



# Planning and delivering jointness in Erasmus Mundus Master's Programmes

State of play report



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## **GLOSSARY**

<b>DG EAC</b>	Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission
<b>EA</b>	European Approach for Quality Assurance
<b>EACEA</b>	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EHEA</b>	European Higher Education Area
<b>EM</b>	Erasmus Mundus
<b>EMA</b>	Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association
<b>EMSI</b>	Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative
<b>EQAR</b>	European Quality Assurance Register
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Erasmus Mundus (EM) action is part of the Erasmus+ Programme, specifically under Key Action 2 'Cooperation among organisations and institutions'. Previously operating under Key Action 1 'Learning mobility of individuals', the European Commission (EC) has shifted the focus of the EM action to promote deeper cooperation among higher education institutions across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Now, the EM action falls under the objective of establishing long-lasting partnerships, which not only benefit participating institutions but also positively impact individuals involved, while enhancing innovation in both the programme and teaching practices<sup>1</sup>.

Over the past two decades, through the EM action, the EC has funded 585 high-level integrated master programmes<sup>2</sup> delivered by international consortia of higher education institutions. What has set these joint master programmes apart from other transnational collaborative study programmes is the **high degree of 'jointness'** required across all levels for their successful development and implementation. This is partly due to the EC's strong emphasis on jointness, making it a key criterion for awarding EM funding<sup>3</sup>.

In this context, 'jointness' refers to **the level of integration within a joint study programme across all its components**, including student admission and selection criteria, course coherence and delivery methods, performance assessment, administrative and financial management, student services, promotion, recruitment and awareness-raising strategies, as well as the awarding of degrees<sup>4</sup>. Establishing and implementing joint procedures across these components is therefore key to achieving jointness and ensuring compliance with the Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA<sup>5</sup>, which cover all key aspects of joint programmes, in terms of joint design, implementation, delivery and quality assurance<sup>6</sup>. It is important to note that jointness does not mean all activities must be conducted together; rather, it entails operating based on common approaches and jointly designed procedures within a trusting environment among partners. However, **differences in national and institutional regulations**, along with **varying attitudes and levels of commitment** at the institutional level, often pose challenges for consortia in fully achieving jointness. These challenges have a greater impact on certain components of the programme, particularly in areas like awarding joint degrees and ensuring accreditation and recognition.

This state-of-play report consolidates joint approaches currently implemented by EM consortia to address these challenges hindering the achievement of jointness in the design and implementation of joint programmes. It is intended to provide context and support expert-level discussions among participants during the upcoming thematic seminar '**Planning and delivering jointness in Erasmus Mundus Master's programmes**', held in Brussels (Belgium) on November 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Specifically, the report offers an overview of the different levels of jointness achieved by consortia across the various components of EM joint programmes, while also summarising the identified joint practices and solutions to tackle recurrent challenges faced by higher education institutions.

From a methodological perspective, the first step in preparing this state-of-play report involved conducting **desk research to collect background information** on jointness in EM joint programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, Erasmus+ Programme Guide (Erasmus+, 2023), p. 225: [https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/2024-Erasmus%2BProgramme-Guide\\_EN.pdf](https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/2024-Erasmus%2BProgramme-Guide_EN.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), Ferencz, I. and Kupriyanova, V., 20 years of Erasmus Mundus – Beyond borders and boundaries (Publications Office of the European Union, 2024), p. 9: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/767054>.

<sup>3</sup> EACEA, Voelkl, C. and Pirocchi, F., Sustainability of Erasmus Mundus master courses – Best practice guide based on survey results and analysis (Publications Office of the European Union, 2017), p. 21: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/019359>.

<sup>4</sup> EACEA, 20 years of Erasmus Mundus – Beyond borders and boundaries, Op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> EQAR, Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA (EQAR, last accessed September 2024): <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/agreed-standards/>.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission, Erasmus+ Programme Guide, Op. cit., p. 288.

Due to limited literature available on this specific European notion, three **exploratory semi-structured interviews** were conducted with a total of six representatives from three different higher education institutions currently delivering EM joint programmes. These were selected for their extensive experience participating in EM projects that are among the longest running. The interviews aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the topic, refine the research approach, and identify additional experts, stakeholders, reports, or publications for further consultation.

Findings from the desk research and interviews were consolidated into a **survey targeting individuals with administrative and/or academic experience** in designing and delivering EM joint programmes. The survey aimed to (i) provide deeper insights into the overall level of jointness achieved by consortia across various components of EM joint programmes; (ii) assess the extent to which factors impacting jointness and relevant joint practices had been identified in previous data collection efforts; and (iii) gather any additional relevant information on these aspects. The survey remained open for eight weeks, resulting in a total of **104 responses**. Participants represented 80 higher education institutions from 25 countries, primarily within the European Union (EU), with some from outside it. Of the respondents, 73% were involved in only one EM joint programme, covering a total of 57 EM projects, of which 74% were coordinators and 24% full partners<sup>7</sup>. Additionally, 48% of the respondents were academic programme coordinators, 27% were administrative programme coordinators, 20% were administrative staff supporting the programme, and the remaining 5% were academic staff teaching on the programme. Most administrative staff worked either within the faculty delivering the joint programme(s) or in the corresponding international relations office.

All data collected through these activities were then integrated and analysed to incorporate the findings into the topics under research.

This report is structured in **five sections**. Following this introduction, the second section provides a brief analysis of the value of jointness within EM joint programmes. The third chapter outlines the various factors that may have an impact on achieving jointness within consortia. The following section, 'Jointness across components', analyses the components of EM joint programmes that will be discussed during the event's parallel sessions, highlighting for each, approaches to jointness, identified challenges, good practices, and potential reflection points for the seminar. The final section suggests possible actions that European and national authorities could consider, to help higher education institutions achieve jointness within EM joint programmes.

Lastly, a summary table providing an overview of the joint approaches identified for each programme component is available in Annex I.

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<sup>7</sup> Note that respondents involved in more than one EM joint programme (23%) were not asked to specify the programmes they were involved in or their institution's role in them.

## 2. THE VALUE OF JOINTNESS

The information gathered from the various sources for this report highlights the high value placed on jointness in EM joint programmes, considering it as an essential aspect to be integrated at every stage of the programme's design and delivery<sup>8</sup>. According to interviewed and surveyed practitioners, striving for jointness should remain one of the primary goals within consortia to achieve efficient partnerships and successful EM joint programmes. In this context, this chapter evaluates these claims by assessing the benefits of jointness in EM joint programmes at both the programme and institutional levels.

At the **programme level**, the benefits of achieving jointness can be classified into four distinct areas. Firstly, jointness can **increase the quality of the programme** from various perspectives:

- A jointly designed and implemented EM joint programme allows partner universities to exchange their expertise and create a truly internationalised curriculum<sup>9</sup>. This cooperative approach may provide the programme with **innovative teaching methods and a balanced curriculum** based on complementary expertise in the topics covered<sup>10</sup>, thereby making the programme more competitive<sup>11</sup>.
- Jointness ensures **coherence and consistency among partners in delivering** the programme. Joint approaches seem to facilitate the integration of the various partners' diverse cultures and organisational contexts into a unified curriculum, significantly enhancing students' experience. As highlighted in one interview: *"Without jointness, the programme risks becoming disorganised, incoherent, and inconsistent. When programmes lack jointness, students often have a less positive experience. They feel the fragmentation, with no unified academic path or consistent learning objectives."*
- EM programmes are highly attractive and competitive schemes that appeal to top international students. Jointness can help select the best candidates from this pool, ultimately **increasing the quality and excellence of admitted applicants**. With consortia assessing all candidates through joint selection processes based on common criteria, the quality of students enrolled in the programmes seems to be higher, as argued by one survey respondent: *"The quality of EM students is clearly above the quality of students in regular programmes."*
- A consistent joint quality assurance can ensure **higher quality standards and continuous improvement** across all components in the long term. This overall increase in the programme's quality can attract the interest of renowned universities globally, offering graduates opportunities to enter prestigious doctoral programmes and further extending their career prospects.

Moreover, jointness might contribute to **fostering a sense of community identity** among all those involved in EM joint programmes, including partner universities and students. Findings from the interviews and survey indicated that jointness allows the programme to be perceived as a cohesive whole, rather than merely a collection of distinct courses from various universities. As a result, the student experience is enhanced, as one interviewee explains: *"Jointness fosters unity and cohesion within the programme, creating a common student identity and significantly impacting the quality of the programme. An inefficient partnership can indeed result in a less satisfactory student experience."* In addition, jointness facilitates a collaborative and enthusiastic environment, making academic and administrative staff feel part of something larger. As one interviewee noted: *"Participation in these programmes nurtures a community of practitioners and cultivates lasting friendships, despite challenges. Maintaining enthusiasm and teamwork is demanding but highly rewarding, fostering a strong sense of*

<sup>8</sup> EACEA, Sustainability of Erasmus Mundus master courses – Best practice guide based on survey results and analysis, Op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>9</sup> Becker, R., Joint Programmes from A to Z: A reference guide for practitioners (FaBoTo+ project, 2020), p.19: <https://impea.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Joint-Programmes-from-A-to-Z-Report-2020.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Blakemore, M., Burquel, N., Handbook of Excellence – Transnational Joint Master Programmes (EMQA project, 2012), p. 37: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/2.1.1421.1369>

<sup>11</sup> EACEA, 20 years of Erasmus Mundus – Beyond borders and boundaries, Op. cit., p. 35.

*ownership and pride among participants.*" This sense of belonging can have a significant intercultural dimension, promoting interaction between students and staff from diverse backgrounds in many different contexts.

In addition, a high level of jointness may **enhance efficient collaboration between partner universities**. Encouraging consortia to establish common procedures can simplify the administrative management of the programmes by bringing together their local departments, understanding the strengths and limitations of each institution and streamlining processes for greater efficiency<sup>12</sup>. As one interviewee aptly stated: *"Carrying out all tasks jointly means they only need to be done once."* As such, the greater the level of jointness in the components, the smoother the programme's implementation will be, serving as a powerful driver for administrative improvement in joint programme management across all phases – from agreement negotiation to student management, up to graduation and degree-awarding.

Finally, the joint efforts and combined resources of partner universities in consortia can **enhance the programme's visibility and attractiveness worldwide**. This is especially true when it comes to promotion, awareness-raising, and employability strategies. By implementing joint marketing strategies and leveraging global networks, consortia can generate interest across relevant industries, mobilise significant resources, and attract potential students from various countries.

