



# Conference Report of the 2023 Erasmus Mundus Community Conference

“Boosting the potential of joint degrees in  
Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes”  
30.11.-01.12.2023, Brussels



Funded by  
the European Union



Funded by  
the European Union

## Author

Tanja Kreetz, DAAD Brussels Office, for the Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative

## To cite this document

European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative, Kreetz, T. (2024). *Conference Report of the 2023 Erasmus Mundus Community Conference “Boosting the potential of Joint Degrees in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes”*. <https://erasmus-networks.ec.europa.eu/reportsandpublicationscornerem>.

The Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative (EMSI) is an initiative of the European Commission, funded by the Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027) and operated by a consortium of four organisations, under a service contract with the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

*This document has been prepared for the European Commission however it reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.*



## GLOSSARY

<b>DG EAC</b>	Directorate-General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission
<b>DS</b>	Diploma Supplement
<b>EACEA</b>	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
<b>ECTS</b>	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
<b>EHEA</b>	European Higher Education Area
<b>EM</b>	Erasmus Mundus
<b>EMA</b>	Erasmus Mundus Alumni
<b>EMACT</b>	Erasmus Mundus Association for Consortia Cooperation
<b>EMDM</b>	Erasmus Mundus Design Measures
<b>EMJM</b>	Erasmus Mundus Joint Master
<b>EMSI</b>	Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative
<b>EQAR</b>	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
<b>ESU</b>	European Student Union
<b>ESG</b>	European Standards and Guidelines
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUA</b>	European University Association
<b>EURASHE</b>	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>JD</b>	Joint Degree
<b>JP</b>	Joint Programme
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>SoP</b>	State of Play Report



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	5
1.	INTRODUCTION.....	6
2.	ADDED VALUE OF ENGAGING IN JOINT DEGREES.....	6
2.1.	Students and alumni.....	7
2.2.	Higher Education Institutions .....	7
2.3.	Business .....	8
2.4.	European Commission.....	8
2.5.	National public authorities .....	9
3.	CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS .....	9
3.1.	Students and alumni.....	10
3.2.	Higher Education Institutions .....	10
3.3.	Business .....	11
3.4.	European Commission.....	11
3.5.	National public authorities .....	11
4.	USEFUL LINKS.....	12
5.	ANNEXES .....	13
	Annex I Conference Agenda .....	13
	Annex II – Speakers' and panellists' contributions to the conference .....	16

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This executive summary synthesises the main findings and recommendations that emerged from the presentations and discussions during the Erasmus Mundus Community Conference "Boosting the potential of Joint Degrees in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes" on 30 November – 1 December 2023 in Brussels, Belgium.

### Key insights include:

#### Added value of engaging in Joint Degrees (JDs)

- From the perspective of the European Commission, JDs align with the policy objectives of the EU, serve as a hallmark of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and contribute to the excellence of European Higher Education systems, while laying the foundation for a European degree in the future.
- From the viewpoint of learners and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), JDs contribute to a coherent and high-quality programme design and implementation, streamlined administrative processes and facilitated accreditation procedures.
- Business representatives highlight that companies operating globally could benefit from graduates with JDs due to their specialised training and international exposure.

#### Key takeaways

- The conference underlined the role of HEIs as key actors in creating and co-designing an innovative, internationally oriented higher education environment. The importance of effective communication, cooperation, flexibility, and inclusiveness was stressed as beneficial for HEIs, students, and stakeholders involved in the process of developing and awarding JDs.
- Students should be involved in the development and promotion of JD programmes to ensure that their voices are heard.
- Key enabling factors for implementing JD programmes are financial sustainability, streamlined accreditation and administrative processes, standardised definitions and a forward-looking approach in the efforts to enhance the quality, attractiveness and coherence of higher education through JDs.
- While JDs should be enabled and facilitated for HEIs at the level of the EU and the EHEA, speakers and conference participants underlined the importance of continuously acknowledging the diversity of HEIs and programmes, including the co-existence of different degree types along with the specific priorities, capacities, and strategic choices of HEIs, acknowledging their autonomy and strategic objectives.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

On 30 November and 1 December 2023, the European Commission held its first annual Erasmus Mundus Community conference under the title “Boosting the potential of Joint Degrees in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes” in Brussels, Belgium. The event offered participants a platform for peer learning and networking on the topic of JDs in Erasmus Mundus Master programmes. One of the highlights was the launch of the Erasmus Mundus Community Platform ([link](#)).

The conference, attracting around 250 participants, facilitated a lively discussion on the different perspectives on JDs from various stakeholder viewpoints, comprising representatives from HEIs, students and alumni, employers, national ministries, the European Commission, as well as quality assurance agencies. Participants examined ongoing challenges and identified key enabling mechanisms as well as good practices at the institutional, national, and European levels.

The event provided the opportunity to reflect on the added value of JDs and on the measures needed to overcome obstacles and promote awareness of JDs.

It provided a rich source of inspiration for the Erasmus Mundus community, with insightful presentations, panel discussions, presentations of good practices and thematic participant table discussions. The discussions with a focus on JDs in the Erasmus Mundus programme were complemented by an exchange of experiences gained in two pilot projects currently testing criteria for a European degree label and a student perspective on the value of a European JDs.

This report highlights the main insights that emerged from the discussions between experts and participants.

## 2. ADDED VALUE OF ENGAGING IN JOINT DEGREES

To guide the discussions of the first annual conference of the European Commission targeting the Erasmus Mundus Community, NTT DATA has developed a State-of-Play (SoP) report entitled: “Awarding Joint Degrees. State of play report for the 2023 Erasmus Mundus Annual Conference ‘Boosting the potential of Joint Degrees in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes’” ([Link](#)). The report provides an overview of the current legal landscape and implementation of JDs in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), followed by an analysis of advantages JDs might have for different stakeholders including HEIs, national authorities, the EU itself, students, and the labour market. Accordingly, JDs appear to:

- indicate a higher level of jointness among involved HEIs;
- enable a deeper form of internationalisation within HEIs as well as between countries;
- provide employers with a system of easily readable, recognisable, and comparable degrees;
- allow for more streamlined administrative processes within institutions.

During the conference, the results of the SoP report were presented. Several sessions enabled an in-depth discussion among Erasmus Mundus consortia and stakeholders about the added value of JDs from different perspectives. In particular, this was the focus of the panel discussion “Added value of engaging in Joint Degrees for Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes” followed by table discussions and two dedicated sessions: “Solutions to overcoming administrative barriers at institutional level” and “Raising awareness and promoting the added value of joint Erasmus Mundus master degrees”. Furthermore, the significant contribution of JDs to European Higher Education policies and developments, and the EHEA, were particularly addressed in the panel discussion “Towards a joint European degree: piloting a Joint European Degree Label under the Erasmus+ policy experimentation”.

The main insights that emerged from the discussions between experts and participants confirmed and complemented the outcomes of the SoP report. The outcomes of the discussions related to the different stakeholder perspectives are presented below.

## 2.1. Students and alumni

The added value for students and alumni relates to the following aspects:

- **Streamlined administrative processes:** JD programmes can reduce administrative and academic burden for students in JDs programmes (e.g., no additional exams required, reduced translation costs, etc.).
- **Specialised educational programme:** JD programmes tend to enable a specialisation in a particular study field by bringing together complementary courses from different institutions. This can provide a more tailored and in-depth educational training and qualification in a specific study field.
- **Coherent study path:** Joint degree programmes offer students a cohesive and integrated academic journey. Students can follow a streamlined and integrated curriculum that combines the strengths of different institutions.
- **Comprehensive and rigorous academic experience:** The development of a JD in Erasmus Mundus master programmes involves the in-depth collaboration of institutions with a complementary set of expertise, synergistically contributing to the curriculum of the interdisciplinary Erasmus Mundus programme and offering a comprehensive, innovative and rigorous academic experience.
- **Facilitated student mobility:** JDs typically come with automatic recognition of study periods abroad across participating institutions. This facilitates student mobility and ensures that the qualifications obtained are widely acknowledged, fostering graduates' employability on a global scale.

## 2.2. Higher Education Institutions

Benefits for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to engage in awarding JDs include:

- **Strengthening prestige and reputation:** By offering high quality JD programmes based on an internationally consolidated approach, participating HEIs enhance their global competitiveness and connections. This point reconfirms the findings of the SoP report, highlighting that JD programmes provide an asset for the visibility and attractiveness of HEIs.
- **High credibility of the programme and partnership:** JD programmes showcase a great sense of responsibility and ownership within the consortium, consequently contributing to strengthening the credibility of both the study programme and the partnership (for more details, see EACEA 2016 report “Erasmus Mundus joint master degrees” ([Link](#)) and NTT DATA’s SoP report).
- **Joint use of resources and expertise:** Benefits were also identified at the academic level, resulting from the collaborative efforts in designing JD programmes and enabling HEIs to pool their academic resources and expertise, and to create synergies.
- **Integrated and coherent form of collaboration:** JD programmes enable a more integrated and coherent form of cooperation between HEIs with consortia pursuing “jointness” in the design and implementation of their programmes (this aspect has also been elaborated in the SoP report).

- **Streamlined administrative procedures:** JD programmes often act as frontrunners. As HEIs engaged in JD programmes often capitalise on the good practices of partners and jointly overcome various institutional barriers, this experience can be valuable for other study programmes and institutions.
- **Global talent attraction:** JD programmes help expand the outreach of HEIs and attract talented students from different parts of the world explicitly seeking a high-quality JD programme with a European or global orientation, a coherent study pathway, and a widely recognised degree.
- **Increased chances for Erasmus Mundus funding:** As the level of jointness is one of the award criteria for the Erasmus Mundus programmes, consortia that are designing or already awarding a JD can increase the likelihood for funding.

While HEI representatives and associations, notably the European University Association (EUA) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), highlight the added value for HEIs to be able to award JDs, they also emphasised the importance to uphold the opportunity to decide on the degree form, whether these are JDs, multiple or single degrees.

