employers at application stage in the project, mostly as associated partners. This deepens the relationship between the HEIs and the businesses.

### *"More flexibility is needed for internships"*

The main technique used by some coordinators to effectively increase students' employability is to include compulsory work placements as part of the curriculum. EMJMD coordinators may also find it useful to look for ideas on how to arrange internships in other existing programmes at the university.

There should be a certain flexibility for students to be able to complete the internships during the summer break, immediately after their studies, or to connect them with the master thesis research. Students appreciate the opportunity of easing their transition from education to the world of work. In any case, the consortium should always collect feedback from the students about their internships to take the outcomes into account.

Other examples include offering students the opportunity of participating regularly to career fairs to get in touch with businesses, and to learn more about their future possibilities in their line of business.

### *"Representatives from the world of work should be involved in the programme"*

Inviting experts from the industry to specific courses, either to develop a practical workshop or as guest lecturers, helps students to become aware of the latest advancements in the field or of scientific challenges related to their future research or when entering the labour market.

From the Quality Assurance point of view and in order to keep the curriculum updated and ensuring that it responds to the demands of the labour market, having employers as part of the advisory board can be helpful. They can be involved in the monitoring and evaluation process, and can give feedback from their practical perspective to bring the programme up-to-date if needed.

Additionally, some coordinators mentioned that in their respective master programmes, students present their master thesis, not only in front of the academic board, but also in front of associated partners and alumni who could be their potential future employers. The best master thesis is selected for an award.

### *"Soft skills are gaining relevance in the world of work"*

The participants agree that the main benefit related to the different academic, social and cultural backgrounds that students bring into the course is how they are able to acquire soft skills from each other (e.g. better understanding of other cultures and behaviours by meeting people from other countries). Even if often these abilities are not immediately identified by the students, they might need guidance to become aware of them.

## Challenges and possible solutions

Some coordinators report that in the initial phase of a new EMJMD it is not easy to find internship placements nor strong business partners. However, they acknowledge that the reputation and visibility of the EMJMDs programme helps the creation of new relations.

#### *"Finding suitable internships"*

Different national frameworks for the working conditions of students create some difficulties, as in some countries internships have to be paid placements, while in others they have to be unpaid.

It is suggested to look for support inside the institution to find potential business partners, by building upon previous relationships, which can be organised via career centres. This would help to overcome the lack of links between the academics and employers in EMJMD consortia.

Consortia should write reference letters for students and graduates to increase their employability. These letters should give a comprehensive overview about their acquired hard and soft skills. The Diploma supplement could also play an important role transferring this information.

#### *"Balance between the academia and the world of work"*

Some coordinators explained that they hesitate to include businesses in the consortia and to give employers an active role, due to the fact that they might limit the academic freedom through influencing the curriculum to become profit-driven. It is essential that master programmes establish the approach they wish to follow and find a balance between theory and practice that responds to the needs of all stakeholders.

#### *"Supporting soft skills"*

The consortium can offer specific courses to develop soft skills, such as languages, project management, communication or intercultural behaviour, which will indirectly make students aware of their improvements in these areas outside the specific courses. This horizontal know-how could help them throughout their professional life. To ensure better results, ECTS should be awarded and the content of the courses need to be described in the learning outcomes.

## **“Enlarged concept of sustainability - maximising institutional and societal impact”**

### **Workshop 2**

#### Resource Persons

- Ms Joyce Fongers, University of Groningen, Netherlands
- Mr Francesco M. Pirocchi, LUISS University Rome, Italy
- Mr Márton Beke, Tempus Public Foundation, Hungary

#### Background

*"A project is sustainable when it continues to deliver benefits to [its] beneficiaries and/or other constituencies for an extended period after the Commission's financial assistance has been terminated"* (DG EAC, Handbook on Sustainability, 2006)

This wide description of sustainability goes far beyond the financial aspects and encompasses notions of integration, continued cooperation, added value, innovation, quality, visibility, employability and transparency. EMJMDs have a particular strong impact on the visibility and international recognition of the participating institutions and moreover lead to structural changes, such as the establishment or enlargement of international offices or the implementation or amelioration of student services. Moreover, strong links and cooperation in research activities beyond the project and the exchange of good practices and expertise between the consortium members, e.g. related to didactic practices and methodologies, are positive side effects of EMJMDs. A sustainable programme is not necessarily one that maintains exactly the same structure as during the funding period. Changes, new developments, different approaches and solutions are all part of the natural evolution of a project, as long as it still delivers an added value to the institutions, the students and other beneficiaries.