At the **institutional level**, the advantages of striving for jointness may be observed in two key areas. On the one hand, a high degree of jointness can lead to a **strengthened level of collaboration between institutions in the long term**. Close cooperation can foster greater commitment and trust among institutions, ensuring not only the sustainability of the programme<sup>13</sup> itself but also promoting future collaboration on new research and related projects<sup>14</sup>. This idea was echoed in the survey: *"Jointness in an EM programme creates opportunities for developing research projects with partner institutions, such as doctoral networks and other initiatives, facilitated by the interconnectedness of research and laboratories."*

On the other hand, jointness appears to **promote a continuous learning mindset** within institutions. Survey participants noted that the exchange of good practices and insights into how other institutions operate can positively influence local staff, motivating them to update and innovate not only in EM programmes but also in local ones: *"The jointness of the programme impacts staff at the local level. We observe, for instance, that academics are more willing to update their course content and teaching methods due to the exchange of practices among programme partners."* This learning loop also encompasses gaining insights into the political, educational, and socio-cultural environments surrounding partner universities, enabling institutions to better understand their own context and learn how others address similar challenges.

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<sup>12</sup> EACEA, 20 years of Erasmus Mundus – Beyond borders and boundaries, Op. cit., p.10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

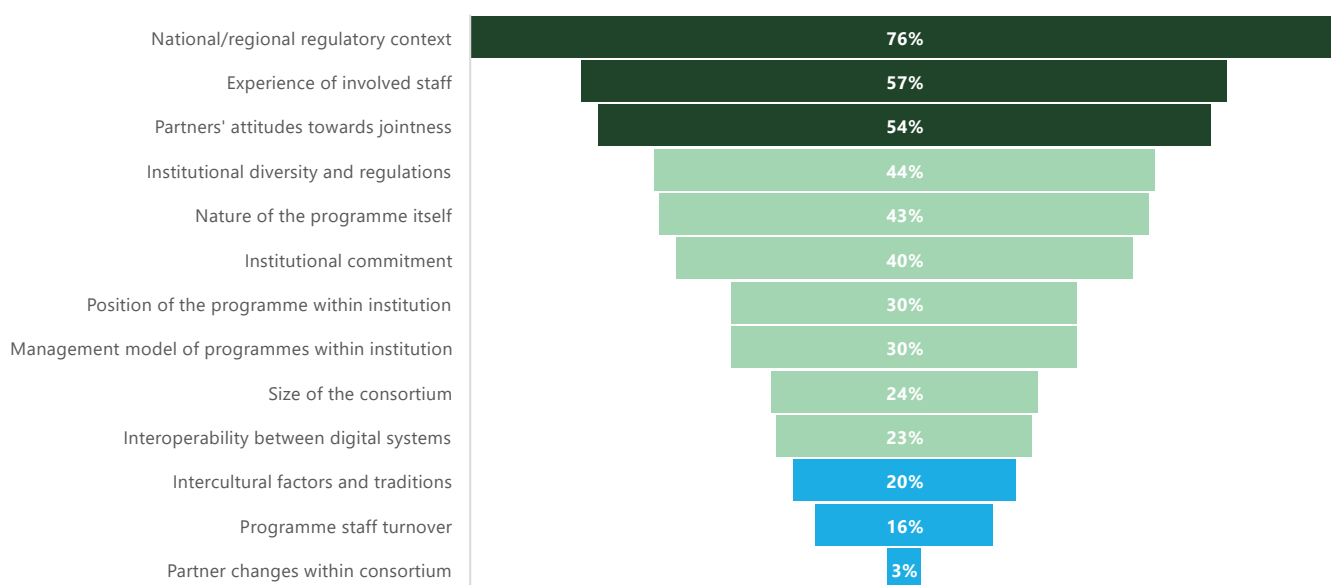
<sup>14</sup> EACEA, Sustainability of Erasmus Mundus master courses – Best practice guide based on survey results and analysis, Op. cit., p. 27.



### 3. FACTORS IMPACTING JOINTNESS

The level of jointness varies across EM joint programmes and their components. This diversity can be attributed to various factors influencing the programmes. While some of them may enhance the degree of jointness achieved, others may act as detractors. This chapter aims to identify the factors that may significantly affect jointness in EM joint programmes.

Information retrieved from interviews revealed the existence of **13 factors that can influence the level of jointness** in EM joint programme. However, not all of these factors are considered to have the same level of impact. As part of the survey, participants were asked to select up to five most important factors influencing jointness from those previously identified. *Figure 1* presents the percentages of the overall ratings for each factor, illustrating their perceived influence on jointness.



*Figure 1. Factors impacting jointness.  
Source: EMSI, Survey 'Erasmus Mundus Seminar on the notion of Jointness'*

According to the presented data, 76% of respondents selected the **national or regional regulatory context of the partner universities** as one of the five most influential factors, making it the most selected among all 13 identified factors. This suggests that it might have the greatest influence on the jointness of EM joint programmes. This is because legislative differences among countries can create diversity within consortia when creating and implementing EM projects. Regulatory contexts may play a crucial role in shaping joint approaches to accreditation and quality assurance procedures (e.g. participation in the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes), financial management (e.g. policies on tuition fees), examination mechanisms (e.g. evaluation and grading systems), and degree awarding systems (e.g. specific national requirements for awarding joint degrees), among other aspects.

57% of respondents indicated the **experience of involved academics and administrative staff in running EM joint programmes** as one of the five most influential factors, making it the second most selected factor. Institutions hosting a large number of EM joint programmes, along with staff who have participated in EM projects over multiple funding periods, have extensive experience in implementing joint approaches across various components. As a result, the academic and administrative staff at these institutions often promote a high level of integration in new programmes from the very beginning.

However, the opposite can also occur, consortia with a longstanding history of operating with low levels of jointness may continue their established practices, with no incentive or willingness to change.

Similarly, the third-highest rated factor, selected by 54% of respondents, relates to the differing **mindsets and attitudes towards jointness among partner universities**. While some institutions may be eager to pursue a high level of jointness, others may prefer to maintain institutional autonomy with a lower level of integration, managing their EM joint programmes more locally. As a result, reaching agreements on the desired level of jointness can prove challenging. This issue is closely linked to the level of experience staff have with EM projects. The process of familiarising local staff with the joint nature of the programmes may require time and effort, gradually shifting their initial scepticism to a more collaborative and supportive attitude towards jointness.

In addition to these three most selected factors, several others have also been considered to have a significant impact on the level of jointness achieved within EM programmes, such as **institutional diversity and internal regulations**. Differing institutional regulations and administrative procedures, such as formal decision-making processes at institutional level<sup>15</sup>, may not always facilitate the joint nature and efficient operation of the programmes.

The specific **nature of the programme itself** (i.e. mobility path, programme structure, multidisciplinary subject) can, to a similar extent as the previous factor, impact the joint approaches implemented across its components. One of the interviewed practitioners suggested that achieving jointness might be easier when consortia avoid overcomplicating the mobility path and programme structure. Additionally, reusing similar local courses and the multidisciplinary nature of the programmes can also affect the level of integration of the curriculum. Specifically, jointness may be more achievable with multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary subjects, as these allow for the better integration of diverse topics and teaching methodologies into a coherent joint curriculum. This approach might enable partner institutions to contribute their expertise while focusing on specific aspects of the joint programme.

Jointness can also be significantly affected by the level of **institutional commitment and ownership** within each partner institution. The degree of commitment—whether it rests solely with the dedicated administrative and academic staff involved in the programme or is supported by a strong institutional belief—may influence the level of jointness throughout the programme's development. This degree of commitment might, however, depend on the size of the institution's EM portfolio; the larger the portfolio, the more institutionalising EM programmes might be needed. A sense of ownership among local staff across various institutional levels may enhance commitment and foster proactive engagement between partner institutions, leading to a greater level of integration among them.

Another relevant factor concerns the **position of the joint programme within an institution**, specifically whether it is part of a larger programme or a stand-alone offering in the academic catalogue. Some institutions view an EM joint programme as an independent offering due to its inherently joint nature, and manage it separately from other local courses. In contrast, other institutions integrate EM programmes with similar local courses, incorporating them into existing national programmes. In the latter situation, the implementation of joint approaches can be hindered by established operating procedures.

Moreover, the **institutional model of managing joint programmes** was also selected by 30% of survey respondents as one of the top five most influential factors. Varying levels of jointness are observed depending on which model universities use to manage staff involved in EM joint programmes and facilitate communication between them. While some universities have dedicated administrative staff working in a central office to support all international programmes, others are more decentralised,

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<sup>15</sup> Blakemore and Burquel, Op. cit., p. 64.

with administrative staff allocated to each individual EM joint programme. Some universities, however, lack dedicated international staff. This can be problematic given that national administrative staff may lack the capacity to support international students and processes (e.g., insufficient English language skills, increased workload, etc.), hampering the adoption of international approaches and hindering jointness within consortia.

Lastly, over 20% of respondents indicated that the **size of the consortium** and the existing **interoperability between the institutions' administrative digital systems** can also have relevant implications for the jointness achieved in EM joint programmes. The larger the number of partners in a consortium, the more challenging it can be to coordinate collaboration, increasing the need for formal organisational structures<sup>16</sup> to foster jointness within larger consortia. However, not everyone concurs with this perspective; one interviewee noted that their programme operates very collaboratively despite managing a partnership of 12 institutions. Regarding administrative digital systems, varying levels of digitalisation and investment in each institution's systems can affect interoperability, thus hindering the implementation of joint approaches to managing student data, for instance.

Surprisingly, from the full list of 13 factors, **intercultural factors and traditions, academic and administrative staff turnover, and changes over time in partner universities from the consortium** were the least selected factors. Intercultural factors and traditions, including good personal connections between all staff members, may impact collaboration among partner universities, especially when dealing with institutions from outside the EHEA, which often have different educational structures and standards. Concerning staff turnover, while some interviewees highlighted its potential impact on jointness when a key individual dedicated to the programme is replaced, they also noted that strong institutional commitment can help mitigate these effects. Similarly, interviewees concurred that changes in partnerships over time can have minimal influence on the jointness of EM joint programmes if proper integration of new members is ensured.

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<sup>16</sup> Becker, Op. cit., p. 16.

## 4. JOINTNESS ACROSS COMPONENTS

This chapter explores the level of jointness achieved by EM consortia across various components of joint programmes. It also presents different approaches followed to implement these components jointly, highlighting challenges and good practices. These components have been aligned with the thematic seminar's programme topics from the parallel sessions and include potential reflection points for the event.