### 2.3. Business

The benefits JDs can bring for business include:

- **Recognition of degree:** JDs provide employers with a system of legible, recognisable, and comparable degrees.
- **International exposure of students in a comprehensive study programme:** The added value of hiring graduates with a JD lies according to the business representatives in the specific education, international exposure, and comprehensive nature of Erasmus Mundus JD programmes.
- **Access to globally minded/skilled graduates:** Accordingly, JDs can be particularly valuable for business and other types of organisations which operate internationally as graduates from JD programmes have an educational background that enables them to understand cultural differences, to master foreign languages and to work effectively in global environments.
- **Specialised training tailored to the needs of industry:** A particular asset of hiring graduates with a JD lies from the business perspective addressed during the conference, is the specialised training tailored to the needs of specific fields or industries.

Most of the above-mentioned advantages apply to joint programmes in general, and are therefore also relevant for multiple and dual degrees programmes.

### 2.4. European Commission

According to the European Commission, the added value to engage in the development of joint degrees includes the following aspects:

- **Increase the attractiveness of Europe as a study destination:** JDs help increase the attractiveness of Europe as a study destination by offering students a distinctive study experience and a high degree of jointness and coherence in their study journey.
- **Hallmark of the EHEA:** JDs align with the principles of the Bologna Process and are a hallmark of the EHEA by making effective use of tools such as Diploma Supplement (DS), the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

(ECTS), and Quality Assurance mechanisms such as the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, which are supported by the European Commission.

- **Contribution to the European dimension:** JDs strengthen the European dimension of higher education programmes.
- **High relevance for the way forward:** In 2024, the European Commission will propose a blueprint for the future European degree, which will contribute to achieving the European Education Area. The blueprint will be supported by recommendations on quality assurance in and attractive and sustainable careers in higher education. Inspiration will be drawn from the experience gained with JDs in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes.

## 2.5. National public authorities

- **Contribution to the simplification of accreditation processes:** The application of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes ([Link](#)) helps simplify accreditation processes given that there is no need for a thorough assessment at national basis in all countries involved in an Erasmus Mundus consortium, including in the context of JD programmes.
- **Driving innovation and networking:** National policy makers see the value of JDs, especially regarding their innovative nature.

## 3. CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

To make full use of JDs in Erasmus Mundus masters programmes, it is necessary to improve the conditions for awarding JDs. In this respect, several targeted solutions were proposed:

- **Increase the awareness and visibility of JDs:** While the Erasmus Mundus programme has established itself as an acknowledged brand for high-quality programmes, the awareness and recognition of the added value of JDs needs to be improved. More explicit communication strategies at the national (Ministries, National Agencies for Erasmus+, quality assurance agencies, HEIs) and at the European level (the European Commission, European Parliament) would allow for a more effective visibility of JDs both for students and employers.
- **Monitor and evaluate the impact of JDs:** It is important to continuously monitor and evaluate the structures and processes associated with JDs by involving HEIs, students, alumni, business and other stakeholders in such activities.
- **Ensure sufficient funding:** Adequate funding for programmes is highly necessary to enable high-quality, globally competitive, and resilient JD programmes.
- **Foster inclusion and diversity:** Stakeholders should pay more attention to the social dimension of JD programmes, to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds can benefit from a JD.
- **Boost capacities in developing JDs:** A continuous dialogue and exchange between all stakeholders involved should be enabled, by bringing together HEIs, quality assurance agencies, ministries, and funding bodies, to jointly exchange ideas and solutions to common challenges, and to strengthen the capacities in developing JDs.
- **Acknowledge the diversity of different types of degrees:** While enabling the participation in and awarding of JD programmes without barriers, a highly flexible higher education system in Europe where different types of institutions offer a variety of programmes and different types of degrees, should be maintained.

The discussions resulted in target group-specific recommendations at different levels.

### 3.1. Students and alumni

- **Make students' and alumni's voices heard:** Erasmus Mundus students are direct beneficiaries of JD programmes, so it is recommended for students and alumni to actively express their views. They should be involved in shaping the design and awarding process of the JD, for example by participating in student representative bodies such as student councils and student organisations at local, national or European levels. After graduation, engagement is possible through affiliation to the Erasmus Mundus Association (EMA) ([Link](#)), which advocates for the students' perspective in Erasmus Mundus joint master programmes.
- **Raise awareness:** Effective communication is a crucial precondition when promoting the added value of JDs, with students playing an important role as potential communicators and multipliers. It was discussed that students sometimes face difficulties in communicating the essence of the Erasmus Mundus study programme and of the JD, e.g. during the job application process. Students should be made aware of the benefits of a JD to be able to contribute to making the concept of JDs more meaningful and to increasing its visibility and reach.

### 3.2. Higher Education Institutions

- **Involve students in the development of JDs:** Institutions are urged to listen to students and alumni as participants and beneficiaries of the JD programme, and to ensure that their voices are heard and they are adequately represented in the development of JDs. HEIs could rely on the Erasmus Mundus Association (EMA) which offers support to institutions and programmes in communicating and working together with students and alumni.
- **Become aware of the benefits of JDs:** Improved communication of what JDs mean is essential for attracting talented students and making all stakeholders – including HEIs, existing and prospective students, alumni and employers – aware of its benefits.
- **Engage in and promote trust-building:** Building trust between HEIs is an important prerequisite for the creation and awarding of JDs and for the effective implementation of JD programmes.
- **Benefit from streamlined administrative processes:** Building on each other's strengths in designing JD programmes and awarding a JD can facilitate the work at the administrative level of the institution.
- **Foster inclusion and diversity:** Promoting inclusion in JD programmes is critical to ensure that a diversified group of students has access to a JD programme, including students from lower socio-economic backgrounds or with otherwise limited opportunities.
- **Facilitate the implementation of JDs and joint programmes:** The focus should be on facilitating the implementation of joint study programmes and on fostering its quality and recognition for HEIs intending to engage in awarding a JD. JDs should be enabled and facilitated.
- **Accept the diversity of HEI's degree preferences:** It is important to have sufficiently flexible partners when the consortium is ready to move to the next stage, e.g. by awarding JDs, but to also recognise and acknowledge that some institutions may be more flexible than others. Long-standing joint master programmes have shown that it can take time to move from one stage to another, and it is important to accept that not all partners have the capacity to pursue the same pace and/or to award a JD.
- **Foster partnerships and maintain an ongoing dialogue:** It is beneficial to network regularly with different stakeholders, both internally – among academics, administration, students,

alumni, marketers – and externally, with quality assurance agencies, ministries, Erasmus+ National Agencies, business, and other stakeholders.

- **Harmonise terminology:** New consortia are advised to start their partnership by explicitly defining key terms such as joint programmes, JDs and double/multiple degrees to avoid any confusion. The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes was mentioned as an officially recognised source for these definitions, providing clear and standardised explanations.

### 3.3. Business

- **Get involved in the design, development and evaluation of JD programmes:** Participation in programme sounding boards and stakeholder meetings could enable business to be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of JD programmes. Business representatives are encouraged to advocate for the alignment of JD programmes with labour market requirements and for ensuring that the programme appropriately prepares graduates for their future employment.

### 3.4. European Commission

- **Establish resilient funding mechanisms:** The European Commission is encouraged to continue to provide a sufficient level of support for joint programmes and to further develop robust funding mechanisms and procedures at the European level.
- **Foster adherence to definitions:** EU institutions should actively promote the alignment with the definitions of JDs and related terms established in the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, with the support from the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR, [Link](#)).

### 3.5. National public authorities

- **Provide guidance for navigating and comprehending national legislation:** National authorities are advised to provide HEIs and stakeholders with clear guidelines on how to interpret the related national legislation. They should provide a clear definition of JDs in their legislation to ensure a more harmonised understanding among stakeholders and to facilitate transnational cooperation between HEIs.
- **Ensure adequate financial support for JD programmes:** The political commitment to JDs at the national level should be supported by sufficient investment for HEIs to be able to cover the additional costs incurred from the implementation of JD programmes and their continuation after the end of the Erasmus Mundus funding period.

The above above-outlined insights and recommendations could serve as an orientation for stakeholders to harness the full potential of JDs when shaping joint programmes in the EU, the EHEA or beyond.

## 4. USEFUL LINKS

- [Awarding Joint Degrees. State of play report for the 2023 Erasmus Mundus Annual Conference 'Boosting the potential of Joint Degrees in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes'](#)
- [EACEA 2016 report "Erasmus Mundus joint master degrees"](#)
- [Erasmus Mundus Annual Conference 2023 "Boosting the potential of Joint Degrees in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes"](#)
- [Erasmus Mundus Association \(EMA\)](#)
- [Erasmus Mundus Association for Consortia Cooperation \(EMACT\)](#)
- [Erasmus Mundus Community Platform](#)
- [European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes](#)
- [European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education \(EQAR\)](#)
- [European Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#)