#### Proposed discussion questions

4. What is the institutional and societal impact of your EMJMD and how will it contribute to your sustainability plan? How can your consortium maximize it through networking activities at individual and institutional level?
5. How do you strategically involve visiting scholars in your EMJMD in order to enhance innovation at institutional level?
6. What are the joint elements of the internationalisation strategy of your Consortium partners and what is the impact on the individual institutions?

#### Introduction

Ms Joyce Fongers gave a presentation on the institutional approach of sustainability. During her presentation, she explored the added value of a sustainable programme in terms of the three

missions of a university: education, research and the societal impact, which she put in the context of internationalisation.

The strategies of universities should not have internationalisation as a goal in itself, but as a means to benefit education and research, ensuring sustainability for the different projects undertaken by the HEI. An advanced internationalisation strategy should focus on quality rather than quantity, with the purpose of increasing quantity through quality.

Ms Joyce Fongers also mentioned that if the cooperation history that joint programmes require (e.g. legal, political, social) is considered, they constitute the result of already existing complex forms of cooperation. Nevertheless, in the EMJMD programme, even though there is a complex cooperation history and ample partner commitment, the threat of discontinuity is constant (no sustainability in time) when project funding ends. Ms Fongers expressed that interconnectedness - i.e. linking different (perhaps seemingly unrelated) cooperation initiatives - could help the consortium to become sustainable. Furthermore, if institutions integrate EMJMDs into their internationalisation strategies, they can have multiplier, spill-over (new collaborations with adjacent fields) and spinoff effects (such as intercultural communication), thus creating “longer-term added value in education, research and societal impact”.

Mr Francesco M. Pirocchi presented the background and the results of the [Best practice guide: Sustainability of Erasmus Mundus Master Courses](#), which contains statistical data, practical guidelines and best practice testimonials from Erasmus Mundus Master Courses (EMMCs). The Best practice guide is based on the "Survey on the Sustainability of Erasmus Mundus Master Courses", which had been implemented by the Unit responsible for EMJMDs at EACEA. The survey was launched in March 2016 and consisted of an online questionnaire and follow-up interviews with selected EMMCs. One of the main conclusions is that sustainability needs to be considered as a complex concept comprising not only financial aspects. Therefore, a tailor-made sustainability strategy needs to be put in place by the consortia. An EMJMD can indeed represent many benefits for participating institutions, including long term impact in terms of integration, continued cooperation within the consortium and beyond, research collaborations, improvement of administrative procedures and transparency and international visibility. Benefits also extend to innovation in curriculum design and course provision, quality assurance and increased employability of graduates.

### Good practices

Participants of the discussion agreed that – especially in the earlier phases of the Erasmus Mundus programme - those implementing the joint masters were often looked upon as pioneers within their institutions. At present, their expertise is widely sought for by the HEIs (international officers, project coordinators, academic staff, etc.) and they often become advisors in the fields of internationalisation and curricula based on excellence, as well as the different aspects of sustainability.

### *"Harmonised strategies"*

The strong international component of EMJMDs, heavily based on close cooperation, requires that all the partners have harmonised internationalisation strategies. Although it can be

challenging, it affects positively the institutions, the embeddedness of the EMJMD projects and on a larger scale the cooperation potential of European HEIs.

### *"Third Mission of universities"*

Many EMJMD coordinators emphasised that their projects had remarkable effects on the surrounding cities, regions and vice versa, as they managed to form fruitful cooperations with the municipalities, local or regional councils, as well as NGOs and social institutions. For instance, voluntary work or placements at such organisations can influence, not only the transversal skills and employability perspectives of the students, but can also contribute to stronger and long-lasting relations between the HEIs and their non-academic partners. Nearly all coordinators agreed that cooperation with industrial partners and employers (in terms of knowledge transfer, placements, visiting scholars etc.) have similar benefits to the quality of the joint programmes and their sustainability.