As part of the survey, participants were asked to rate the perceived level of jointness across various components of their EM joint programme, using a scale ranging from 'very low', 'low', 'neither low nor high', to 'high', and 'very high'. As illustrated in *Figure 2* below, most respondents indicated a high or very high level of jointness across all components, with **student admission and selection** being perceived as the most joint aspect of the programmes. Specifically, 89% rated it as either very highly (75%) or highly (14%) joint. Similarly, **curriculum design** was rated as very highly (52%) and highly (36%) joint by 88% of respondents, though with slightly lower 'very high' ratings.

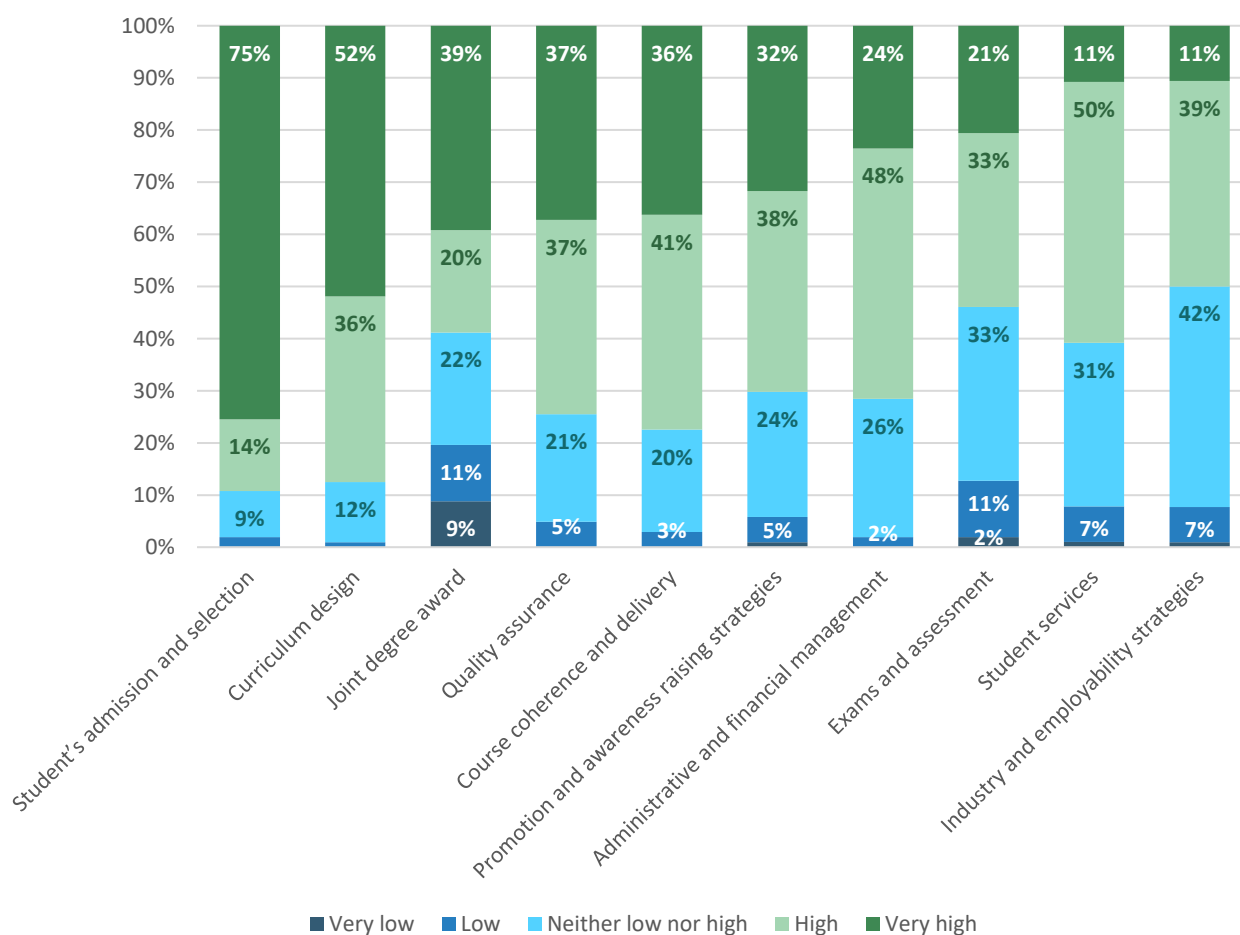


Figure 2. Perceived level of jointness achieved within the different components  
Source: EMSI, Survey 'Erasmus Mundus Seminar on the notion of Jointness'

**Course coherence and delivery (77%), quality assurance (74%), administrative and financial management (72%), and promotion and awareness-raising strategies (70%)** were also reported as being highly or very highly jointly implemented. However, it is important to note that 21% to 26% of

participants rated these components as 'neither low nor high' in terms of jointness, while 2% to 5% indicated a low level of jointness.

**Student services** (61%), **joint degree awards** (59%), **exams and assessments** (54%), and **industry and employment** (50%), were perceived as the components with the lowest levels of jointness in EM programmes, with 7% to 11% of participants rating them as 'low'. The joint degree award, in particular, received the most varied responses: 39% rated it as 'very high', 20% as 'high', 22% as 'neither low nor high', 11% as 'low', and 9% as 'very low' – the highest percentage of 'very low' ratings among all components.

We will now present the detailed findings for the following components, regrouped and/or rephrased to align them to the programme's parallel sessions: 4.1. Joint admission and selection; 4.2. Quality assurance, mutual recognition, and joint accreditation; 4.3. Joint learning and teaching; 4.4. Student services and mobility; and 4.5. Cooperation with industry and programme sustainability. Additionally, 4.6. Enhancing jointness with non-European partners will be explored in this section.

### 4.1. Joint admission and selection

With each new edition, some EM consortia face an overwhelming number of applications from interested students, requiring them to filter through numerous candidates, which presents a significant workload for both administrative and academic staff. This is, however, not the case for all consortia, as others typically receive fewer applications, requiring them less processing time, which in turn affects their choice of joint approaches implemented within this component. Additionally, partner institutions must align on their respective quality standards, without compromising their own, to select the best candidates. All while avoiding biases and ensuring fairness in the selection process. There is therefore a need for efficient joint procedures that foster mutual trust among partners.

According to the Erasmus+ Programme Guide<sup>17</sup>, EM consortia developing a project are expected to implement joint student admission requirements and selection procedures. Although the guide provides limited details on these processes, 'admission and selection' has consistently emerged in the survey as the component with the highest level of jointness in EM programmes. As such, many participants have shared their joint strategies for admitting and selecting a diverse and high-quality student body in a coordinated manner across partner institutions. These include establishing common eligibility criteria, creating a joint interoperable platform that streamlines the process from application to selection, and implementing a multileveled evaluation process in which tasks are either evenly distributed among partners or conducted jointly. A joint selection board or meeting involving all partners finalises decisions, all governed by shared guidelines to ensure trust and consistency.

As such, the first step in admitting and selecting students begins with the **clear establishment of common eligibility criteria** across partner institutions. Many survey respondents mention having "*joint admission and selection criteria*", with some developing joint guidelines for evaluating applications to ensure consistent standards among all consortium partners. One interviewee explained that consortia typically follow the highest admission standards from all participating institutions. For instance, if one partner has stricter language requirements for English-taught programmes, the consortium adopts this higher standard as the overall language admission criterion. Other consortia may adopt the admission criteria of the university with the most stringent requirements<sup>18</sup>. In either case, these criteria are agreed upon collectively and often formalised in the Consortium Agreement.

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<sup>17</sup> European Commission, Erasmus+ Programme Guide, Op. cit., p. 289.

<sup>18</sup> EC, EACEA, Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative (EMSI), Munich Study Visit of the Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative - 11-12 March 2024. Event Proceedings (Erasmus Mundus Community Platform, 2024), p. 16: <https://erasmus-networks.ec.europa.eu/emc/study-visit-munich>.

Another interviewee emphasised the importance of jointly refining these criteria over time to adapt to field developments and societal changes.

After jointly defining criteria, consortia commonly communicate them to potential applicants. Some use their **programme's website for applications**, while others have adopted a **joint application platform** that integrates the evaluation and selection processes. One survey participant, for instance, explained that students upload their application documents and complete a questionnaire on the consortium's website, which features a system that allows all partner institutions to review and evaluate the candidates online or download documents, thus streamlining the process. Another respondent noted that student applications are submitted through a custom online application system based on an open-source software.

Once applications have been received, consortia undertake a **multileveled evaluation process** to filter through the large volumes of applications, which typically includes (i) a pre-screening of candidates, (ii) a selection ranking, (iii) joint online interviews, and (iv) a joint decision over the final rankings<sup>19</sup>. This process is conducted jointly but varies depending on the consortium. Some consortia adopt a **centralised approach**, where the Coordinator manages the procedure by initially receiving the applications and conducting the first eligibility check. However, it is important to note that all consortium partners are involved in the subsequent evaluation and final selection phases. As one survey respondent describes:

*As the coordinator, we conduct the initial check on student applications for completeness and eligibility. All partners are then actively involved in the selection process, with student applications being jointly discussed during a Consortium meeting.*" Similarly, another respondent notes: *"The coordinating institution performs an initial selection of candidates who meet the criteria. The remaining candidates are then ranked by the Admission Committee, which consists of local coordinators and representatives from the three involved institutions.*

Other consortia, on the other hand, **involve all degree-awarding institutions in every step of the process**, sharing responsibilities equally. As one survey respondent states: *"The Secretariat, Coordinator, and Local Directors jointly support and manage the selection process. After an initial eligibility check, Local Directors score applications based on agreed criteria, with at least three Local Coordinators from different institutions evaluating each application."* In this particular case, non-EU partners assist in the selection of applicants from their specific region. Similarly, another respondent explains that the number of applications is evenly distributed among partner universities, with two partners evaluating each application.

Moreover, **interviews** are typically either distributed among partners to make the task more manageable or carried out jointly by several partners. As one survey respondent explains: *"All partner universities interview applicants together, making sure there are always at least two institutions present at each interview"*. Another participant describes how the consortium jointly decided to maximise the number of student interviews (around 250) to minimise potential errors during pre-selection: the work was divided into three interview teams, with local coordinators from the first-year institutions staying with the same team throughout the two days of interviews. This approach allowed them to compare students applying for the same pathways. Meanwhile, professors from one of the partner institutions rotated between teams every two hours to ensure consistency in grading across all groups. The final ranking, based on the scores from all three teams, was collaboratively determined at the end of the meeting. *"This process not only ensured a truly joint selection but also encouraged exchanges on evaluation practices, contributing to team building and fostering jointness in areas beyond just student selection"* the participant affirms.

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<sup>19</sup> EACEA, Munich Study Visit of the Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative - 11-12 March 2024. Event Proceedings, Op. cit., p. 16.