## 5. ANNEXES

### Annex I Conference Agenda

Venue: Blue Point - Blvd Auguste Reyers 80, 1030 Brussels

Day 1 -30th of November 2023

13:00 - 14:00	Registration and welcome coffee
14:00 - 14:30	<p><b>Welcome and opening remarks</b> Chair: Yves Le Lostecque. Head of Unit Erasmus Mundus &amp; Sport, European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bruno Castro, Policy Officer, Unit International Cooperation, Directorate-General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC)</li> </ul>
14:30 - 14:55	<p>Joint degrees in the Higher Education policy of the European Union (EU) and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) Chair: Philippe Ruffio, Head of Sector, Erasmus Mundus &amp; Sport (EACEA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>David Crosier, Studies and Analysis Manager (EACEA)</li> </ul>
14:55 - 15:20	<p>Implementing joint degrees in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes Chair: Philippe Ruffio (EACEA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>David Flacher, Full Professor, University of Technology of Compiègne (UTC), Chair of the Erasmus Mundus Association for Consortia Cooperation (EMACT)</li> <li>Barbara Rega, Professor at AgroParisTech, FIPDes Erasmus Mundus Master Managing Director, EMACT board member</li> </ul>
15:20 - 15:45	<p><b>Participant table introductions round</b> Moderator: Michael Hörig, Director of the Brussels Branch of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)</p>
15:45 - 16:15	Coffee break
16:15 - 17:15	<p>Added value of engaging in Joint Degrees for Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes Moderator: Irina Ferencz (ACA)</p> <p>Panellists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tarun Agrawal, EM alumnus, Senior Lecturer, Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden, Director Research and Innovation Unit of Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association (EMA)</li> <li>Benjamin Baert, Team Coordinator, DEME Group</li> <li>Dirk Bochar, Secretary General, Engineers Europe</li> <li>Michael Gaebel, Director of the Higher Education Policy unit at the European University Association (EUA)</li> <li>Raquel Galeano Gimenez, Erasmus Mundus alumna, Management Board member of EM-ACT and EMA</li> <li>Jakub Grodecki, Policy &amp; Project Manager, European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)</li> <li>Tanguy Guibert, Vice President, European Student Union (ESU)</li> </ul>

17:15 - 18:00	<b>Table discussions</b> Moderators: Irina Ferencz (ACA) & Michael Hörig (DAAD)
18:00 - 18:30	<b>Official launch of the Erasmus Mundus Community Platform</b> Chair: Jacques Kemp, Head of Sector, Erasmus Mundus & Sport (EACEA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vasiliki Botsi, Erasmus Mundus Community Manager (NTT DATA) together with community member</li> </ul>
	<b>Closing of day 1</b> Jacques Kemp (EACEA)
19:00 - 20:00	Dinner at the conference venue

**Day 2 - 1st of December 2023**

09:00 - 09:30	Welcome Coffee
09:30 - 09:45	<b>Welcome and Introduction</b> Yves Le Lostecque, Head of Unit Erasmus Mundus & Sport, European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)
09:45 - 10:45	Session 1: Recent policy developments at national level: How to make things work? Moderators: Michael Hörig (DAAD) Panellists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Patrick Van den Bosch, Head of the Flemish Higher Education Council Quality Assurance (VLUHR QA)</li> <li>Melinda Szabó, Deputy Director of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)</li> <li>Eva Fernandez De Labastida Amurrio, Responsible for Internationalisation and Projects, Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System (Unibasq)</li> <li>Dr. Olaf Bartz, Managing Director of the German Accreditation Council</li> </ul>
10:45 - 11:15	Coffee break
11:15 - 11:50	Session 2: Solutions to overcoming administrative barriers at institutional level Chair: Bruno Castro, Policy Officer, International Cooperation (DG EAC) Overcoming barriers at institutional level – State-of-Play: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Virginia Zalunardo, Senior Consultant (NTT DATA)</li> </ul> Experience sharing from two Erasmus Mundus good practice examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programme MESPOM: Noemi Kovacs, Project Officer, Academic Cooperation and Research Support Office, Central European University (CEU)</li> <li>Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programme Choreomundus: Gediminas Karoblis, Professor at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)</li> </ul>
11:50 - 12:35	<b>Table discussions session 2</b> Moderators: Irina Ferencz (ACA) & Michael Hörig (DAAD)

12:35 - 13:45	Lunch break
13:45 - 15:00	<p>Session 3: Raising awareness and promoting the added value of joint Erasmus Mundus Master degrees Moderators: Irina Ferencz (ACA) &amp; Michael Hörig (DAAD)</p> <p>Raising awareness on the added value of joint degrees – State-of-Play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ines Fernandez-Figares Durcudoy: Business Consultant (NTT DATA)</li> </ul> <p>Experience sharing from an Erasmus Mundus good practice example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programme Euroculture: James Leigh, Lecturer, University of Groningen</li> </ul>
15:00 - 15:45	<p><b>Towards a joint European degree: piloting a Joint European Degree Label under the Erasmus+ policy experimentation</b> Moderator: Vanessa Debiais-Sainton, Head of Unit Higher Education, Directorate-General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC)</p> <p>Experience sharing from joint European degree label pilot projects funded under the Erasmus+ policy experimentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FOCI - Future-proof Criteria for Innovative European Education - Aleksandar Šušnjar, University of Rijeka (UNIRI)</li> <li>ETIKETA - FilmEU Degree label – Barry Dignam, Head of European Projects at the National Film School, IADT</li> <li>Una Europa – Danel Van Mensel, student, KU Leuven</li> </ul>
15:45 - 16:30	<p><b>Conference conclusions</b> Chair: Yves Le Lostecque (EACEA)</p> <p>Wrapping up main results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Irina Ferencz (ACA) and Michael Hörig (DAAD)</li> </ul> <p>Closing remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>José A. Piña Sánchez, Education Attaché (Permanent Representation of Spain to the EU)</li> <li>Filip Van Depoele, Head of Unit (DG EAC)</li> </ul>

## **Annex II – Speakers' and panellists' contributions to the conference**

### **DAY 1 – 30<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2023**

#### **Welcome and opening remarks**

**Chair:** Yves Le Lostecque. Head of Unit Erasmus Mundus & Sport, European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)

The Chair recalls the importance of the Erasmus Mundus programme as a major flagship initiative of the European Commission to support high-quality master programmes in the EHEA (so far about 580 programmes by about 600 HEIs).

#### ***Bruno Castro, Policy Officer, International Cooperation (DG EAC)***

The Erasmus Mundus programme within Erasmus+ is globally recognised and respected, with a large number of scholars involved from various regions. Its budget is linked to the Erasmus+ multiannual financial framework budget (2021-2027), serving as an important tool to support EU policies in the field of higher education. The current Erasmus+ programme is undergoing its mid-term review and the discussion of the features of the new Erasmus+ term after 2027 is still very open, taking into account the uncertain budgetary context. This Erasmus Mundus conference will discuss the added value and strategies to boost the potential of JDs as a special feature of Erasmus Mundus joint master programmes. The upcoming 20th anniversary conference of the Erasmus Mundus programme in 2024 will be a platform to showcase the programme's overall success.

#### **Joint degrees in the Higher Education policy of the European Union (EU) and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)**

**Chair:** Philippe Ruffio, Head of Sector, Erasmus Mundus & Sport (EACEA)

While JDs are not mandatory in the context of joint master programmes, the European Commission regularly promotes the implementation of JD mechanisms. The session familiarises the audience with the wider EU higher education and EHEA policy background that has created favourable conditions and incentives for HEIs to jointly develop and award JD. While the European Commission continues to promote the use of JD, there are ongoing discussions about the complexities and challenges associated with their integration into international master programmes that need to be addressed.

#### ***David Crosier, Studies and Analysis Manager (EACEA)***

Rationale for Erasmus Mundus programme: Collaboration and internationalisation play pivotal roles in stimulating the development of high-quality joint master programmes within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The emphasis is on HEIs making the best use of different expertise and cultural perspectives to provide attractive European programmes, initially aimed only at students outside Europe. Putting Bologna tools into action, including the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), Diploma Supplement (DS), and Quality Assurance mechanisms, is a fundamental aspect of this approach, ensuring standardised and recognised higher education programmes. The objective of the Erasmus Mundus programme was for HEIs to transition from multiple degrees to JDs.

Difference between joint, multiple and double degrees: JDs hold a distinct position within the Erasmus Mundus programme. In 2004, Erasmus Mundus was established during the early years of the Bologna Process, leveraging the tools developed in that period. It was the first new education programme since Erasmus, representing a significant step in implementing internationalisation between universities

across Europe. The European Commission has consistently expressed the objective of incorporating JDs into the Erasmus Mundus programme as JDs illustrate integration of the HEIs, whereas multiple degrees illustrate the separate entity of the participating HEIs (and may imply separate requirements for exams etc. in order to receive the degree). While JDs are considered the logical outcome of a joint master programme, multiple degrees are often a more preferred outcome for HEIs due to their ease of navigation and of finding common ground related to a diverse legislative landscape.

Why JDs in Erasmus Mundus? Initially, the choice between joint and multiple degrees was not available in Erasmus Mundus, but the Commission's position evolved to accept multiple degrees while preferring JDs. Despite lacking legal competence at the European level, the European Commission is hoping to nudge national frameworks and HEI practice to become sufficiently flexible to issue JDs, and the stimulus of Erasmus Mundus could push positive change of national legislation.

Has Commission approach worked? NTT DATA's State of Play report has shown that legislation in EU countries permits JDs. There has been a significant progress since the launch of Erasmus Mundus. Beforehand, most countries' legislation did not cover JDs. Nowadays, approximately 55% of Erasmus Mundus programmes award a JD, including (with 21%) type D, where a single joint diploma is combined with diplomas from HEIs.

National public authority perspectives: There is a strong willingness and incentives from HEIs to engage in JDs, to benefit both students as well as teaching and research. However, at national level, support has sometimes been lacking even though some countries have prioritised funding mechanisms to cover additional costs associated with JD programmes or to sustain them post-Erasmus Mundus funding. It is noteworthy that while in terms of a consistently positive and supportive rhetoric, innovation in JDs (e.g. European Approach and European University Alliances) has come from programmes/HEIs, stakeholders and the EU, but not from national authorities.

Importance of Erasmus Mundus: Erasmus Mundus JDs serve as a practical demonstration of innovation and interconnectedness. In recent years, the notion of excellence has been increasingly complemented with supporting social inclusion and European integration. Despite the progress made, challenges persist, indicating the need for further development of the framework conditions for European cooperation. It is important to provide the evidence base for why the goal of JDs should be pursued.