### *"The importance of visiting scholars"*

The participants emphasised the importance of planning strategically the selection of guest lecturers, as these - usually highly renowned - academics contribute strongly to the promotion activities of the master programme (making the project more appealing to students, developing international research projects, etc.) and represent an added value for the academic quality of the curriculum, which can reflect on quality assurance.

## Challenges and possible solutions

### *"Obtaining support from the institution"*

Often, the most common challenge for the consortium is caused by the different national frameworks, where the national rules and legislation, especially regarding accreditation and recognition do not offer enough flexibility to joint programmes. The fact is that each participating HEI has different rules and regulations, as well administrative procedures in place, among other practices that may differ from one university to another.

At institutional level, especially in cases where the institutions are less experienced in the management of EMJMDs, many coordinators commented on the fact that it was not easy to harmonise the work of the various administrative and academic departments. Staff members often believe that an international project belongs exclusively to the realm of international relations offices, while EMJMDs are much more complex and need a well-tuned cooperation between the different services. In case the stakeholders fail to address these issues, the EMJMD can be left isolated.

As a consequence of different organisational cultures, it is not always easy to gain the support of the HEI leaders. Moreover, teaching staff may be reluctant to innovative ideas. However, obtaining their support is an essential step to create and maintain the sustainability of a project.



### *"Reaching to society"*

While almost all coordinators agreed with the importance of reaching out to the society at large (city, region, NGOs, etc.), they also discussed the difficulties that they face to achieve the 'third mission' of universities, partly due to the fact that academics and administrative staff are not always aware of this objective.

There was general agreement that the potential of current students and alumni should be used in a more systematic and strategic way, not only to promote the EMJMD, but also to support the programme implementation. The participants also suggested turning towards the "ecosystem" of Higher Education (non-academic partners, cities, etc.) to become more active in the field of the 'third mission' of HEIs. These strategies would significantly contribute to the sustainability of EMJMDs.

## **“Building an effective business plan and exploring potential (financial) co-operations”**

### **Workshop 3**

#### Resource Persons

- Philippe Gourbesville, Coordinator of the EMJMD EUROAQUAE+, France
- Katarína Šmálová, SAAIC NA Erasmus+ Education and Training Sectors, Slovakia
- Thomas Berger, University of Fulda, Germany

#### Background

The EMJMDs are prestigious, integrated, international study programmes, jointly delivered by a strong and committed international partnership of Higher Education Institutions. Sustainable partnerships are often based on shared financial planning, long term commitment and sustainable funding models including funding from multiple stakeholders.

Under Erasmus+, EMJMDs are requested to include a convincing mid/long-term sustainability strategy and an effective business plan with realistic projections beyond the EU funding period to attract excellent students - including self-funded students - worldwide. This implies the mobilisation of other funding sources for scholarships to guarantee the sustainability of the course.

Achieving sustainability not only requires building an effective business plan. It involves learning from experience, making decisions about which elements of the programme to sustain, exploring new co-operations, selecting the right strategies, and using the right tools to build support for the programme.

#### Proposed discussion questions

1. Which stakeholders have you involved in the design and implementation of your sustainability and business plan? Which actions proved to be particularly successful and what obstacles did you encounter?
2. How did your Master programme manage to involve non-educational actors and representatives from the business world in order to attract other sources of funding? What are the mutual benefits of these collaborations?
3. What resources does your Consortium dedicate to promoting the sustainability of the programme? How does your Master facilitate the involvement of self-funded students from Programme and Partner countries and which information sources do you provide to them?

#### Introduction

The presentation of Mr Philippe Gourbesville introduced the participants to the topic by presenting the sustainability strategy of EUROAQUAE+. He explained the initiatives the

consortium has taken over the years to achieve financial stability in their EMJMD. During his presentation, Mr Gourbesville identified a series of priorities and actions that can help masters obtain the necessary support and should be part of the business plan.