The **use of Excel files or matrices** seem to facilitate a more collaborative approach. One survey respondent reveals their consortium employs a spreadsheet to consolidate the analyses of all applications by local coordinators, using a rating system from 1 to 5 across various criteria, including: (i) Recognition by the institution and career path; (ii) Motivation and project; (iii) Professional experience, community involvement, and study abroad; (iv) Quality of recommendations; and (v) Language skills. Another consortium created a responsibility matrix to assign dedicated staff to the different stages of the process, such as administrative, language, and academic validity checks, as well as interviews.

Lastly, many consortia have established a “*Joint Selection Committee*”, “*Joint Graduate Committee*”, “*Admission Committee*”, or “*Academic Board*” to discuss and validate the final rankings, agree on the admitted students, and nominate scholarship recipients. At a minimum, they hold a **joint meeting with members from all involved institutions** to make these final decisions on selected applicants.

In conclusion, given the responses received, it seems safe to state that this component is generally managed in a highly collaborative manner by EM consortia. Jointness in student admission and selection enables partner institutions to align and assess each candidate using common criteria, ensuring a **consistent level of quality** among selected applicants and fostering mutual trust in each other’s decisions. Moreover, while establishing a joint evaluation process may be burdensome at first, it can help **distribute the workload** more evenly among staff, making the selection process smoother and fairer, and potentially increasing the number of applications that can be processed. In the words of one survey participant:

*The joint student admission and selection procedure is perhaps the most crucial to be carefully designed and implemented jointly to ensure the programme attracts and selects the best students. We have handled an increasing number of applications each year, and with a graduation rate exceeding 95%, I believe it has been well-executed.*

Table 1 Potential reflection points for the parallel session on ‘Joint admission and selection’

REFLECTION POINTS	
<b>Ensuring quality &amp; consistency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you structure the evaluation process to systematically incorporate each partner institution's input and ensure their perspective are reflected in the final selection decisions?</li> <li>• How do non-EU partners within your consortium contribute to the selection of applicants from their regions? What good practices do you implement for integrating regional perspectives into the global joint selection process?</li> <li>• How do you build trust and strengthen collaboration among your partner institutions during the joint admissions process?</li> </ul>
<b>Leveraging the use of technology &amp; tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there innovative tools or methods that you have found particularly effective for facilitating joint decision-making?</li> </ul>

## 4.2. Quality assurance, mutual recognition, and joint accreditation

Although Quality Assurance (QA) was not reported as the component with the highest level of jointness by survey participants, it was generally noted to have a relatively high level of jointness. This was particularly evident in **internal QA procedures**, where many respondents reported joint practices, including the development of a common questionnaire, the establishment of shared communication channels with student representatives, the appointment of a QA director at the consortium level, the creation of a QA joint board or meeting involving all partners, alumni and industry representatives, and the facilitation of document sharing among partners. However, EM consortia encountered greater challenges in implementing a joint approach for **external QA and accreditation**.

More specifically, regarding internal QA procedures, Becker (2020) describes two main joint approaches employed. On the one hand, EM consortia can mutually recognise the internal QA schemes of participating institutions, incorporating this mutual recognition into the Consortium Agreement. On the other hand – and perhaps considered as a more joint approach – consortia can develop joint internal QA mechanisms together from scratch<sup>20</sup>. Based on both interview and survey results, the latter approach appears to be more prevalent.

These internal QA procedures involve establishing **common feedback mechanisms** to gather input from students, graduates, and faculty. This is often done through annual questionnaires and open communication channels with student representatives. The collected feedback is then reviewed and discussed in a **joint board** (e.g., “Quality Assurance Board”, “Joint Board of Studies”, “Joint Programme Board”) or during specific periodic meetings (e.g., “a QA meeting takes place every year,” “we organise yearly quality meetings”), where decisions are made to enhance the programme based on the feedback. These Joint Boards and QA meetings usually involve all full partners, students and Alumni representatives, and associate partners. As one respondent explains, “QA is arranged within a Board, which includes participants from all full partners, some associate partners, and student and alumni cohorts. The Chair of the Quality Board is not from the coordinating university, which ensures that the reporting and quality processes are more distributed and not solely led by the coordinating institution.” This participant also notes that all **QA-related documents are shared on a secure platform** within the consortium to facilitate a joint approach to internal QA. The following quote from a survey respondent perfectly illustrates a joint approach to internal QA:

*We have a well-defined internal feedback cycle in place, which collects input from students and graduates at various points throughout the year. The QA director, in collaboration with the student service director, analyses and compiles this feedback, which is then reported to the Programme Board during their bi-annual meetings. Based on the findings, an action plan is promptly developed and implemented. Students elect representatives who maintain direct contact with management and local coordinators. The entire process—from setup and decision-making to execution and follow-up—is carried out collaboratively by all partners.*

Moreover, given that joint programmes involve multiple higher education institutions, they require either separate **external QA and accreditation processes** in each participating countries or the recognition of one agency's results across all relevant higher education systems. The latter approach is arguably the most joint and has been facilitated by the development of the **European Approach for Quality Assurance (EA)**, which introduced a unified joint accreditation process that, in principle, is recognised across all EHEA countries involved. This approach was designed to replace separate national programme accreditations in the countries represented in a joint programme consortium<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Becker, Op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 66.



Many EM consortia have already used this QA instrument for their respective programmes, as revealed by the interviews and the survey results: *“Our programme has achieved European Accreditation according to the EA and is therefore officially accredited and approved, including by the national accreditation agency.”*; or as reported by the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) on their knowledge base which lists joint programmes that have used the EA<sup>22</sup>. However, implementing it remains challenging, as **not all European countries have recognised this instrument** and/or adjusted their national legislation and regulations to implement the EA since its adoption in 2015<sup>23</sup>. According to EQAR, the EA is currently available to all higher education institutions in 17 European countries, available only to certain institutions or under specific conditions in 13 countries, and not implemented at all in 17 countries<sup>24</sup>.

These disparities are becoming increasingly problematic for institutions in countries where the EA is not yet recognised or implemented, especially as more countries and universities aim to align with this standard. One of the universities interviewed—an Italian institution—highlighted that Italian universities face the challenge of **dual accreditation**: they prepare all the necessary materials to comply with the EA, but since the EA holds no value in Italy, they must also undergo a separate, country-specific accreditation process, thereby doubling the administrative staff's workload. Additionally, the interviewee described the coordination challenges arising from the lack of a joint approach to external QA within their consortium of three European partners. In Italy, accreditation occurs annually, while in Portugal, it takes place every six years, and in France, every five years. Accreditation criteria also vary across national authorities. They explain:

*Coordinating the accreditation timelines across countries and institutions to ensure continuous accreditation of the master's degree is a significant endeavour. It demands specialised knowledge from professors, and all programme coordinators have had to become well-versed in this process. Administrative staff also play a crucial role in this coordination effort.*

Closely tied to accreditation and facing similar regulatory challenges is the awarding of joint degrees, which, as highlighted in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide<sup>25</sup>, are encouraged by the EC to the extent permitted by national legislation. As introduced in this chapter, the awarding of joint degrees represents one of the most challenging components of an EM programme in terms of jointness. While 59% of survey respondents rated joint degrees as a highly joint component—which suggests they issue a joint degree—this area also had the highest percentage of 'low' and 'very low' ratings at 20%. As explored in-depth in the state of play report prepared to inform discussions at the conference 'Boosting the Potential of Joint Degrees in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes'<sup>26</sup>, this disparity largely stems from the legislative differences among countries, which create diversity within consortia. One survey respondent encapsulates the challenge: *“The most difficult aspect of jointness is the diploma. Navigating the national obstacles in each partner country to issue a joint diploma is a significant challenge, and it remains an objective for many consortia.”*

However, the barriers are not solely national; **institutional regulations can vary widely** among partner universities, leaving local staff uncertain about the concept of joint degrees. As one interviewee observed:

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<sup>22</sup> EQAR, Joint programmes that used the European Approach (EQAR, last accessed September 2024): <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/european-approach-cases/>.

<sup>23</sup> Becker, Op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>24</sup> EQAR, National implementation of the European Approach (EQAR, last accessed September 2024): <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/national-implementation/>.

<sup>25</sup> European Commission, Erasmus+ Programme Guide, Op. cit., p. 289.

<sup>26</sup> EC, EACEA, EMSI, Zalunardo, V., & Fernández-Figares, I., 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' (Erasmus Mundus Community Platform, 2023): <https://erasmus-networks.ec.europa.eu/stateofplayjointdegreesem>.

*Local administrative staff often need to familiarise themselves with the concept of joint degrees. When legal frameworks changed to permit these, some universities were initially unaware or sceptical. It required time and effort to demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of implementing joint degrees and to guide them through the development process. Ultimately, these efforts were successful, though it is important to note that legal officials at different universities often prioritise their own regulations over national ones.*

This latter point was also highlighted by a survey participant who emphasised the importance of distinguishing between 'hard rules' and 'mere customs' in institutional regulations.

Implementing a joint degree requires such significant effort that consortia offering them are viewed as representing a more integrated and advanced level of cooperation among higher education institutions. Consequently, delivering a joint degree is often seen as one of the **clearest indicators of jointness** within an EM programme<sup>27</sup>. For more detailed information on the current legal landscape and implementation of joint degrees within the EHEA, as well as potential solutions to address the challenges associated with their implementation, readers are encouraged to consult the materials and proceedings of the aforementioned conference, along with the state of play report prepared for the event<sup>28</sup>.

Given the complex stakeholder ecosystem involved in the accreditation and recognition processes of EM programmes — including local coordinators, administrative offices, QA units, legal experts and national authorities — it seems essential to **coordinate communication and dialogue** among them as early as possible. This coordination should occur **among partner institutions**; one interviewee stressed the importance of involving legal experts from all partner universities at the outset to ensure alignment with both institutional and national regulations, and to have them review and verify the programme's Agreement for compliance.

Additionally, the coordination should also be established **within each institution**. To achieve jointness within a consortium, each partner institution must establish joint approaches to managing EM programmes among staff across different offices and/or departments. In this context, institutional commitment is crucial and can be achieved by **integrating joint programmes into the broader institutional framework and strategy**—particularly one that prioritises internationalisation and the development of such programmes. One of the interviewed practitioners proudly shared that their institution fully supports these efforts, as their new strategy (2023–2027) has prioritised the development of joint degrees and programmes, even appointing a rector specifically for this purpose.