## **Implementing joint degrees in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes**

**Chair:** Philippe Ruffio (EACEA)

***David Flacher, Full Professor, University of technology of Compiègne (UTC), Chair of the Erasmus Mundus Association for Consortia CooperatiOn (EMACT)***

The Erasmus Mundus community driven initiative EMACT, a network of institutions and Erasmus Mundus programmes roots back to the year 2020. EMACT serves as a platform for the exchange of information and insights regarding difficulties, needs, and good practices within its community. It seeks to facilitate the pooling of resources among its members to enhance collaboration and knowledge sharing. The initiative encourages the exchange of skills among its participants, is dedicated to dissemination of information and engages in collective actions aimed at supporting and advocating for changes and improvements. A key role of EMACT relates to advocacy, pushing for the evolution of national and European institutions in order to facilitate the implementation of joint programmes (e.g. with a better recognition of the European approach). The initiative has also been instrumental in launching surveys that benefit the community, focusing on issues such as insurance schemes, application platforms and JD implementation. Moreover, EMACT is actively engaged in outreach and the dissemination of information, fostering joint social networking within its community.

Due to its missions and activities, EMACT, yet informal, functions as the long-term representative body for EM joint master programmes, holds monthly board meetings and has the capacity to undertake initiatives, including advocacy efforts, with a dedicated team of 10 board members. More information can be found on EMACT's website at [www.emact.eu](http://www.emact.eu).

According to David Flacher, the Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative (EMSI), by promoting the exchange of experience and good practices and by enhancing networking opportunities, appears as a useful support to the EMACT initiatives.

The newly launched [Erasmus Mundus Community Platform](#), launched by the European Commission during the first conference day, has the potential to provide assistance to consortia and to facilitate collaboration and support, and as such to replace the EMACT platform. After a successful beta test, users have found the platform to be useful for their collaborative needs.

***Barbara Rega, Professor at AgroParisTech, FIPDes Erasmus Mundus Master Managing Director, EMACT board member***

The survey results on JDs were presented. The survey was launched this year by EMACT task force on JDs and European approach. The survey opened again for the conference participants, who can use the QR code for participation. The idea was to gather new insights since the 2019 survey, to see new developments into the new landscape of European Alliances and the emerging concept of a European degree, and to see how new programmes have positioned themselves around this objective. Respondents (academic and administrative staff) were from 34 consortia, mostly programmes around 7 years of maturity; mainly 2-year programmes and mainly small consortia; types of JDs awarded: 64% delivering JD (either full JD: 25%, JD by track: 3% or a combination: 22%). Top countries participating were Spain, Germany, France, Italy, and Belgium, complemented by 4 non-EU countries (India, Uganda, South Africa, Sudan). On average 3.7 partners are issuing the JD.

Concerning the mobility scheme, 41% of the JDs were awarded by triangle programmes, where students start together at one university and move together from one university to the next, followed by the hybrid scheme (23%), a combination between triangle and Fork programmes, where students start together at one university and are then distributed among other partners, and by the Fork scheme (18%). The remaining 18% belong to the "Other" (12%) and "Star" category, where students follow individual mobility paths.

Feedback about expected benefits: The conclusion of the survey is that the legal framework and agile and robust administrative practices are key for the success of JDs, and that HEIs and EACEA play a strategic role by catalysing administrative agreements and legislative change.

Questions about the survey or comments can be directed to: [contact@emact.eu](mailto:contact@emact.eu).

## **Added value of engaging in joint degrees for Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes**

**Moderator:** Irina Ferencz (ACA)

The session shed light on the benefits of engaging in joint degrees from different stakeholder perspectives.

### **Panellist statements**

***Michael Gaebel, Director of the Higher Education Policy unit at the European University Association (EUA)***

Higher education institutions should be entitled to award JDs. Regulations preventing them appear as an unnecessary restriction of their autonomy and academic freedom. Obstacles that may exist at systems' level, need to be eliminated.

That said, award of a JD is just one of the challenges that HEIs experience with joint programmes, and there is no indication that a JD award would solve the other problems. There is also no evidence that JD programmes provide a better student experience compared to multiple degrees or are easier to administer.

Both joint and multiple degree programmes can achieve high levels of “jointness”, be of high quality, and provide a good student experience. But they also require strong collaborative effort and coordination among partner institutions in areas such as teaching methods and approaches, learning outcomes, assessment, and grading. This is a relatively high effort and costs for the institutions.

Quality assurance is critical for both, JDs and multiple degrees (MD). The [European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes](#) is valid for QA of both, joint and multiple degrees, and principally recognised throughout the EHEA. But in reality, HEIs still encounter difficulties, as the European QA Approach is not accepted in all countries, and even if it accepted, HEI may have to fulfil often additional requirements, on top of the external evaluation by one agency.

To conclude, while advocating that higher education institutions should be allowed to award JDs, the option of awarding double or multiple degrees should be retained. Of pivotal importance is to ensure the quality and sustainability of joint programmes. What use if graduates praise fantastic programmes, which unfortunately no longer exist. To be considered also that – at least up to date – joint programmes benefit relative low numbers of students and are overall a very small part of internationalisation.

***Jakub Grodecki, Policy & Project Manager, European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)***

While traditionally perceived as regional hubs, Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) are increasingly involved and interested in international higher education collaborations and programmes, challenging the notion of a regionally confined expertise. Erasmus Mundus master programmes awarding JDs serve as an option for UAS of enabling European mobility and engaging in prestigious programmes.

However, the awarding of JDs in programmes in which UAS are involved has been limited so far, with challenges in quality assurance and the setup of programmes normally happening at slow path.

Enhancing the visibility of opportunities to invest in programmes awarding JDs can incentivise UAS to get engaged. This should be realised through awareness raising regarding the requirements of support and administrative staff, the local coordinating team at HEIs, quality assurance staff, as well as those strategically involved in admissions, registrations, quality assurance and comprehensive student affairs.

Information sessions, conferences, peer-to-peer events and information events organised by national quality assurance agencies and governmental organisations can help to clear out ambiguities. A representative structure of the Erasmus Mundus community could play an advocative role and should be established based on co-ownership of different higher education stakeholders, including UAS, who are acknowledged players contributing to the development of societies.

***Raquel Galeano Gimenez, Erasmus Mundus alumna, Management Board member of EACT and EMA***

While communicating JDs as a unified interdisciplinary degree simplifies matters, it also introduces complexities, requiring thorough explanations for both industry partners and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) about the nature of European mobility and JDs. The interdisciplinary aspect can be easily conveyed, but the essence of Erasmus Mundus and JDs may pose challenges in communication. Engaging in communication with the degree is therefore crucial.

Awarding multiple degrees can be burdensome, while JDs can alleviate this, contributing to broader levels of participation. Additionally, JDs prove beneficial in mitigating translation burdens for graduates facing financial constraints.

Moreover, student awareness is a key aspect for effective communication as often, students may not fully comprehend the nature and the benefits of a JD, rendering the degree somewhat meaningless when communicating with industry and society. HEI must therefore communicate the benefits more clearly to students, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the programme's full value. Valuable support in communication and collaboration can be provided by the European Mobility Alliance (EMA) which pursues effective working relationships among programmes.

While HEIs hold the responsibility for programme development, it is imperative that they actively listen to students and involve alumni in shaping programme contents. Communication is a two-way approach, with HEIs expected to convey information effectively, and students playing a role in understanding and transferring the communicated information.

***Tarun Agrawal, EM alumnus, Senior Lecturer, Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden, Director Research and Innovation Unit of Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association (EMA)***

The added value of the JD is that it replaces individual degrees which simplifies administrative and examination processes, providing graduates with a well-respected and recognisable qualification that is well acknowledged and accepted across participating countries and industries. Moreover, students can be sure about the high academic standards of JDs because they undergo joint quality assurance processes that involves all participating institutions. Students also benefit from a clearer approach in terms of specialisations instead of multiple specialisations which are harder for students to communicate.

Employers often value the adaptability and broad perspective of JD graduates, enhancing their competitiveness in the job market. Students, through studying in multiple countries, immerse themselves in diverse cultures and academic environments. This exposure not only enriches their global perspective but also cultivates adaptability, enabling them to thrive in varied working environments with ease.

Favourable conditions for students to maximise their benefits include robust support services, with knowledgeable advisors who understand the nuances of the JD programme. They can also help in realm of visa and migration processes. This support should extend beyond the programme's commencement, helping students during transitions for summer internships or international placements throughout their master course.

Ensuring continuous assistance in these critical areas enhances the overall student experience and facilitates seamless engagement with academics and stakeholders. Student support fosters acknowledgement of JDs as students will communicate and can promote the degree to stakeholders.

***Tanguy Guibert, Vice President, European Student Union (ESU)***

The added value of JDs is visible by integrating European values into the curriculum and the contents of the study programmes. This goes beyond traditional higher education by seamlessly integrating what the European Union (EU) can offer students during their educational journey, with an emphasis on employability, internationalisation and mobility, underscoring the crucial role of JDs in preparing individuals for a globalised world.

However, it is essential to create favourable conditions for engaging in JDs, which involves navigating issues of governance and fostering the role of students in the degree awarding process. Students are the ones undertaking programmes, which were not always designed with their input. To make JD programmes relevant and meaningful for students, their involvement in the design phase becomes imperative.

Moreover, for reasons of inclusion, it is essential to consider how JDs can be made accessible to all students. This requires a thoughtful examination of institutional practices to ensure that JDs are not exclusive but rather cater for a diverse student population.

Despite these aspirations, a critical challenge remains the issue of trust among Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Establishing trust between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is important for creating JDs and ensuring the successful delivery of the programme; this remains a challenge that has yet to be overcome.

***Benjamin Baert, Team Coordinator, DEME Group***

At DEME, there is currently little reflection on the difference between dual and JDs. Erasmus Mundus master programmes are highly acknowledged for their international experience and specialized courses offered. DEME supports Erasmus Mundus Programmes that offer courses on subjects close to its business. The programme Emship is a good example combining offshore renewables and ship design.

When recruiting graduates, DEME assesses candidates based on their education, qualifications, experience, and personal attributes. In the case of Erasmus Mundus, the focus is on ensuring that students benefit from the combined strengths of two or more universities.