The first notion underlined is the need of establishing a joint degree. This serves as recognition of the programme which helps integrating it within regular curricula and courses, while also contributing to receiving financial support. Mr Gourbesville also listed the characteristics that have made EUROAQUAE+ a sustainable programme, such as developing a brand, enlarging the consortium with non-EU institutions, creating a "Club of friends" with industry partners to offer internships and jobs to the graduates.

In this context, Mr Gourbesville acknowledged that sustainability in Higher Education is challenging, since the landscape is highly dynamic, [public] education is not a business and often, innovation is not synonym to sustainability (reactivity vs. sustainability).

The presentation concluded with a list of priorities, which Mr. Gourbesville considered that all Master programmes should focus on: Institutional and professional endorsements; Synergies between education and research; Mixing initiatives and frameworks in order to get diversity of support; and finally, to keep the motivation throughout the process.

### Good practices

Discussing the above mentioned questions, the coordinators focused on a number of initiatives which are considered good practice for building an effective business plan.

*“Build a brand name, be unique”*

To attract additional resources, it is key that EMJMD coordinators build a brand name for their study programme and ensure its uniqueness. This should be done by building quality, choosing effective associate partners and offering opportunities to graduates, both in the academic and the professional world. Having a strong brand often results in constant support from all consortium members as well as non-academic partners, while being able to attract the best students and increase the numbers of self-funded students.

*“Internships increase the attractiveness of EMJMD for students”*

Having professional experience gives graduates a competitive advance when entering the world of work. Therefore, gaining experience in the field during the master programme is frequently one the students' priorities.

There is evidence that EMJMDs (in any field of study or discipline) offering internships are more attractive to students. In return, prospective students are more likely to be willing to cover the costs of the programme from their own resources.

*“Institutional commitment is crucial”*

Remaining sustainable after the EU funds cease to support the EMJMD is easier when the course is integrated in the curricula of the home institutions. Institutional commitment of all degree-awarding consortium partners allows the coverage of the programme's operational costs

(particularly the costs of staff working on the programme) and, might also offer the possibility of awarding institutional scholarships for the best students.

*“Alumni are the best ambassadors”*

Tracking graduates is an effective tool for collecting evidence of the excellence of the EMJMDs. Moreover, success stories of EMJMD alumni are excellent resources for the programme’s promotion to prospective students.

Alumni can be assets when creating links with non-academic partners and the labour market. They can represent employers, but they still feel affiliated to their universities, meaning that they are keener on collaborating and/or providing financial support.

### Challenges and possible solutions

*“Links with non-academic partners depend on the EMJMD’s profile and the stage of the project”*

A common issue discussed among the Master programmes in the humanities field is that they have more difficulties finding sponsors or external partners willing to provide financial support (in comparison to the science field). This seems to be the case especially for EMJMDs in their early stages of existence, which are not yet in a position to present successful graduates or other convincing results.

One of the key solutions to address this issue is a strong and continuous effort in exploring and identifying the stakeholders for the specific joint study programme. The campaign should not only target large enterprises or companies. Small and medium-sized enterprises, (professional) associations, NGOs and even municipalities, can also contribute (e.g. providing access to events/locations or in the form of public transport tickets for students). Each stakeholder has a different added-value, some can contribute financially and others can provide internships or thesis support. In any case the main target should not be obtaining financial contributions immediately. The consortium partners can agree that each of them brings on board at least one non-academic partner.

It is important to maintain relations with non-academic partners over time. They can be invited to events such as graduation ceremonies, presentations of thesis, seminars, winter or summer schools, roundtables and alumni days. They can be involved in advisory boards, curriculum development and quality assurance measures, offer guest lectures, provide thesis and project supervision or help students draw their business plans and launch start-ups. If the personal approach is maintained, coordinators can recommend individual students to companies. Setting up networks of alumni (including via social networks) always brings positive results. Collecting data about alumni is a financial investment, but it provides very good results.

The objective of all these activities should always be to collect feedback from the partners on how to make the EMJMD more attractive, by creating mutually beneficial, win-win situations. However, issues such as: 'academic freedom versus commercialisation', the strategical agenda of a hosting organisation, or the protection of sensitive information in businesses, need to be addressed.