Moreover, the same interviewee emphasised the need to have a **close relationship with the national authorities** in charge of accreditation in order to effectively lobby for legislative change. They noted: *"The personnel involved in these agencies are highly proactive, and there is optimism about ongoing improvements."*

Lastly, one of the interviewed practitioners highlighted that the absence of proper national legislation and institutional regulations often requires a high degree of innovation when implementing joint programmes. This underscores the importance of **sharing good practices, exchanging experiences, and learning from fellow EM peers** to inspire creativity and develop original solutions. Studying successful programmes and their implemented models can be particularly beneficial. Similarly, another interviewee noted that at their institution, which hosts over 15 EM programmes, all joint programme coordinators regularly come together to exchange experiences and foster collaboration.

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<sup>27</sup> EACEA, 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', Op. cit., pp. 13-14.

<sup>28</sup> EC, 1st Annual Conference: Boosting the potential of joint degrees: The Erasmus Mundus experience (Erasmus Mundus Community, last accessed on October 2024): <https://erasmus-networks.ec.europa.eu/emc/first-annual-conference>.

Table 2 Potential reflection points for the parallel session on ‘Quality assurance, mutual recognition, and joint accreditation’

REFLECTION POINTS	
Measuring jointness in internal QA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does your consortium find a balance between standardising QA processes across institutions and allowing flexibility to accommodate local practices and regulations?</li> <li>• What joint processes and tools has your consortium put in place to ensure the programme’s continuous evaluation and improvement?</li> <li>• Does your consortium measure jointness as a criterion when evaluating the overall quality and effectiveness of joint programmes? If so, how?</li> </ul>
Bridging the dialogue among stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does your consortium employ strategies to bring all relevant stakeholders — including local coordinators, administrative offices, QA units, legal experts and national authorities — together in collaborative problem-solving? If so, how?</li> <li>• Do you lobby for legislative changes that support joint programmes and QA processes? If so, how?</li> </ul>

### 4.3. Learning and teaching

As outlined in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide, consortia developing a project are expected to jointly design a fully integrated curriculum, including joint teaching activities and examination procedures<sup>29</sup>. In this context, survey participants indicated high levels of jointness in both ‘curriculum design’ and, to a lesser extent, ‘course coherence and delivery’. The joint approaches reported include organising co-creation workshops with all partners to design joint learning outcomes and the programme’s curriculum, developing joint syllabi, establishing joint teaching practices involving mobility and co-teaching methods, using shared tools to provide seamless student access to course content regardless of location, implementing joint monitoring practices to track programme delivery, and conducting joint research and seminars to keep the curriculum up to date.

More specifically, the first step in developing a fully integrated curriculum, or even initiating a partnership among higher education institutions, should be the **joint design of the programme’s learning outcomes**. This initial exercise requires partners to assess their individual contributions to the curriculum in order to “*deliver something innovative that exceeds the sum of the individual parts*”, an interviewee notes. They further explained: “*It helps determine whether integration is feasible, leading to increased synergy throughout the overall design and implementation of the joint programme.*” Similarly, a survey participant emphasised that joint programmes are intended to deliver content and learning outcomes that no single partner university could achieve alone.

Building on these learning outcomes, consortia integrate the course offering of each partner university into a **comprehensive and cohesive joint course curriculum**. One survey respondent mentioned that their programme’s curriculum was designed to fit the expertise of each partner university and to follow a logical sequence of knowledge, with each semester building on the previous one. Another respondent echoed this, stating that “*each course builds the learning outcomes of the previous course, with partner universities complementing each other by delivering the next stage in the learning path*”.

A challenge arises at this stage of the process when institutions reuse courses and modules from similar local programmes, which are often incorporated into the joint programme. While this approach can

<sup>29</sup> European Commission, Erasmus+ Programme Guide, Op. cit., pp. 288-289.

streamline efforts, it may hinder true integration across the joint programme's curriculum. As a result, students may experience fragmentation as they navigate the distinct approaches of each institution.

To address this, co-creation among all partner institutions should be emphasised at this stage of the process. The REDEEM2 initiative<sup>30</sup>, for instance, highlights the value of **bringing together all involved academics in a workshop** to develop a deeper understanding about the complementarities of the curricula. Such meetings help clarify the motivations and vision of the joint programme and provide a platform to discuss innovative teaching methods<sup>31</sup>. Some survey respondents seem to have adopted similar practices, with one in particular explaining: *"The joint design of the four possible tracks involved two of the four partner institutions with several in-person workshops to shape the curriculum"*. Once jointly designed, the curriculum can be consolidated into joint syllabi: *"All the courses follow a syllabus that has been discussed and decided jointly by all partner institutions"*, a survey respondent affirms.

Moreover, to ensure jointness and course coherence during programme delivery, the implementation of **joint teaching practices** are crucial. For instance, one survey respondent explained that each course is co-taught by at least two instructors from different consortium universities, who share responsibility for content, teaching methods, assignments, and student evaluations. Instructors' hours are counted in a workload at each partner institution and are equally divided between the two teaching the same subject. This collaborative approach brings diverse perspectives while maintaining curriculum consistency. **Teachers' mobility**, in particular, deepens collaboration alignment and customisation of courses, as noted by another respondent.

Additionally, the **use of shared tools**, such as a common digital platform, is vital to ensure jointness among partners and consistency for students throughout the programme. For example, a survey respondent reported that all teachers and students in their programme use a platform for teaching, communication, and information storage. This unified system allows for consistent interaction and ensures that all participants have access to the same materials and updates, regardless of their location. Similarly, Blakemore & Burquel (2012) highlight in their Handbook of Excellence a programme that provides students with an integrated research and training platform that operates seamlessly across all partner sites, allowing students to access teaching materials in a unified manner, no matter where they are. When such integrated systems are unavailable, Blakemore & Burquel (2012) stress the importance of preparing students before mobility, ensuring they are familiar with the various platforms used at partner institutions. By maintaining consistent access to resources across all universities, students can fully engage with the programme and experience a cohesive academic journey<sup>32</sup>.

Once the programme is up and running, consortia must establish **joint monitoring mechanisms** to ensure its smooth delivery. In addition to the various internal QA practices mentioned in section 4.2 'Quality assurance, mutual recognition, and joint accreditation', several survey respondents reported holding regular meetings (e.g., monthly) throughout the academic year to address any necessary adjustments. As one respondent noted: *"Frequent meetings and initiatives are held by the consortium to ensure the consistency of the curriculum."* These are typically held online to facilitate quick decision-making: *"Joint deliberations are undertaken via videoconferences between consortium partners to unify decisions, especially in case of problems."*, explained another respondent.

Beyond monitoring programme delivery, EM consortia must **periodically update their curriculum** to *"constantly reflect on developments in society"*, as one respondent emphasised. Joint research and specialised seminars are some of the methods highlighted in the survey: *"Shared research on the EM joint*

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<sup>30</sup> The CLUSTER Network, Reforming Dual Degree Programmes for Employability and Enhanced Academic Cooperation (REDEEM2, 2015-2017): <https://www.redeemproject.eu/>.

<sup>31</sup> The CLUSTER Network, Guidelines for reforming and creating joint programmes to enhance student employability and academic cooperation (REDEEM2, 2021), p. 12: [https://www.redeemproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/2018/04/REDEEM-Guidelines-Manual\\_final.pdf](https://www.redeemproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/2018/04/REDEEM-Guidelines-Manual_final.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Blakemore and Burquel, Op. cit., p. 53.

*programme topic is conducted to provide content-related support for the programme”; and “The curriculum is updated every year by thematic groups.” It is interesting to note the impact of time and experience on jointness in curriculum design, as one interviewee remarked: “Our programme has been collaboratively designed over time, resulting today in a fully integrated curriculum with a high level of jointness and joint syllabi.”*

Furthermore, some survey respondents reported implementing activities that further strengthened jointness within their partnerships. For instance, some highlighted the value of participating in academic events hosted by partner institutions, such as roundtable discussions, conferences, and seminars, which facilitate the exchange of ideas and foster research innovation. Similarly, organising summer schools, where students, faculty from consortium institutions, and external guest speakers come together for workshops, presentations, lectures, and field trips, can reinforce the programme's jointness by **promoting academic collaboration and enhancing research outcomes**.

But while 'curriculum design' and 'course coherence and delivery' were generally rated as highly joint components, '**exams and assessments**' was seen as significantly less integrated across partners. Some respondents briefly mentioned joint efforts such as organising joint exams across partners, establishing a joint Exam Board, defining common grading systems and standards, involving external examiners, and jointly supervising and evaluating master's theses.

This lower level of jointness may be due to the **differing regulations between countries and/or institutions**, as one survey participant explained:

*The examination and assessment rules for assignments and courses are typically defined by each partner university as part of their internal regulations. We cannot influence this at the programme level. Regarding exams, the evaluation and grading systems vary greatly between different EU countries.*

This challenge is particularly evident in EM programmes built on existing local ones, as another respondent noted: *“The consortium cannot really affect how the local courses are implemented if those courses are also part of other programmes. As a result, students take local exams, and no joint elements are planned.”*

In addition to differing regulations, **academic practices and traditions in grading** can vary considerably among institutions themselves, with some adopting more 'generous' approaches than others. In this context, when asked about the importance of implementing jointness in components they rated low, one participant emphasised the need to respect the academic independence of teachers and institutions in order to maintain high quality standards.

As a result of these differences, **approaches to exams and assessments were found to be quite diverse**. Some survey participants reported organising joint exams and establishing an Examination Board at the consortium level, while others implemented “*comparable*” exams across partner institutions. Some consortia involve all partner universities in the grading process to prevent grade inflation or create a common grading scale for lecturers, supplemented by a conversion table for each national grading system. Others mentioned involving external examiners to provide an independent overview of assessments.

Regarding theses, many respondents reported **joint supervision and evaluation**: *“Academic representatives from each partner university are involved in this task by reading and grading written reports, as well as evaluating oral presentations at an annual symposium.”* However, some others noted that thesis evaluation is the least integrated part of their programmes due to national regulations. One respondent explained: *“I believe having common guidelines for thesis supervision are essential. Based on my experience, this is often the least joint aspect of joint programmes, yet it is a crucial step in the students' academic journey. Joint regulations can help minimise the impact of differing academic cultures across the institutions involved.”*

In this context, it is crucial to **analyse and understand the exam regulations and grading practices or traditions** of each university and country during the design stages of the programme, as pointed out by a survey respondent. Once these are clear, **joint policies/guidelines for exams and the Master’s thesis** should be developed to ensure consistency across all partner universities. Given the sensitivity this component might have at the institutional level, a good practice shared by one interviewee could be applied:

*During the preparation of the EM proposal, our institution’s International Office participates in meetings with academic coordinators and peers from partner universities to identify the administrative individuals responsible for approving or supporting the programme’s development at the institutional or faculty level. Once identified, we work to understand the procedures necessary to secure this approval.*

As for QA and joint degree awards, ensuring that all stakeholders within the institution are aligned on the exams and assessment procedures is key to securing commitment. This was echoed by another interviewed practitioner who stressed the importance of having legal experts from all universities review and approve the programme’s agreement, teaching, and assessment criteria.