That's in the specialisation of each university and in providing students with a diverse array of options to align with their specific interests. The coherence of the master programme enhances the overall quality of a programme, and the introduction of a JD strengthens this coherence as it is coordinated seamlessly from one university to another.

The international experience of Erasmus Mundus has a lot of added value, especially as a study experience abroad with students participating from all over the world. A JD serves to elevate this international experience, acting as a testament to the collaborative spirit of international cooperation.

JDs are deemed particularly relevant for business working internationally and with highly qualified staff like DEME.

Part of the process to promote JDs by business will unfold organically, driven by satisfied alumni and companies pleased with the performance of new employees, specialised them to actively seek candidates from the specific Erasmus Mundus programme. While the JD may not emerge as a direct quality label sought by companies, the enhanced quality of Erasmus Mundus through JDs will indirectly elevate the visibility of these programmes. Engaging in programme sounding boards is also instrumental in supporting this initiative.

***Dirk Bochar, Secretary General, Engineers Europe***

EngineersEurope serves as a bridge between academia and employers/recruiters, aiming to foster collaboration and understanding between these two fields.

There is a significant challenge related to JDs in the pursuit of harmonised programmes. Creating a cohesive curriculum that meets academic standards and seamlessly integrates the strengths of diverse higher education institutions proves to be a complex but worthwhile task. This requires meticulous planning and coordination. In this context, the question of learning outcomes becomes paramount, as employers express a keen interest in understanding what academics can deliver to the labour market. Educational outcomes should be closely aligned with the expectations and needs of employers, ensuring that graduates are well-equipped to meet the demands of the labour market.

While companies recognise the value of a JD, they often place greater emphasis on the additional competences and skills that graduates bring to the table. In essence, the focus on competences tends to outweigh the significance of a JD in the eyes of employers, highlighting the importance of skills and capabilities in the professional landscape. However, when HEIs succeed in navigating various

government regulations, a JD holds a significant value for companies, due to the clarity in the application process, with students submitting only one instead of several degrees.

To conclude, as there are benefits of JDs, it is important to offer and ensure harmonised and comparable JD programmes of academic equivalence in terms of learning outcomes in order to meet the demands of the labour market.

### **Table discussions related to the added value of engaging in joint degrees in Erasmus Mundus master programmes**

Following the table discussions, rapporteurs were asked to summarise the findings of the discussions, which participants of each table had on the following questions:

#### **Question 1: added value of joint degrees**

- Rap 1: Half of the participants of the first do not find any real added value. The other half already experiments with joint master degrees to reinforce the identity of the programme and the recognition of the involvement.
- Rap 1: An advantage (for a big consortium) is that issuing one degree instead of seven or eight reduces the complexity of the process.
- Rap 3: The added value of a JD is that the visibility of the university can be enhanced. A JD supports other joint activities of the programme as the whole consortium needs to work on different kinds of activities, which is supportive for the ranking. The end aim for the consortium is to go from a double degree to a JD (from sub-contractors to joint contractors).
- Rap 4: Not too many advantages of the JD can be reported as an outcome of the discussion. There is one small advantage as – depending on the study path – students might select institutions among the consortium that are more popular or better ranked and decide on that ground rather than on the content. This would not happen under a joint framework.
- Rap 5: Opinions were split. JDs involve collaboration between students, faculty and university. It is also about professional recognition, and it simplifies administration. Students find these programmes very attractive (travel, different stakeholders) and also all university stakeholders like it. The problem is to specialise the faculty. They do not get a lot of recognition and often are individual drivers.

#### **Question 2: Stakeholder incentives**

- Rap 1: If institutions can show the added value of a JD, it is much easier to get stakeholders on board. Participants reported about good experience with proactive stakeholders managing to push the institutions for a JD programme.
- Rap 2: The identity and quality of a programme are the major issues for stakeholders. With JD programmes, which are very specialised and target a global market, there is limited competition with national programmes. The quality of graduates is an incentive in itself.
- Rap 3: To improve the “sexiness” of the JD programme it is important to provide clear guidelines to stakeholders to understand the benefit of the JD. People are sceptical about the difference between joint programmes and JDs.
- Rap 4: Some programmes struggle with sustainability. More funding is needed to attract more students and employers being more familiar with these programmes. JD programmes need to be brands for which a marketing team is needed. Having business and marketing support is key. We are academics, we thus need additional support to make them more sustainable.

## Official launch of the Community of Practice

*Vasiliki Botsi, Community Manager on behalf of EMSI*

The [Erasmus Mundus Community Platform](#) managed by NTT DATA for EMSI on behalf of the European Commission, is a subsection of the umbrella Erasmus Networks Platform. It is a digital space aimed at connecting EMJMD, EMJM and EMDM project team members, supporting peer-to-peer learning and sharing best practices as well as engaging and allowing people to collaborate across the Erasmus Mundus landscape. The conference participants learned how to join the community platform to stay updated on the latest news, to network with fellow members, and to share their own experiences. They were informed about the types of content available, comprising public content with information about EMSI, publications and news, activities, Erasmus Mundus Masters as well as the privacy statement, and content accessible only for registered community members such as on the groups and on group generated contents. To access the platform and join the community: <https://erasmus-networks.ec.europa.eu/organization/erasmus-mundus-community>. Inquiries or information requests should be directed to: [support-erasmus.mundus@nttdata.com](mailto:support-erasmus.mundus@nttdata.com).

## DAY 2 – 1<sup>st</sup> DECEMBER 2023

### Session 1: Recent policy developments at national level: How to make things work

**Moderator:** Michael Hörig (DAAD)

#### **Panellists:**

*Patrick Van den Bosch, Head of the Flemish Higher Education Council Quality (VLUHR QA)*

In Belgium, the various communities are responsible for education. The statement focused on Flanders. There are no restrictions for joint programmes e.g. in terms of the language of instruction. Recently, there have been no major changes in function of legislation to make JDs easier. Inquiry with our HEI and also with representatives of university alliances shows that they encounter little or no legal obstacles in Flanders. Where there were, these have recently been removed by law: no more ‘macro-eligibility check’ for these programmes. Although the Flemish government does not advance a definition for JDs, it does pay a lot of attention to JDs in its legislation and is quite flexible in the autonomy of institutions to set up a JD. Since 2019, the law refers to JDs mainly as a function of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA for QA of JP) ([Link](#)).

In some programmes, including new programmes, evaluation according to the European Approach is compulsory. Joint programmes that already function within an institutional review are not obliged to do so. This law takes into account the decision of the EHEA ministers in Yerevan in 2015. The decree mentions explicitly that ‘Joint programmes, which are organised by a Flemish higher education institution together with one or more foreign higher education institutions and which, upon successful completion, lead to a joint diploma [...] are assessed on the basis of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, approved by the ministers of the European Higher Education Area.

VLUHR QA implements the European Approach and disseminates it both in Flanders and at the European Forum. (e.g. staff mobilities to observe EA for QA of JP evaluations). In one of the universities VLUHR QA brings together groups of joint programmes so that they can learn from each other. It plans to bring the Flemish partners in all university alliances together around the table in early spring 2024. The first steps have already been taken to this end.

***Melinda Szabó, Deputy Director of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)***

Traditionally, JDs make up a small proportion of the university's study programmes. While there is no systematic collection on the existence of JDs across Europe, the Erasmus Mundus catalogue reveals the operation of a total of 188 joint programmes at master level, within 36 of the EHEA member countries. DEQAR data also shows that only 6% of the 3835 higher education institutions have undergone one or more joint programme accreditation processes for the issuance of joint or multiple degrees. This all shows that unfortunately that their number is very low.

The development of JDs requires a diverse range of expertise in curriculum design, quality assurance, legal frameworks, admissions processes, student guidance and marketing. The small number may be due to a limited familiarity of what it entails, but also related to the practical challenges in terms of its set-up and a limited recognition of different higher education systems. However, the state-of-play report of the Erasmus Mundus on European JDs (JDs) reveals dynamic progress. While initially hindered by legal constraints, the Erasmus Mundus programme spurred reforms, fostering national acceptance. By 2020, most countries (except Croatia and Romania) allowed Master-level JDs. Recent legislative changes in Romania and Croatia now permit JDs, marking a positive shift. Despite varying legal frameworks and institutional resistance, interest in JDs is rising, with Spain's 2023 law promoting internationalisation, exemplifying the evolving landscape of collaborative degrees in Europe.

**Main initiatives and achievements of EQAR in addressing the challenges and opportunities to awarding JDs at European level**

EQAR maintains a knowledge base with clear information about the legal framework in each country on QA and specifically on the availability of the European Approach for the QA of JP. While not specifically focusing on JD, EQAR also monitors whenever a joint programme review has taken place through the database of external quality assurance results (DEQAR) and when/if the EA procedure has been employed. The monitoring is not just about the collection of data on a website, but also about disseminating of good practices through EQAR's Members Dialogue (the meeting organised for its members, representatives of 41 HE systems in EHEA).

We also are aware that despite the availability of numerous EQAR-registered QA agencies prepared to implement the European Approach its full utilisation is still hindered by various national regulations, and we try to raise this issue in our events with our members and through the corresponding working groups of the Bologna Process. The adoption of the European Approach for QA of JP adopted by Ministers in 2015 was meant to solve the multiple administrative procedures, clashing criteria and differing accreditation periods that created uncertainty and potential conflicting decisions, making quality assurance, and thus the planning and organisation of such joint programmes difficult.

The development at European level show that the uptake of the European Approach has been relatively slow (only 33 procedures since 2016) although a number of higher education systems that have a requirement for programme level accreditation have amended their legislation to permit the use of the European Approach by some or all of their higher education institutions. From the gathered data we also see collaborations in the development of JDs with higher education institutions based outside of EHEA (Kosovo, Israel, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, and United States). This can present an opportunity for outreach and further collaboration, but it should also make us weary that if the system level issues (and compatibilities) are not resolved within EHEA that our HEIs might be more incentivised to seek partnerships and collaborations outside, where such barriers do not exist.