*“Funding from companies is unstable”*

Finding long-term guaranteed funding from outside the academia is a continuous work in progress. However, being able to offer internships to students increases the attractiveness of the EMJMD while encouraging the commitment of non-academic partners (the students' future employers) to provide sponsorship. To obtain successful results, a specific strategy should be developed to maintain the collaboration.

Other forms of collaboration, such as getting involved in other activities, research notably, can bring new additional resources. Enlarging the network (also to professional networks) increases the EMJMD's visibility and attractiveness vis-à-vis enterprises as well.

Including non-academic partners as associated partners from the beginning of the project can also help maintaining the commitment once the EU grant is finished.

*“Industrial partners find it challenging to support mobile students with full-time scholarships”*

As mentioned above, obtaining financial contributions should not be the main goal of the collaboration with non-academic partners. Offering internships for students already adds value to the programme for potential students. The company or hosting organisation supports the student during a shorter period of time while also drawing benefit from his/her presence.

*“Not all consortium partners provide scholarships”*

Institutional scholarships and fee waivers offered by consortium partners can be rather limited. It is necessary to search for external sources of funding, among which, self-paying students are usually the ones most sought for. Looking for self-payers in countries with (high) tuition fees and involving more non-EU partners can provide good results. A high number of potential self-payers come from non-EU countries (especially the fast growing economies interested in networking and ready to invest), and it is strategically wise to focus promotion activities on these regions. Additionally, some countries offer scholarships to study in other parts of the world.

Marketing, both traditional and via social media, can play an important role in attracting students from across the world, EMJMDs should consider hiring a professional if the expertise is not available within the institution. Local and national networks can be supportive in running promotion nationwide.

In terms of practical initiatives, students are excellent promoters of their own study programmes, therefore hiring self-financed students to work for the management of the master, in tasks such as running promotion activities, particularly online and in the social media, keeping a blog or updating the database of scholarship opportunities, can be mutually beneficial. Additionally, the use of Erasmus+ credit mobility to lower the mobility costs for self-payers is an interesting possibility. Nonetheless, implementing this option depends on the individual arrangements of the consortium and the mobility tracks to be supported.

In order to attract self-paying students it is crucial to collect and keep updated information on various sources of scholarships, as well as to provide guidance to students for applying as a standard service, combined with the accommodation and visa support.

Gradual capacity building of staff and continuity are key factors in reaching sustainability. This can be mostly achieved by employing a project manager on a long-term contract, and recognising that implementing a joint study programme is very time consuming for the coordinator and the consortium. The preparatory year of the EMJMD should be used to build trust and commitment by the institution's administration.

On a final note, EMJMDs often compete with other international study programmes that run at the university. Practice shows that if professionals, the labour market and other consortium partners appreciate an EMJMD, the management of the coordinating institution is also keener on offering scholarships and covering costs related to the study programme.

*“EMJMD coordinators are usually teachers, not managers able to set up a business plan”*

Several discussions among workshop participants resulted in the conclusion that EMJMD coordinators, usually working as teachers, lack managerial skills and do not have the know-how to build a sustainable business plan. They need guidance, networking and peer-learning.

The workshop participants proposed several actions to be taken by the European Commission, EACEA and National Agencies in order to support the sustainability of EMJMDs in the future. In addition to the already mentioned Erasmus Mundus label, there was a strong agreement among participants on the need for disseminating more good practice examples, sharing experience and peer learning among coordinators and rectors of involved universities. The Coordinators discussed about the benefits of establishing an online communication platform to support the management of EMJMDs. Last but not least, Coordinators pointed out that a reinforced campaign promoting the Erasmus Mundus programme in Europe would help to have more self-funding students from Europe.