To conclude this section, it is worth noting that the more organically the collaboration between higher education institutions develops, the more likely they are to achieve jointness in learning and teaching. As one interviewee recommended:

*When developing an EM programme, prioritise the programme’s jointness rather than simply pursuing funding. Both my colleague’s and my own programmes were conceived and developed before the formal establishment of EM in 2004. Their joint approach evolved naturally, beginning with collaborations in research and exchange programmes with other universities, which later led to the development of their respective joint programmes and subsequent funding.*

Table 3 Potential reflection points for the parallel session on ‘Learning and teaching’

REFLECTION POINTS	
<b>Jointness in Curriculum Design</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What strategies does your consortium use to ensure that learning outcomes reflect a truly integrated approach rather than just an aggregation of individual institutional courses?</li> <li>• How have you and your partners addressed the challenges posed by reusing local course content to ensure greater jointness and cohesion?</li> </ul>
<b>Coherence in Course Delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What mechanisms does your consortium implement to ensure that students experience a unified programme across institutions?</li> <li>• How does your consortium leverage mobility of teaching staff or joint teaching activities to improve cohesion in course delivery?</li> </ul>
<b>Jointness in Exams and Assessments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has your consortium aligned thesis and assessment regulations and evaluation methods while respecting national or institutional rules?</li> </ul>

#### 4.4. Student services and mobility

As discussed in Chapter 2. ‘The value of jointness’, a high level of jointness within EM consortia significantly enhances the student experience. This may be particularly relevant to the ‘student services and mobility’ component, as students rely heavily on the support and coordination provided by EM staff while navigating the various institutions and countries. Student services and mobility include a range of support activities, such as welcoming students and providing essential information prior to their arrival,

assisting with housing and accommodation, supporting visa and residence permit processes, matching students with buddies or academic tutors, offering career guidance, language support, and insurance.<sup>33</sup> A lack of integration and coordination of these support services across partner institutions can lead to a more fragmented and less satisfactory experience for EM students.

While the Erasmus+ Programme Guide highlights the importance of offering common services to students, it provides little specific guidance beyond recommending language courses and visa support<sup>34</sup>. Notably, student services emerged as one of the least joint components within EM consortia. Jointness in this area appears to be mostly limited to setting common standards for delivering support services at each institution and consolidating these into a comprehensive joint student handbook. Some survey respondents also mentioned administrative staff mobility and job shadowing opportunities as additional efforts toward integration.

This low level of jointness might be explained by the fact that this area is typically **managed at the institutional level** rather than at the programme level. As one survey participant explained: *“Student services are almost entirely handled by the individual consortium institutions, where our EM programme is just one of many degree programmes offered. Consequently, the types of services available and how to access them vary between institutions.”* This means that fostering jointness in this area may be limited to establishing contacts between administrative staff at the different institutions. The same respondent added: *“Typically, the EM programme staff can connect students with university employees who can help them access the services they need, but achieving a higher level of jointness is challenging due to the small size of our programme compared to the larger student bodies and the differing services available in each country.”*

Managing EM students at the institutional level can present challenges for EM consortia, particularly if some of the institutions involved are not highly internationalised. In such cases, universities might be less accustomed to the **specific needs of international students** and may focus more on supporting their domestic students<sup>35</sup>. One survey participant echoed this sentiment, noting that procedures are often more complicated and bureaucratic for international students compared to their national counterparts. This underscores the importance of having **dedicated administrative staff focused on supporting international students**. One practitioner highlighted this need, stating:

*Programmes with the highest degree of jointness have administrative staff dedicated to international programmes, bridging the gap between national and international levels—something professors cannot do alone. National administrative staff typically operate within a closed framework, limiting their ability to adopt international approaches. Unfortunately, it is uncommon for our national universities to have their own International Office.*

**Universities vary in their organisational structures** and not all institutions have the benefit of dedicated international administrative staff. Some programmes are managed independently at the programme level, others at the faculty or department level, and some centrally. In certain cases, management is a mix of both centralised and decentralised approaches. As one interviewee noted: *“Our Projects & Mobility Office oversees the implementation of EM programmes at our institution. While these programmes are managed in a highly decentralised manner, certain components, such as student services, are handled centrally.”* This makes it crucial for partners, when first designing the programme, to clearly define roles and responsibilities, **establishing how to navigate their own administrative offices and coordinating effectively with their partners' administrative teams**. The REDEEM initiative recommends that each local academic coordinator maintain close and continuous communication with

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<sup>33</sup> Becker, Op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>34</sup> European Commission, Erasmus+ Programme Guide, Op. cit., p. 289.

<sup>35</sup> EC, EACEA, EMSI, Lanzuela, M., Fernández-Figares, I., Euro-Asian/Pacific Cooperation in Erasmus Mundus. State of play report (Erasmus Mundus Community Platform, 2024), p. 31: <https://erasmus-networks.ec.europa.eu/stateofplayjointdegreesem>.

a designated coordinator in the university administration. Additionally, the guidelines advise formalising the division of responsibilities between the two coordinators in a work plan to ensure continuity and a smooth handover in the event of personnel changes<sup>36</sup>.

Here, **institutional commitment** seems to be a key ingredient in cultivating jointness within student services and mobility. One interviewed practitioner observed that achieving jointness in components typically managed at the institutional level, such as student services, may be easier in the context of European Universities alliances. They argued that the higher level of institutional cooperation in these alliances makes it easier to establish collaboration between central services.

Once the roles and responsibilities for supporting EM students at each institution have been established and coordination among partners' administrative staff is in place, consortia are encouraged to **set standards for delivering support services**. This need was emphasised by one of the interviewed practitioners, who added: *"If partners decide to reserve accommodation for all joint programme students, it should be standardised in terms of type, quality, pricing, and other factors, while also considering the differences among countries."* Several survey participants reported providing the same services across all partner institutions, stating: *"All the universities offer the same quality of student support under the coordination of the programme's project manager"*, or *"the same student services are provided by each partner, with coordination addressing specific needs. The consortium then collectively determines which partner is best suited to provide the necessary service."*

Once standardised, it is good practice to **consolidate these support services offered at each institution into a comprehensive joint student handbook** for the overall study cycle from application to graduation. Ideally, this handbook would include all aspects related to visa applications, housing search, insurance procurement, scholarship fund management, programme course preparation, scheduling, etc. and should be updated on an annual basis<sup>37</sup>. This is a practice that seems to be already well implemented among EM consortia with one survey respondent reporting that *"Every full partner university has their own services, but all are combined in a Practical Guide – a document shared with all students so they have one place to turn to for all information"*. Another participant highlighted this as a best practice, explaining that it not only helps students become aware of the various services available, but also compels institutions to **conduct a thorough analysis of the existing services across all participating institutions**, facilitating comparison and systematisation.

Study visits involving the **mobility of professors and administrative staff** among partner institutions provide valuable **job shadowing opportunities** and can greatly assist in the analysis and design stages of the student support services. As one interviewee explained, spending time at other institutions enables academic and administrative staff to observe and better understand different operational practices while also developing essential soft skills. This mobility can continue during the implementation stages, as another practitioner noted: *"Institutions in the programme invite colleagues from student services at other universities to visit partner institutions and explain to students the specific administrative details they need to know about their next university."* A survey participant also highlighted the importance of community building through mobility, stating: *"In our programme, faculty and staff mobility is intrinsic; all partner universities come together to greet new cohort students during the kick-off day and at other events, representing the consortium as a 'family' rather than just individual study locations."*

Lastly, although no participants mentioned it, the **Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association (EMA)** plays a vital role in supporting students where universities lack capacity or resources. The association organises pre-departure orientations and gatherings for incoming students, with country representatives providing local support to students preparing for their EM journey. Programme

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<sup>36</sup> The Cluster Network, Op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> EACEA, Munich Study Visit of the Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative - 11-12 March 2024. Event Proceedings, Op. cit., p. 11.



representatives also serve as points of contact for specific course-related queries. Once a student is officially accepted into an EM programme, they can join the EMA community and access the extensive support it offers<sup>38</sup>. While these services are not meant to replace those offered by universities, EMA helps enhance the overall student experience and make their EM journey feel more cohesive.

Overall, jointness helps provide effective support to international students, and is achieved through **hands-on administrative staff and institutional commitment** to ensure that resources and structures are in place to support students throughout their EM journey.

However, some survey respondents emphasised the importance of **institutional autonomy in managing this aspect of EM programmes**. One participant argued that treating EM students as regular master's students and managing student services at the institutional level helps them receive better services and become more integrated into the university. Similarly, another respondent pointed out that, given the logistical challenges of achieving high jointness in areas like student services, consortia resources are better spent ensuring jointness in more feasible areas, such as curriculum design, admissions selection, quality assurance, and degree awarding. Lastly, an interviewee also noted that while jointness is important, maintaining European and cultural diversity within the programme is essential, as it forms a key part of the student experience. According to them, students should be prepared to embrace this diversity, explore different academic environments, and **not expect uniform services throughout the programme**. *“The goal of these programmes is to train students to become global, flexible, and open-minded citizens”,* they affirmed. *“Achieving this requires, nevertheless, a strong foundation of jointness at the core of the programme.”*

Table 4 Potential reflection points for the parallel session on ‘Student services and mobility’

REFLECTION POINTS	
<b>Jointness across partners’ administrations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent should EM programmes prioritise jointness in student services? Where does it make sense to have joint services, and where is it less relevant (e.g. career guidance, visa assistance, etc.)?</li> <li>• How do you and your partners offer a unified experience when student services are managed at the institutional level? Are there examples of services (e.g., accommodation, visa support, health insurance) that have been successfully standardised in your consortium?</li> <li>• Do any of your partners lack international offices or dedicated administrative teams? If so, how do you support them and address this gap?</li> </ul>
<b>Integration of EM students and staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does your consortium cultivate a sense of community or a ‘family-like’ identity among both partners and students to ensure the programme is not perceived as merely a series of disjointed academic locations?</li> </ul>

#### 4.5. Industry and programme sustainability

Reported as the component with the lowest level of jointness in EM programmes, ‘Industry and employment’ plays a crucial role in enhancing graduates’ employability and ensuring the programme’s sustainability. Although joint programmes are evaluated based on their impact on individuals, particularly with regard to employability, the Erasmus+ Programme Guide makes no reference to the

<sup>38</sup> EMA, About EMA (Erasmus Mundus Association, last accessed September 2024): <https://www.em-a.eu/erasmus-mundus>.

need for implementing joint approaches to this component<sup>39</sup>. The few joint strategies reported by survey participants included providing shared career guidance services, implementing common feedback questionnaires for graduates as a career tracking mechanism, organising joint networking events to connect industry, alumni and current cohorts, and involving industry partners and alumni in the programme's QA boards and meetings.