**To what degree and how can this experience be scaled-up?**

Firstly, expanding our knowledge base to include specific information on JDs and collaborating with relevant organisations such as EACEA and DAAD could be valuable to create a set of comprehensive

resource. Intensifying efforts to address hindrances in national regulations through targeted advocacy and engagement with the Bologna Process working groups would be also worth pursuing. Promoting the current tools like the European Approach and emphasizing its benefits could accelerate the development of joint programmes and awards of JDs. And lastly, the current initiative of the European Commission to set up a community of practice deserves applause. This can ensure continuous dialogue and collaborative initiatives that are crucial elements in scaling up the impact.

***Eva Fernandez De Labastida Amurrio, Responsible for Internationalisation and Projects, Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System (Unibasq)***

Recent developments in Spain regarding joint programmes/degrees

New organic law on the University System (2023): Specific chapter on internationalisation of the university system and specific article on joint programmes and degrees (Article 26):

1. The universities will promote and facilitate the internationalisation of their academic offer, through the creation of joint programmes and degrees. They will also foster the design of joint programmes and degrees which include the use of foreign languages.
2. The universities will promote the doctoral programmes with international co-mentoring.
3. The University Ministry and the Autonomous Communities, using their corresponding competences, will promote and facilitate the creation and recognition of the joint programmes and degrees.

Royal Decree 822/2021 on the organization of university education and the procedure for its quality assurance: Statements regarding the potential use of the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes and a “fast track” administrative path for Erasmus Mundus listing on the Spanish Register of Universities, Centers and Study Programmes: (i) International joint programmes, (ii) International joint programmes in the framework of the European Commission’s European Universities Initiative, (iii) Procedure for the ex-ante and ex-post accreditation of the Erasmus Mundus joint programmes.

Royal Decree 1002/2010 (amendments in Ines2016) about the issuing of university degrees: Specific articles regarding the issuing of JDs and establishing specific requirements depending on if the issuing university is the Spanish partner or one of the foreign partners as agreed in the corresponding consortium agreement.

Contributions of Unibasq

- Participation in the project “Implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes - ImpEA” (2017-2020) - Development of the online toolkit - basic European Approach training and information for HEIs and agencies
- Promotion of the use of the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes through trainings and workshops
- Use of the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes in the accreditation of Erasmus Mundus programmes in the Basque Country

Upscaling potential

Close communication with all the involved actors is very useful, including the ministries. Promoting the use of the European Approach and raising awareness about the challenges we are still facing, mainly about acceptance of the decisions in some countries and the specific issues we can face when running ex-ante procedures.

***Dr Olaf Bartz, Managing Director of the German Accreditation Council***

The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes is increasingly being used and contributes to the simplification of accreditation procedures in Germany, especially when it is

implemented in all countries of the participating higher education institutions of a joint programme. Mutual trust between the member states plays a key important role in joint quality assurance endeavours. The German Accreditation Council supports accreditation according to the European Approach. For German higher education institutions that have opted for accreditation according to the European Approach, the German Accreditation Council no longer undertakes a separate assessment according to accreditation standards, but only a check for completeness of the submitted documents.

## **Solutions to overcoming administrative barriers at institutional level” and corresponding “Table discussions session 2”**

**Chair:** Bruno Castro, Policy Officer, International Cooperation (DG EAC)

### **Overcoming barriers at institutional level – State-of-Play**

*Virginia Zalunardo, Senior Consultant (NTT DATA)*

#### Challenges

Challenge 1: Some countries have set very specific technical requirements within their legal framework for the implementation of JDs. These requirements often lead to incompatibility issues across EU MS as some of them may contradict each other.

- Examples include signature of the diploma, compulsory use of a degree template, compulsory information, language requirements, mandatory parchment elements, minimum academic requirements, etc.

Challenge 2: Some HEIs have complained about the unclear rules and the lack of guidance on how to interpret the national legal frameworks when it comes to JDs or identify measures to adapt to them.

Challenge 3: Internal rules and regulations of partner HEIs are sometimes incompatible with the delivery of JDs. These regulations cannot always be easily lifted to enable the implementation of JDs. Examples include:

- Minimum academic requirements, specifying that JDs can only be awarded to students who have physically studied at the HEI, enrolled there, and/or completed a minimum amount of credits at the HEI.
- Other requirements related to the Master thesis, the mandatory presence at some particular stages of the programme (e.g., first and last semester), the organisation and recognitions of industrial placements in a curriculum, or the number of allowed resit exams, etc.

#### Consequences of these challenges:

- The implementation of JDs is a case-by-case situation that varies depending on the HEIs involved and their respective countries, which makes it a particularly challenging process for institutions, especially for those new to JDs.
- Implementing JDs within a consortium demands significant resources and requires lengthy, time-consuming negotiations between HEIs, as they need to agree on all aspects of its delivery.
- Consequently, such complex negotiations may discourage academic and administrative staff from designing JDs, leading them to choose other types of degree arrangements instead.

#### Possible solutions

- **Allow flexibility to individual JPs with regards to internal general regulations**, awarding them exemptions where required. HEIs should be able to deviate from their established regulations, provided that decisions on such deviations are taken by the proper authorities at

the HEI. It is also advised to add ‘vents’ in the institutional regulations to ensure a smoother process when developing JPs.

- **Develop a dedicated institutional regulation valid for all JPs.** Flexibility and autonomy for academic and administrative staff developing these programmes should be envisaged when carrying out this exercise.
- **Foster the exchange of experiences and good practices among consortia of the EM community.** To facilitate this, the EU has developed an Erasmus Mundus Community of Practice to support the exchange of information, news, and peer learning within the EM community. HEIs are encouraged to register now that the collaborative platform is operational and to take advantage of its features to learn from each other’s experiences and brainstorm solutions to administrative challenges.
- **Pool resources and streamline processes:** it is important for HEIs to carefully organise their resources and tasks at the outset of the process.
  - o The coordinating institution would ideally play a central role in this exercise, assigning clear roles, tasks and responsibilities to all partners involved.
  - o A chart of the work process with timelines for each unit within the consortium can simplify the process and ensure smooth coordination.
  - o Regular meetings among representatives from all involved HEIs could be conducted to discuss progress, address potential obstacles, and determine short-term steps to be taken.
  - o JDs should be ideally issued by the coordinating institution, and the partners would need to comply as far as possible with the coordinator’s technical and practical requirements.
- **Develop a timeline for achieving specific targets to award the JD:** Ideally, the JD would be implemented during the development phase of the JP and be ready to be awarded before the first group of students completes their studies. However, the process of establishing JDs may take longer, and the consortium may initially award double/multiple degrees instead. In these cases, it is recommended to develop a timeline for achieving specific targets throughout the programme to award JDs, keeping the consortium on track and ensuring that the necessary steps are taken to overcome barriers and ultimately deliver JDs to students.
- **Ensure people and institutional commitment and motivation:** The successful implementation of JDs is highly dependent on the human factor: having committed individuals who are dedicated to making the process work, with strong networks and connections, and partnering with other motivated HEIs.
  - o HEIs must ensure there is strong leadership and institutional commitment from all partners, as well as within their own institution.
  - o Establishing a JD seems to require thinking outside the box and finding innovative solutions: cultivating a pioneer spirit within HEIs may therefore be crucial to navigate through challenges and barriers.
  - o It is important to involve and engage all relevant stakeholders throughout the entire process. This includes properly organising and dividing tasks and responsibilities, as well as clearly communicating the strategic value of JDs to all involved parties and allowing space for creativity and exchange of ideas/solutions.
- **HEIs need the support of the EC** for each of these solutions, by creating methodologies and tools for establishing JPs and promoting peer learning. Examples of support include:
  - o Facilitating the exchange of experiences and good practices, providing HEIs with a space for dialogue (e.g., the EM CoP)
  - o Providing support, guidance, and advice to HEIs (e.g., through a consulting mechanism).
  - o Developing tools tailored to HEIs’ needs (e.g., creation of a JD template accompanied by guidelines outlining the process and steps of implementing JDs)

## **Experience sharing from Erasmus Mundus good practice examples**

### Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programme Choreomundus

#### ***Gediminas Karoblis, Professor at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)***

In 2010, the partners of the Choreomundus joint degree master programme unanimously decided to implement a JD across all participating institutions. It was agreed to issue a joint one-page diploma parchment. Another notable enhancement to the programme was the introduction of the Diploma Supplement, a document aimed at providing comprehensive information about the academic and professional qualifications of the graduates. This addition increased transparency and fostered a standardised credential.

NTNU played a crucial role in the programme's adaptability by expressing its willingness to reduce the minimum number of ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). This flexibility at the institutional level ensured a more inclusive approach, accommodating diverse student needs and academic pathways.

The success of the Choeromundus JD programme was underscored by the fact that all participating institutions saw significant value in the collaborative process. The collaborative effort extended to the domain of dissertations, where all partners worked together to consolidate the requirements from each institution. This harmonisation streamlined the dissertation process, facilitating a more cohesive and efficient experience for students pursuing the JD programme.

The strength of the consortium lay in its ability to leverage the unique attributes of each partner. The collaborative spirit ensured that the programme benefited from the distinct expertise of every institution involved, creating a holistic and enriched mode of collaboration.

Recognising the importance of sustainability, the consortium acknowledged their institutions' efforts in regarding the JD programme as an integral element of its programme portfolio, at the same level as the local degrees. This shift reflected an understanding of the institutions' continuous investment, efforts, and adaptations of the programme.

The evolution of the JD programme serves as a testament to the power of collaboration in higher education, paving the way for continuous improvement and shared success.

### Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programme MESPOM

#### ***Noemi Kovacs, Project Officer, Academic Cooperation and Research Support Office, Central European University (CEU)***

The case study of the MESPOM Programme coordinated at CEU showed that in the programme, running in its 4th edition (launched in 2005), a JD is awarded, however not in the form of a single diploma. As the partner in New York could not make the quality check for the EU partners and MESPOM partners could not feature on the diploma, it was required for MESPOM to award one US accredited MESPOM diploma, complemented by a joint diploma from 4 EU partners, each issuing its own diploma plus a joint Diploma Supplement.

Despite these diploma related challenges, there are several features showcasing the embeddedness and jointness of the MESPOM joint master programme:

- JD: all MESPOM graduates receive a MESPOM degree with four degree certificates: from the University of Lund, University of Manchester, Central European University-Privat University, and the University of the Aegean cross-referring to each other as well as a joint Diploma Supplement

- Admission: pre-selection according to MESPOM accreditation, application form, proof of residency, declaration, direct contact with selected applicants
- Enrolment at all 4 universities
- External examiner – validation of the joint framework (requirements, grading system --- Joint Quality Assurance)
- Synergy with Erasmus+ Mobility Programme – self-funded students benefit
- Classes together: MESPOM students are together with other students of their department
- Services: MESPOM students benefit from all services offered by Partner Institutions

In the pursuit of JD accreditation, partners embarked on a journey that involved aligning with institutional accreditation standards. Among the specific challenges faced were the stringent Austrian requirements for JD programmes. To initiate the accreditation process, a significant step involved the submission of a Letter of Intent from the partners. This formal declaration underscored the commitment of all parties involved to collaboratively adhere to the standards set forth in the accreditation process. Moreover, the establishment of a temporary consortium agreement laid the foundation for subsequent steps in the accreditation process. Conditional accreditation was granted, reflecting a commitment to meeting specific criteria. The final consortium agreement then solidified the terms and conditions of the collaboration. Throughout this process, the flexibility of partners proved to be very helpful, allowing adaptation to the unique needs of the JD programme.

Recommendations deriving from the MESPOM experience include:

- To ensure the commitment of all partners from the highest level of their institution
- Raising awareness of the administrative consequences of such a JD programme
- To harmonise processes across the consortium partners (e.g. academic calendars, grading systems, language of instruction)
- To plan for the financial sustainability of the programme once the funding is over and
- To continue the programme even without successful EU funding acquisition.

## Table discussions session 2

A summary of the table discussion results can be found in the conference wrapping up below.

## Session 3: Raising awareness and promoting the added value of joint Erasmus Mundus Master degrees

**Moderators:** Irina Ferencz (ACA) & Michael Hörig (DAAD)

### State-of-Play

***Inés Fernandez-Figares: Business Consultant (NTT DATA)***

### Challenges

There is a general lack of awareness and recognition of JDs and their benefits. This is true for HEIs, students as well as the labour market/employers:

- **HEIs:** The added value of JDs over multiple ones may not always be clear from a HEI perspective.
- **Students:** Their perception of JDs varies, with many seemingly opting for programmes that award double/multiple degrees. There could be several reasons for this:
  - o Double/multiple degrees may be easier for them to explain to employers,
  - o Cultural inclination towards seeking higher titles can influence students' preference for double degrees (e.g., central Europe 'magister magister')

- Having a diploma from a specific country, as opposed to a ‘European’ one, may offer certain privileges (e.g., an Estonian Diploma can facilitate access for non-European graduates to the Swedish academic and labour markets).
- **Employers:** There is a lack of comprehensive data to fully understand their views on JDs. However, it appears that they tend to place greater trust in national degrees.

The implication of these challenges is that if JDs are not highly demanded by students and employers, HEIs may hesitate to award them and actively promote them.

Possible solutions:

- HEIs contemplating the development of a JD are advised to analyse the strategic added value of awarding such degrees as part of their internationalisation plans. They could brainstorm together to identify and understand the benefits of awarding a JD compared to double/multiple ones. Refer to Chapter 3 of the State-of-play to understand the competitive advantages of JDs.
- HEIs should communicate the importance of a Diploma Supplement to students and the labour market.
  - Although the DS is a requirement stated in Erasmus+ Programme Guide and most HEIs implement one, we want to emphasize its importance in the recognition of degrees.
  - The DS serves as a valuable tool that offers HEIs the opportunity to provide additional relevant information on the JD, therefore reasonably increasing transparency and clarity for employers and facilitating the recognition of JDs.
  - A DS should be designed to allow the employer to fully comprehend and authenticate the JD. For this reason, it is essential that the information presented in the Diploma Supplement is clear, concise, and easily understandable, to avoid overburdening the employer with excessive details.
  - HEIs should pour additional efforts into communicating to both students and the labour market, the role that DS play for them to better understand qualifications across states.
- HEIs play an important role in promoting JDs to raise awareness and knowledge among students and employers, ultimately facilitating the recognition of JDs in the labour market. Communication activities may include:
  - Involving the labour market more actively in JPs that award JDs. Cultivating deeper industry-related partnerships has the potential to lead to greater recognition and acceptance of JDs in the job market. This can be achieved, for instance, by engaging employers in the development and design of JPs, ensuring that the skills and competencies gained align with industry needs and demands;
  - Actively communicating the learning outcomes and competencies acquired by graduates in these programmes to potential employers. This information can be detailed in the DS provided to employers, giving them clear insights into the qualifications and capabilities of JD holders. It is crucial that the skills acquired by graduates closely match the needs of the employer to ensure successful recognition of JDs and JPs;
  - Prepare students to effectively present their international experience and the value of their degrees to employers.
- The EC could take a more proactive approach in promoting the added value of JDs to Member States, students, and employers. Special attention could be given to actively raising awareness among potential employers about the specific learning outcomes of these programmes.
  - It is essential to convey the message that JDs are not something that exists at the margin but are well-recognised qualifications with specific competitive advantages.

The EU’s communication efforts would ideally extend beyond the EHEA to reach other regions worldwide. Increasing the visibility of JDs on the international labour market can help students graduating from HEIs in Europe have their degrees recognised and valued overseas.

## **Experience sharing from an Erasmus Mundus good practice example**

### Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programme Euroculture

***James Leigh, Lecturer, University of Groningen***

Introducing JDs marked a significant milestone in the academic landscape during the 2019-2020 academic year for the Euroculture programme, involving eight European partner institutions. This endeavour streamlined the accreditation process, freeing some institutions from the need for double accreditation. However, not all partners were able to take part due to national legislation or local institutional regulations, which demonstrates the challenges associated with coming to terms with a uniform European approach.

The process of implementing JDs is inherently multilayered, occurring simultaneously at local, national, and international levels, while engaging various stakeholders. The nature of collaboration varies, with some constellations being more explicit than others. Flexibility becomes paramount, necessitating support for faculty members to navigate and adapt to this intricate process.

Collaboration between JD programmes within Erasmus Mundus has proven beneficial, allowing for experience sharing among colleagues. This exchange is not only valuable for individual programmes but also contributes to more accessible negotiations, with the potential of fostering greater institutional accountability.

An essential aspect of this initiative is raising awareness about the roles of the supportive and administrative staff, including local coordinating teams at university level.

The University of Groningen actively communicates with various parties in the pursuit of effective collaboration. However, challenges persist, as highlighted by policy teams in universities organised by Nuffic in the Netherlands in early November. A survey revealed lingering misunderstandings regarding the feasibility and added value of JD programmes, prompting the need for information sessions to overcome ambiguities.

Diverse information events are suggested, including conferences, peer-to-peer events, and sessions organised by national accreditation institutions and government officials.

The representation structure is supported and should be achieved through co-ownership, ensuring a robust and inclusive approach with individuals representing various levels of the academic and administrative hierarchy.

Additional experiences shared from Erasmus Mundus master programmes about raising awareness and promoting the concept of joint degrees

### Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programme MESPOM

***Noemi Kovacs, Project Officer, Academic Cooperation and Research Support Office, Central European University (CEU)***

Synergies and spillover effects are often the outcome of exchange processes taking place internally at the level of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and with their partners, amplifying good practices within HEIs, its staff, and their consortium partners. These positive outcomes can be exemplified by knowledge-sharing sessions, where faculty members and students involved in Erasmus Mundus programmes offer insights into their own experiences and good practices, with the potential to incentivise further programmes to develop and award JDs as well as fosters continuous improvement of their joint efforts in improving the conditions for JDs.

Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programme Choreomundus

***Gediminas Karoblis, Professor at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)***

Erasmus Mundus programmes have progressively become more aware of the added value JDs bring to the academic landscape. A notable aspect of enhancing this awareness lies in the visibility of the degree for graduates. The visibility of JDs is in fact a reciprocal dynamic, where the voice of students and graduates contributes to the overall recognition of the programme. Alumni play a pivotal role in the sense of being major ambassadors for JDs, significantly contributing to its outreach. Their firsthand experiences and achievements of students serve as important testimonials enhancing knowledge and recognition of the quality and effectiveness of JD programmes.

Choreomundus regularly organises alumni conferences, which have the potential to bolster visibility of JDs. These conferences often feature student-run initiatives that actively involve the consortium partners as well as stakeholders, thus going beyond the academic realm and encouraging interactions with local cultures and municipalities. This multifaceted approach strengthens the visibility of JDs and fosters meaningful engagement with diverse communities.

**Towards a joint European degree: piloting a Joint European Degree Label under the Erasmus+ policy experimentation**

**Moderator:** Vanessa Debiais-Sainton, Head of Unit Higher Education, Directorate General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC)

**Experience sharing from joint European degree label pilot projects funded under the Erasmus+ policy experimentation:**

FOCI - Future-proof Criteria for Innovative European Education

***Aleksandar Šušnjar, University of Rijeka (UNIRI)***

The FOCI project provides good opportunities for cooperation between alliances which ensures that its conclusions are transferable to diverse contexts. FOCI's starting point is the stakeholder needs analysis, including the questions of the added value of the European degree, its scope, and suitability of the proposed criteria. Our hope is that the work on these elements will continue as an iterative process even beyond the project duration.