## **"Securing institutional support and building the institutional 'reputational capital' through excellence, visibility and promotion"**

### **Learning Corner 1**

#### Resource persons

##### Group A

- Moderator: Ms Barbara Rega, EMMC FIPDes, France
- Rapporteur: Mr Annika Sundbäck-Lindroos, Centre for International Mobility CIMO, Finland

##### Group B

- Moderator: Ms Anna Paola Soncini, EMJMD CLE, Italy
- Rapporteur: Ms Jasmina Skočilić, Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes, Croatia

#### Background

Institutional support is considered as one of the cornerstones for the sustainability of an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree. However, excellence programmes such as EMJMDs, are expected to contribute to the 'reputational capital' of the institutions as well. The questions for discussion were expected to gather the views and experiences of the participants on this topic.

#### Proposed questions for discussion

- A. How does your EMJMD ensure institutional support at all levels [international office, rectors' office, the faculty department, financial department, etc.]?
- B. How has the EMJMD contributed to the 'reputational capital' of your institution [spin-off effects, research collaborations, scientific recognition, additional funding opportunities, etc.]?

Question A: How does your EMJMD ensure institutional support at all levels [international office, rectors' office, the faculty department, financial department, etc.]?

The collaborative effort required to manage an EMJMD makes institutional support particularly important for its successful development. Among other aspects, the institutional support is closely linked with project sustainability. It is recommended that projects secure institutional support before applying under the EMJMD programme yet the participants discussed cases where the institutional support was not guaranteed, hindering the project implementation. It was agreed that, receiving the support from the management and staff of the HEI can be a long and challenging process that eases with time and the first project results.

These considerations are of particular importance for EMJMDs selected from universities with no prior experience on the programme, with the project coordinator acting as a pioneer, laying ground work with other colleagues. In any case, finding the right approach for each project is a long process. Often, the coordinator is the driving force of the master course. However, the institution needs to provide support and act as guarantee for the programme implementation and sustainability. Due to the joint nature of the programme, the cooperation with the partners should be smooth and long term.

### Challenges and proposed solutions

Building institutional ownership appears to be the key challenge for the coordinators. Often, despite the engagement from the management, the initial awareness and support from them and other departments can be low. Additionally, changes in the HEI can endanger the project's longevity. Solutions proposed by the participants are:

- Inviting the HEI management and associated partners to important events, such as graduation ceremonies, is a good practice to raise awareness. Likewise, involving the staff from the universities at early stages can provide good results as it strengthens ownership, e.g. inviting colleagues from outside the EMJMD partnership (especially administrative staff) to events, project meetings, or delegating specific tasks.
- External recognition, i.e. praise from external stakeholders, can be used to obtain approval from the own institution.
- The lack of flexibility from the institutional structures, besides the International Office, frequently requires constant reminders of their committed involvement and responsibilities.

The administrative side of managing an EMJMD can put additional strain on available human resources, such as finance, admissions, marketing, international relations departments, etc. Furthermore, the project rules and requirements - e.g. accounting procedures - often differ from the usual institutional practices. In conjunction with learning new rules, there is often the issue of language barrier for the staff.

- Taking advance of the existing mobility options for staff (e.g. under Erasmus+) to improve the language competences or exchange good practice with more experienced institutions.
- If the existing institutional capacities are insufficient to administrate the programme, hiring additional staff should be considered. The additional staff could be initially funded via the project funds and later on from institutional resources.

Securing support from all partner institutions involved and, coordinating the cooperation among partners, can become an issue. One of the most common challenges is to reconcile the different rules and policies among all partners on institutional or national level. It requires good will and persistence to overcome these legal barriers.

- Defining clear partner roles from the beginning of the project (even at application stage), and sharing the consortium management responsibilities among partners is a good strategy to assure a smooth collaboration.



- The use of specific tools for project management, such as joint online platforms and repositories, can ease inter consortia cooperation.
- Developing contingency plans and procedures for hand-over of tasks will mitigate any unforeseen situations that may arise during the project.
- One of the most recommended practices is to gradually expand partnerships to benefit from the added value of incorporating new institutions to the consortium.

Question B: How has the EMJMD contributed to the 'reputational capital' of the institution, what spin-offs are visible?