The limited guidance around this component may explain why some EM consortia struggle to implement integrated industry and employability strategies. One survey respondent explains that the coordinator of their programme is the main driving force behind this component, with alumni contacts, for instance, being managed at the individual partner level. They, nevertheless, express a desire for this process to become more of a joint effort across the project. In fact, other participants recognised the advantages of implementing joint strategies in this component, noting that **combining the resources and networks** of all partners leads to **attracting more students and employers**. As one participant aptly expressed: *"Promotion and employability strategies should be jointly designed and implemented, as the effort involved can be immense and cannot be managed by one partner alone, particularly given the objective of reaching as many prospective students and employers as possible"*.

In this context, industry and employability strategies include **joint career tracking activities** to measure graduate employability, thereby assessing the programme's impact on individuals. These seem to typically involve **establishing common feedback mechanisms** to gather input from graduates, often through periodic questionnaires and open communication channels. Periodic updates to the contacts list were also mentioned by several participants. There was, however, little information on other joint graduate tracking activities currently implemented by EM consortia. One survey participant simply mentioned the use of *"ad-hoc, tailor-made joint graduate career tracking systems"* in some EM projects their institution is involved in, describing these as a central activity for ensuring the programme's impact, quality and sustainability.

Industry and employability strategies also involve **managing alumni** to engage them in the programme, improve its quality, and secure internship and work placement opportunities for students. Joint alumni management activities aimed at building and supporting a dynamic community appear to be well-developed within EM consortia. According to survey results, these include **jointly organising gatherings and events** that connect current and past student cohorts to create a joint network:

*We enable graduate networking through a biennial alumni conference" or "Current cohorts and alumni jointly participate in events, such as our programme's Summer School at the end of the second semester. These enhance the sense of belonging to a common 'family' and facilitates the exchange of opportunities.*

It is worth noting that the terms 'family' and 'community' frequently appeared in the survey findings when discussing alumni. In addition, as mentioned in section 4.2. 'Quality assurance, mutual recognition, and joint accreditation', alumni are often **involved in joint QA/Advisory boards and meetings** to provide advice and better align the programme with industry needs in terms of knowledge, skills, and field developments: *"Employability strategies are discussed during Management Board meetings, involving all partners and alumni."*

In addition to joint tracking activities and alumni engagement strategies, EM consortia offer **joint career orientation services** as part of their support for students. However, little information was found on these, with one survey participant noting the preparation and publication of a **joint catalogue of jobs and internships**. Another respondent reported that partners send information on open positions or

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<sup>39</sup> European Commission, Erasmus+ Programme Guide, Op. cit., p. 289.

opportunities to the programme's coordinator, who then disseminates them to students. No mention was made of joint approaches to preparing students to navigate the labour market.

Moreover, at the consortium level, the development of **sustainable partnerships between the consortium and external stakeholders**, such as companies and local authorities, is also key to facilitate the transition of students to the labour market. Similar to alumni engagement, EM consortia appear to be fostering industry-related partnerships through **jointly organised events** and industry participation in **joint QA/Advisory boards**. As one survey respondent explained: *"Industry partners have been brought together in the programme's group of contributors, which was a joint effort by all partner universities. Once a year, we organise a full day dedicated to the programme, which includes hosting an Industry Advisory Board."* Additionally, another participant mentioned the involvement of 'industry tutors' in the teaching programme, as part of their strategy. In any case, as suggested in the guidelines developed by the REDEEM initiative, consortia would ideally conduct an initial joint exercise when designing the programme to identify all potential industry-related organisations to partner with, define their roles in the project, and gather contact information for relevant individuals<sup>40</sup>.

A survey participant suggested that this component is new to many universities, especially in cases where no project manager is appointed, and the majority of the work is undertaken by professors. Consequently, developing marketing and employability strategies is challenging without the support of an expert: *"As such, only a few EM programmes have solid marketing and employability strategies,"* they affirmed. In this regard, it may be beneficial for EM consortia to consider appointing **dedicated marketing staff across partners** responsible for tasks such as identifying and engaging with strategic partnerships, improving communication and promotion of the programme to highlight its added value to the labour market, and maintaining active relations with alumni networks. These efforts would contribute to the programme's visibility, reputation, and, ultimately, its sustainability<sup>41</sup>.

Once again, although not mentioned by survey respondents or interviewees, the **role of EMA** is crucial in this component, as they offer professional development activities, career advancement opportunities, and facilitate the traceability of graduates as well as the programme's impact on their professional growth through their regular Graduate Impact Surveys<sup>42</sup>. As for student services, EMA helps enhance EM graduates' employability and make their EM journey feel more cohesive.

Table 5 Potential reflection points for the parallel session on 'Industry and programme sustainability'

REFLECTION POINTS	
Joint career tracking activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What digital tools or platforms do you and your partners employ to streamline the career tracking process and enhance data collection?</li> <li>• How does your consortium jointly measure graduate employability?</li> <li>• How does your consortium encourage alumni to participate in ongoing joint career tracking initiatives, and what incentives do you offer?</li> </ul>
Joint management of alumni and industry partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you and your partners combine resources and networks to effectively manage alumni and industry partnerships?</li> <li>• How do you jointly create sustainable partnerships with industry stakeholders that support student transitions into the labour market?</li> </ul>

<sup>40</sup> The Cluster Network, Op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> EACEA, Euro-Asian/Pacific Cooperation in Erasmus Mundus. State of play report, Op. cit., pp. 45-46.

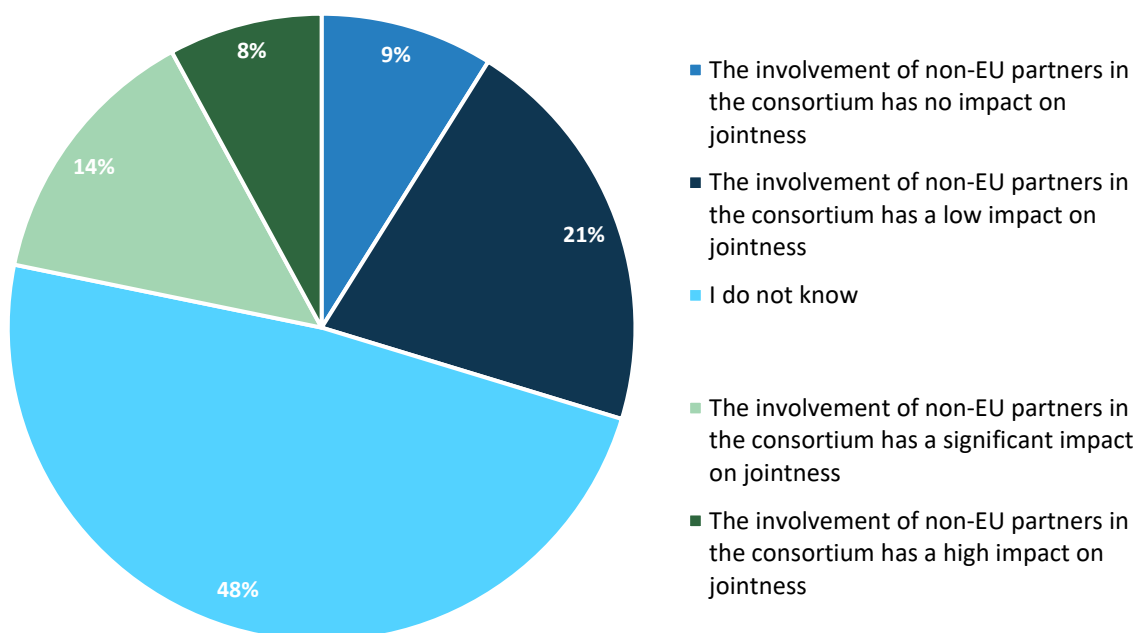
<sup>42</sup> EMA, Graduate Impact Survey 2020/21 (Erasmus Mundus Association, last accessed October 2024): <https://www.em-a.eu/post/graduate-impact-survey-2020-21-results>.

- How can consortia leverage the role of EMA to enhance graduates' employability and integrate it into their joint strategies?

#### 4.6. Jointness with non-European partners

Given the cultural, organisational and regulatory differences within and outside EU borders, coordination and collaboration with non-EU partners may require greater effort from the various partner universities. These integration challenges are evident in the limited participation of non-EU institutions as full partners in most consortia, which often leads to their remaining only partially integrated. Typically, they engage as associated partners, contributing to specific areas such as quality assurance, industry strategies, and, in some cases, curriculum design. In this context, this section examines the extent to which involving non-EU partners impacts the level of jointness achieved within international consortia.

As part of the survey, participants were asked to rate the perceived impact of non-EU partners on jointness within consortia, using a scale ranging from 'no impact' to 'low impact', 'significant impact', and 'high impact', with an additional 'I don't know' option for those who were uncertain. *Figure 3* reveals **widespread uncertainty about this impact**, with 48% of respondents selecting the 'I do not know' option.



*Figure 3. Impact of non-EU partnership on jointness*  
 Source: EMSI, Survey 'Erasmus Mundus Seminar on the notion of Jointness'

Only 21% of respondents believe the involvement of non-EU partners has a low impact on jointness, while 14% report a significant impact, 9% indicate no impact, and 8% perceive a high impact.

Those who indicated that the involvement of non-EU partners within consortia significantly or highly influences the implementation of integrated approaches among EM partners did so due to the existing

**differences in higher education systems** between EU and non-EU countries. As one survey respondent explains: *“The lack of Bologna structures and European standards among third-country partners, coupled with differing administrative and cultural traditions within and outside the EHEA, can hinder achieving jointness.”*

Similarly, some survey participants emphasised that **national and institutional regulatory differences** can play a key role in defining certain components of joint programmes (including tuition fees, QA, joint diploma awarding): *“Non-EU partners do not have the same or similar regulations as the EU”, or “The regulations that apply to them in fundamental aspects such as tuition fees and QA are very different in terms of timing, methodologies, and requirements.”* As such, the absence of common structures, standards and similar regulations may require partner universities to invest additional time and resources in familiarising themselves with the diverse administrative, academic, and regulatory systems of non-EU partners in order to develop joint approaches that accommodate these differences.