Regarding the European Commission's intent to publish a blueprint for European JD in 2024, simplicity and clarity in terminology (e.g. related to joint programme, joint diploma, JD) is essential for the success of the initiative and proper outreach. Similarly, there is a strong need to be clear about the aims and end goals of the initiative, taking into account the existing legislative barriers and potential reservations towards the concept of the European degree. It needs to be made clear that once the European degree has its full rollout, it should be a qualification rooted in the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) with full authority of the relevant legislative framework, respecting the full autonomy of the higher education institutions. Finally, a clear narrative about the added value of the European degree needs to be communicated. These are the prerequisites of building a broad coalition of support from different stakeholders.

Such a degree must also be future-proof and complementary with existing tools and higher education structures. Currently, the initiative applies the logic and criteria for the European degree only to full programmes, but we see a strong need to also apply these to smaller units of learning, e.g. microcredentials. This is further complicated by the fact that the proposed criteria are developed at the programme level. A simplified process would entail mandating HEIs to jointly issue European degrees for all their joint programmes and European credentials for their other educational models. This would

also make the added value much clearer to all stakeholders, if the existing consortia (such as European Universities Alliances) are mandated to issue a joint European degree based on common criteria for all the joint education offered by their alliance.

Erasmus Mundus programmes are typically the best candidates for meeting the current version of the criteria for a European degree.

#### ETIKETA - FilmEU Degree label

#### ***Barry Dignam, Head of European Projects at the National Film School, IADT***

The evolution for IADT and National Film School was to first be involved in a number of different Erasmus Mundus programmes. The School then participated in the pilot phase of the FilmEU European University Alliance, before it became a natural priority to be part of ETIKETA, an Erasmus+ policy experimentation pilot project for a European joint degree label. As a result of the current involvement in ETIKETA, it has become clear that a European joint degree is advantageous because it is a simple term that is easy to understand. Its core elements are clear, which helps the higher education system. Lessons learned so far include that almost no one has been against it, the School is involved in the mapping and testing process together with other higher education institutions and national ministries. There have been no systemic problems so far. The benefits have also been clear to the School's students who have been involved, but more for the degree than for the label. The blueprint for a European Joint Degree in 2025 includes the co-creation of a roadmap. In preparation, the consortium looked at criteria that seemed clear, but then there were detailed discussions about evaluation.

#### ***Danel Van Mensel, student of Una Europa programme, KU Leuven***

The involvement in this newly created Joint Bachelor of Arts in European Studies (BAES) programme, is a unique JD programme, co-developed by eight Una Europa partner universities. The programme examines the fundamental aspects and values of the European Union as well as European states and societies. Through this extensive mobility programme, students not only learn about Europe but also experience, live, and grow in an international setting, which has been highly inspirational.

## **Conference conclusions**

**Chair:** Yves Le Lostecque (EACEA)

### **Wrapping up main results**

#### ***Irina Ferencz (ACA) and Michael Hörig (DAAD)***

##### 1) General observations

The choice between developing and awarding a JD or not should be based on feasibility—opting for it if possible and developing alternatives if not. Diversity of different degree options on the ground seems continuously important and there are sound reasons for retaining the choice approach. The aspiration to develop JDs must go hand in hand with overcoming obstacles.

What has been acknowledgeable with the Erasmus Mundus experience is that it has become evident that a single flagship initiative has the potential to generate change at the policy-level. This lesson should be considered in the development of policies on various other topics. Notably, the impact extends to legislation in many places, highlighting the far-reaching implications such initiatives can have.

##### 2) Clear added value

From the student perspective, enhancing the coherence of the study path seems crucial. This involves integrating jointness into programmes. A JD structure strengthens this approach. While multiple

degrees tend to have various specialisations, JDs are often characterised by one single, interdisciplinary core specialisation instead, which is easier to communicate and to grasp.

Achieving this transformation requires effective communication strategies to bring stakeholders together, ensuring that the JD programme is specialised and serves specific values. The visibility of JD programmes becomes paramount and reinforces its significance.

When programmes progress towards the JD stage, flexibility among partners becomes essential. While some institutions may exhibit varying degrees of flexibility, it is crucial to recognise that flexibility is a key element that may evolve over time. This can be seen with longstanding Erasmus Mundus master programmes that started with multiple degrees and managed to evolve towards a JD.

In the process of implementing joint programmes, trust-building emerges as a key element. While individual institutions remain constant, it is of added value if the joint programme itself can become sustained, emphasising the impact and value of collaborative efforts among HEIs themselves and the funding offered by the European Commission and e.g. member states.

### 3) Conclusions

JDs are hardly ever mentioned negatively, and there is a potential to making more use of it, which is why the conference provided examples of why and how it is beneficial to HEIs.

20 years is - from a market perspective - a rather short time. Still the Erasmus Mundus programme has succeeded in establishing a recognisable brand. More employers should become aware of Erasmus Mundus, the JD elements, and what it stands for. It is suggested to gather many allies both within the HEIs' own administration, academics, students, alumni as well as external partners.

## Closing remarks

### *José A. Piña Sánchez, Education Attaché (Permanent Representation of Spain to the EU)*

Spain, and its universities are, in general, very much in favour of such initiatives and their contribution to the integration and internationalisation of the European Higher Education Area. Spain recently adopted a new Organic Law of the University System. The law not only emphasises the internationalisation of Spanish universities. It also encourages them to create JDs and programmes, as well as regional authorities to facilitate its creation and recognition.

At national level, the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities in Spain is very committed in supporting these initiatives and to others in Higher Education related to internationalisation, integration, and the European Strategy for Universities. They were part of the priorities of the current Spanish Presidency of the Council:

- In June, in Brussels, a seminar on the European Universities Alliances was organised.
- Last week took place the Council of Education and Ministers for Higher Education had an informal debate on challenges and opportunities of digitalisation, as well as on the possibility to implement digital diplomas, which is one of the aspects needed for European JDs.
- In the meeting of Directors-General for Higher Education on next 14 and 15 December, in Madrid, one of the work sessions will focus on JDs.

On another front, next year will mark the twentieth anniversary of the Erasmus Mundus action. On 13 December, in Madrid, SEPIE, the Erasmus+ and internationalisation National Agency, will celebrate this anniversary with a specific afternoon session devoted to the Erasmus Mundus action, as part of the Information Days on the Erasmus+ call for 2024. This event will be another occasion to promote Erasmus Mundus and raise awareness on its added value, among all our beneficiaries and future applicants.

Something very positive is that JDs represent a more integrated and advanced form of cooperation between HEIs. And cooperation is probably what defines us more in the field of education and training at EU level. This is how we work. It's the basis.

A stronger level of coordination and cooperation leads to the creation of stronger relationships among partner institutions, and, in the end, among Member States. Stronger cooperation also leads to a deeper form of internationalisation, which is very strategic and a valuable asset for the visibility and attractiveness of HEIs.

JDs are basically an initiative of the EHEA, even though we can also find them outside Europe. They can be considered like a label, like a seal of quality of the EHEA and its Member States. And their specificity also lies in the excellence of their academic content. Furthermore, they offer students the opportunity to study in at least two universities, to learn in diverse and multilingual contexts, and to receive an international degree that can be more easily recognised across the EU. All this has certainly the potential to attract and retain talent in the EU labour market, which is one of the main issues currently and in the future. JDs are also a tool to further increase compatibility of legislations and education systems between countries, and this facilitates both the recognition of studies and mobility. Indeed, JDs have a strong potential to bring value, transparency and clarity for education providers and employers in Europe and beyond.

Cooperation, integration, internationalisation, quality, recognition, mobility, and employability are some of the many advantages of the JDs. And these are precisely some of the main strategic priorities of the EEA, whose achievement, as you know, is the overarching political objective of the new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training for the next years at EU level.

In this respect, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes, JDs and soon European JDs are not just, somehow, the final goal of the Bologna process or a flagship of the European Universities Strategy. They are also excellent initiatives in Higher Education that could inspire internationalisation, cooperation and integration in other levels of education and training too, in the whole EEA actually.

Cooperation between universities is historically at the origin of European cooperation. Universities have always been pioneers in the very idea of Europe as a common educational, cultural, social and economic area. Today in the EU, it's the same, developments in the EHEA always precede further developments at all other levels and types of education and training. Therefore, it is very worthwhile to continue to support this type of joint initiatives. It is necessary to keep promoting them and to encourage all the actors involved to continue removing barriers and taking the necessary measures to facilitate them, both at the level of national legislations and at the level of the universities themselves.

The Commission through DG EAC, the EACEA and the Erasmus+ programme are driving the process forward and it is important that Member States, HEIs and other stakeholders join forces and collaborate. We should not be afraid of internationalisation, cooperation and further integration in education and training. By working together, we increase the degree of knowledge and trust between us. We reinforce our common values. We go further and better. And this will help the EU in the future to really become a society based on education and knowledge, without barriers between countries and people.

***Filip Van Depoele, Head of Unit (DG EAC)***

Filip Van Depoele (Head of Unit, DG EAC) stresses the policy objective of the European Commission to increase the number of JDs in the EHEA. JDs offer students a distinctive study experience through the high degree of jointness and coherence in the study journey, and the degree is easily comprehensible for employers. Accordingly, JDs contribute to increase the attractiveness of Europe as a study destination. Recognising Erasmus Mundus as an important tool to promote the implementation of JDs in the EHEA, Van Depoele acknowledges progress in awarding JDs but underscores the need to overcome legislative, institutional, and quality assurance barriers to further encourage their

implementation. Conferences like this serve as a valuable platform for exchanging experiences and reflecting on solutions for the way ahead. In 2024, the European Commission will propose a blueprint for the future European degree, which will contribute to achieving the European Education Area. It will be supported by recommendations on quality assurance in higher education and on attractive academic careers. Inspiration will be drawn from the experience gained with JDs in Erasmus Mundus master programmes.