The perspective of strengthening the visibility and reputation of the institution is considered to be one of the clear motivations for applying under the EMJMDs programme. It was agreed that alumni represent the most important element in terms of building the 'reputational capital'. Well-performing, highly motivated and knowledgeable alumni are the best promoters of the joint international study programmes towards both employers and academic partners. Moreover, when alumni return to their home countries, they can act as catalysts to enlarge and strengthen the cooperation, e.g. they contribute to wider research networks, stronger internationalization and create valuable contacts to non-academic partners and employers.

A wide variety of spin-offs result from the EMJMD collaborations. The participants discussed that the Erasmus Mundus brand name represents a sign of quality and reliability, which eases the contact with other academically strong institutions. There is a current increasing focus on developing strategic partnerships.

Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters influence the internationalization strategies of the partner HEIs, both at local level and in relation to the characteristics of the mobility. Several institutions indicated that the EMJMD cooperation had triggered the development of courses offered in English, as well as increased the staff motivation to further improve their English and the competences related to teaching in a multicultural classroom.

The extended research collaboration is one of the most evident consequences of the EMJMD cooperation (this can also occur vice versa). The links between research and education is highly visible within the EMJMD scheme, since joint degrees often stem from a shared interest in specific research topics between the partner institutions. In addition, the EMJMD collaboration can also provide access to the research network of the partner institutions, enlarging the networks even further.

Alumni can also constitute excellent spin-offs, in view that EMJMD scholarships attract excellent students, which are later strong PhD candidates and potential future researchers for a partner institution.

### Challenges and proposed solutions

The main challenge related to building the 'reputational capital' is considered to be the current EMJMD financing scheme, due to the brief funding cycle of only three intakes. Building an academic reputation takes time and, as previously noted, the alumni are crucial in the process.

After three intakes, the number of alumni is still limited to have an impact on the promotion and visibility of the programme.

- Developing internship programmes with potential employers can strengthen the 'reputational capital' of the institution by creating links with the field and the world of work. While creating these relations requires additional resources, it pays off in terms of dissemination of the programme and attractiveness of the course towards students.
- The consortium should focus on the visibility of the programme since the beginning, both internally within the partner institutions and towards external stakeholders. The discussions identified that academic excellence, unique student competences, integrated mobility and attractive scholarships as some of the important selling points for the EMJMD programmes.

The discussions concluded that in order to ensure institutional commitment and to enhance reputational capital, it is essential to involve all the stakeholders in the implementation of the study programme from the beginning onwards. There is a risk of isolation and exclusion if all the benefits and learning remain solely within the colleagues directly involved in the programme management. It is key to involve and engage local staff from the very start and during all stages of the project.

## **"Career guidance for students and graduates & Tracking the employability of graduates"**

### **Learning Corner 2**

#### Resource persons

##### Group A

- Moderator: Ms Inger Munk, EMMA EMJMD, Denmark
- Rapporteur: Ms Beate Körner, DAAD, Germany

##### Group B

- Moderator: Mr Jaume Guia, EMTM EMJMD-QR, Spain
- Rapporteur: Ms Susanne Suhr Andersen, Danish Agency for Higher Education, Denmark

#### Background

Offering career guidance for the students of an EMJMD is a way of contributing to the development of the students' employability. It is important that universities put in place strategies that can benefit students and their future integration into the world of work. However, career guidance is also closely linked to getting suitable statistics by tracking the graduates and their career in an effective way. The following questions were addressed to gather the views and experiences of the participants on this topic.

#### Proposed questions for discussion

- A) What tools has your EMJMD put in place to track the career of the graduates? How and to what extent do you use tracking studies to analyse the success and impact of the joint programme and further adapt it to the needs of the world of work? How do you use the data in order to respond to the demands of the labour market and to increase the employability perspectives?
- B) What kind of services and activities do you offer to guide the students professionally [career days, internships, counselling, job fairs, project events with industry representatives, etc.]?

Question A: What tools has your EMJMD put in place to track the career of the graduates? How and to what extent do you use tracking studies to analyse the success and impact of the joint programme and further adapt it to the needs of the world of work? How do you use the data in order to respond to the demands of the labour market and to increase the employability perspectives?

These questions allowed the participants to exchange very practical examples of the work they carry out to track their alumni' careers. The following list summarises the most common challenges and approaches taken to overcome them, as well as innovative initiatives taken by the projects:

## Challenges

Several challenges were identified by the Coordinators during the discussions. Coordinators mentioned that offering career guidance to students can be challenging for universities because it requires additional resources, however it is highly appreciated by the students.

One of the problematics encountered is related to outdated contact data. Email addresses from the students can quickly become outdated, losing the main contact with the alumni if other measures are not put in place. Most of the coordinators agreed that the tracking of students needs to be done internally as external companies are too expensive. Using the data to generate changes and respond to the labour market needs is challenging for the coordinators, as their resources are limited.

## Proposed solutions

Coordinators discussed that students groups on social media (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn), where both current students and alumni are included, are an excellent way to keep track of the students, while also allowing them to communicate with each other. They need to be kept updated over time in order to maintain the activity levels.

It was discussed that EMA representatives can explain their work to students and present the advantages of joining the association. EMA has their own tracking system in place, which could support EMJMDs.

Moreover, the general tracking systems of institutions can be extended to the EMJMD students. If the university has an alumni department, it is recommended to build good relations with them from the beginning of the project.

Several ideas were raised such as creating a specific brochure for the industry that includes general information about the programme, employability statistics, alumni testimonials and career perspectives, as a way to give visibility to the course and attract sponsors.

The involvement of students/alumni in board meetings to receive their input and feedback is crucial to ensure good results on career guidance for students and graduates & and track the employability of graduates. Engaging graduates to work on the management of the course can help to link the students with alumni, and they bring a different perspective to the staff.

On the other hand, it was also mentioned that surveys should be used carefully as students often receive questionnaires from many different sources.

Summer/Winter schools can support the regular master course with the objective to teach the students the latest innovations in the field, allowing the EMJMD to remain more stable.

Question B: What kind of services and activities do you offer to guide the students professionally [career days, internships, counselling, job fairs, project events with industry representatives, etc.]?

Career guidance is essential for the development of students' employability. The groups discussed different strategies to ensure the biggest possible impact for the students, proposing solutions to overcome the challenges that can arise when developing these initiatives.

## Challenges and proposed solutions

The various cultural and personal backgrounds of Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree-students were identified as important factors for career guidance. The coordinators noted how students often feel that by being admitted into a programme based on excellence, they already have a direct pathway to a job afterwards. Guiding students towards taking responsibility of their careers is fundamental; career guidance should not only be about helping students but also about teaching them to be pro-active and take ownership over the process of identifying potential job opportunities.

The different pedagogical approaches that can be used in career guidance were also discussed, identifying three of them as the mostly used among the group members:

- Counselling: An activity that helps students figure out which particular area of specialization they are more inclined to work in within the field.
- Searching: Students are guided to find and learn about companies and organizations that employ graduates specialized in the field or set of fields of their choice.
- Practicing: Students gain first-hand practical experience on a specific job profile.

Nevertheless, these approaches are not meant as stand-alone, they should be combined with academic counselling, offering the students a holistic approach to the study process and future career. Employability should become an integrated part of the students' learning outcomes.

In order to achieve this, the following solutions were proposed:

- To combine internships or "real life projects" with the preparation of the master thesis on an individual basis, with the objective of enabling students to use their knowledge in relation to a potential job and to demonstrate possible outcomes.
- To put in place academic and career counselling throughout the entire study period, so that elements from career guidance become part of the academic content.
- To make use of the different approaches in career guidance activities, such as study fairs, career days/meet entrepreneurs, and internships, from the beginning of the programme.
- Alumni can also have an active role in career guidance by sharing their knowledge on their recently started careers and the transition from studying to working. While masters often find it challenging to offer this service to their students, as there are no alumni in the initial editions, they should be aware of the network that EMA can offer.
- The related industry can also be a valuable resource for career guidance, both directly by offering internships or job positions, and indirectly by contributing to the development of the curriculum of the study programme. Some coordinators shared initiatives that have been successful in their programmes, such as:
  - Career days with the participation of potential employers and alumni.
  - Organising trips to industrial fairs.
  - Including alumni and representatives from the world of work in advisory boards.