Moreover, collaborating with non-EU partners may require a thorough understanding of their teaching methods used, as well as of their students' needs in order to integrate them into a **coherent and integrated curriculum**. This process can demand additional time and effort, as stated by one survey respondent: *“The involvement of non-EU partners may entail considerable teaching gaps and teaching methods, which then requires further efforts when shaping the curriculum.”*

Finally, **mobility management** can also present significant barriers to the level of jointness achieved within international consortia, particularly in relation to visa application support. This affects not only EM students but also staff involved in the management of the programme. One respondent expressed their frustration: *“Even I struggled to obtain a Schengen visa to visit partner countries, despite my role as project manager”*. One interviewee also mentioned that many students had left their host country without securing their visa on time. This fragmented process drains considerable energy and causes frustration for both staff and students.

Survey participants also emphasised the significant benefits they bring to EM joint programmes, ultimately strengthening jointness within consortia. Firstly, partnerships involving universities from non-EU countries can provide specific knowledge fields that may be less developed at EU universities, contributing to a **more comprehensive and cohesive curriculum**. As one survey participant noted, *“The involvement of a third country broadens the scientific scope of the teachings”*.

Additionally, survey responses highlighted the **extensive experience some non-EU institutions have in collaborating with EU universities** to successfully manage other EM programmes. As one respondent argued:

*The involvement of non-EU partners has a significant impact because they may possess expertise in other developed fields and, importantly, the knowledge to successfully implement a joint programme. This leads to strategic and effective partnerships between higher education institutions. Every good uncharted practice matters.*

Such collaboration can therefore provide valuable insights for designing and delivering successful joint programmes.

Achieving jointness with non-European partners can also **enhance the quality of students enrolled** in the EM joint programme. Cooperation with non-EU partners may increase research and job opportunities for students, helping to attract a larger pool of qualified candidates. This broader application pool enables programme coordinators to jointly select students with a wider range of skills while setting higher common selection criteria. One survey participant highlighted the improved quality of students in these programmes: *“If one of the goals of the programme is to attract the best students to study in Europe, the involvement of a third country allows this strategy to be expanded”*.

Lastly, given the challenges that arise from including non-EU partners in the consortium and the additional effort required to integrate them into the programme, these global collaborations can **represent a more advanced level of cooperation** among higher education institutions. However, this may only be achieved if the decision is made jointly among partners. As one survey participant stated:

*If the consortium jointly decides to include a non-EU partner for the right reasons, tackling the challenges together will significantly enhance jointness. However, if the decision lacks unanimous support, communication, administration, legal contract arrangements, and cross-cultural differences may become too difficult, leaving some partners behind.*

Table 6. Potential reflection points for the parallel session on 'Enhancing jointness with non-EU partners'

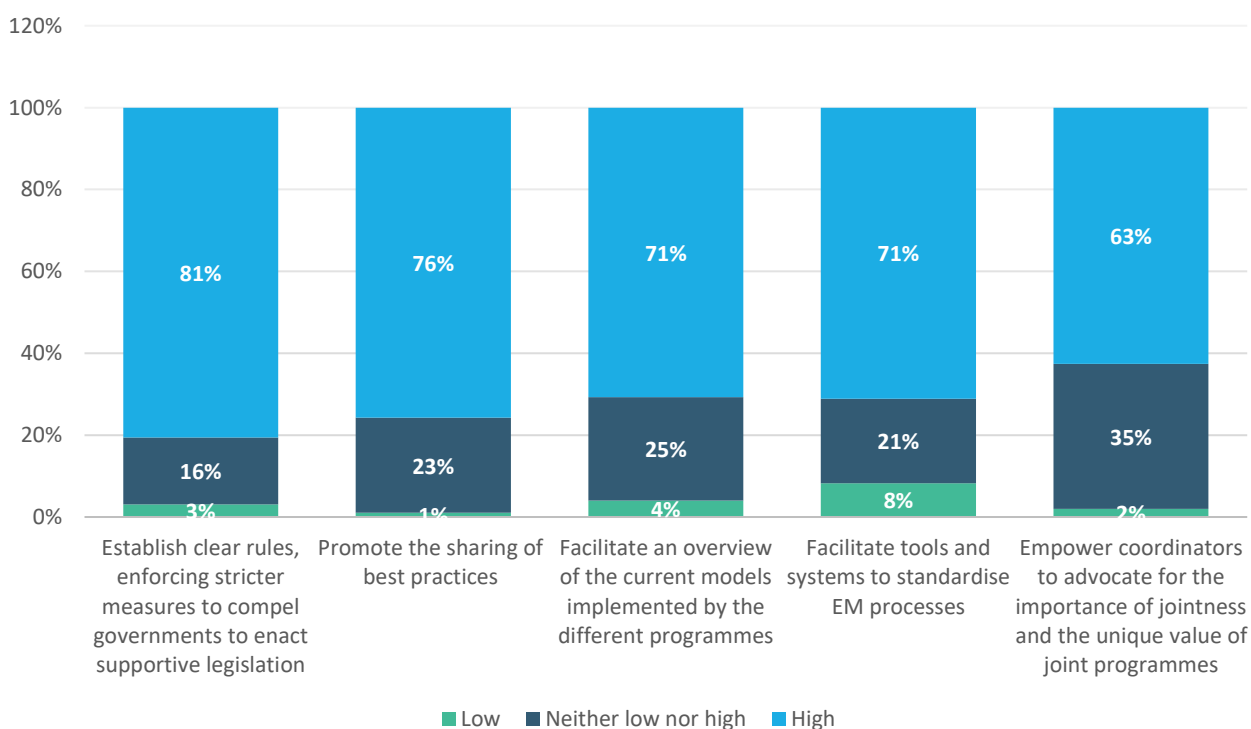
REFLECTION POINTS	
<b>Enhancing jointness and integration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does your consortium bridge cultural, organisational, and regulatory gaps between EU and non-EU universities?</li><li>• How do you ensure that diverse teaching methods and student needs are effectively integrated into a cohesive educational programme?</li><li>• What are some successful examples of partnerships with non-EU institutions that have enhanced jointness? What lessons can be learned and applied to future collaborations?</li></ul>

## 5. SUPPORTING JOINTNESS AT EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL LEVELS

Taking action at both the European and national levels can help institutions overcome some of the challenges that hinder achieving jointness in EM joint programmes. Notably, the selection of the national and regional regulatory context of partner universities as one of the top five factors influencing jointness, as outlined in Chapter 3, underscores the necessity of implementing measures at both EU and national levels to promote jointness.

The desk research and interviews identified **five main measures that EU and national authorities could implement to remove current obstacles and promote jointness** across EM joint programmes and consortia. In some cases, these higher-level actions could be considered as a necessary preliminary step to enable consortia to foster jointness autonomously.

As part of the survey, participants were asked to rate the perceived level of impact each identified measure may have on jointness, using a scale ranging from 'high' to 'low', with the option to select 'neither low nor high' if they were uncertain. Respondents were also encouraged to share any additional measure to support jointness at European and national levels. As illustrated in *Figure 4*, results show a **strong agreement on the high impact these measures could have**, with significantly more respondents selecting 'high' than 'low'. However, a notable percentage of respondents replied 'neither low nor high' for some suggested measures, reflecting **some uncertainty about their impact** on jointness.



*Figure 4. Impact assessment of key EC and national measures*  
 Source: EMSI, Survey 'Erasmus Mundus Seminar on the notion of Jointness'

More specifically, 81% of respondents agreed on the high impact of **establishing clear rules, regulations, and expectations** at EU level. This measure refers to aligning expectations and being stricter in compelling governments to enact supportive legislation that could remove current barriers for jointness in the national, regional or local regulatory context of participating institutions. This is

particularly relevant for addressing challenges related to the awarding of joint degrees and the use of the European Approach, which currently require adjustments in some national regulations to better accommodate such joint procedures (e.g., the requirement to attend courses at a specific institution for a minimum duration, or the obligation to follow national QA processes). Encouragement and support at the EU level in this regard may be necessary not only to increase jointness within the EM community but also to enhance it across the EHEA. While this was the view expressed by survey respondents, it should be noted that the majority of such rules and regulations are national competences. Furthermore, an increasing number of European universities are seeking collaborations and strengthening their international strategies, as emphasised during one of the interviews conducted: *“The EC’s Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC)’s policy instruments in this area should be aligned to integrate jointness into other ongoing initiatives such as the European degree.”*

Additionally, with 76% of respondents indicating high impact, **promoting the sharing of best practices among practitioners from the EM Community** is ranked as the second most influential measure at EU level to enhance jointness. Regularly exchanging emerging challenges and implemented solutions can not only foster a common understanding of joint programmes but also strengthen the sense of a community within EM practitioners, clearly differentiating these programmes from other less integrated ones. In this context, EACEA and DG EAC has already taken steps by implementing the EM Community Platform and organising events to create both online and in-person opportunities for the community to network and share knowledge. Similarly, given the current lack of awareness of what other consortia are doing, **facilitating an overview of the current models implemented by different programmes** would be beneficial in this respect.

Moreover, **facilitating tools and systems to standardise EM processes** was rated as highly impactful by 71% of survey respondents. These refer to the creation of common systems, standardised guidelines, and/or templates for these programmes, thereby simplifying and streamlining administrative processes, and enhancing jointness. A more EU-coordinated approach for facilitating tools such as templates for essential documents like joint diplomas and diploma supplements, could help alleviate ongoing recognition issues and enhance jointness across EM consortia<sup>43</sup>. It is, however, noteworthy that this measure has received the highest percentage of respondents indicating its low impact (8%), compared to all other suggested measures.

Finally, 63% of respondents selected the high impact of **empowering coordinators to advocate for the importance of jointness at both national and European levels**. Clearly emphasising the excellence of EM programmes and disseminating the benefits of these programmes to other institutions but also national authorities can potentially enhance administrative and regulatory facilitation. As one interviewee stated: *“Given the complex regulatory landscape, the ability to effectively lobby at both national and European levels is crucial for universities to achieve jointness”*. However, this proposed measure received the highest percentage of respondents (35%) indicating a ‘neither low or high’ answer, reflecting a significant uncertainty about its impact on jointness.

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<sup>43</sup> EC, DG EAC, Erasmus Mundus joint master degrees – The story so far (Publications Office of the European Union, 2016), p. 40: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/530999>.



## 6. CONCLUSION

Over the past two decades, ongoing transnational collaboration between higher education institutions for the development of EM joint programmes has put **'jointness' in the spotlight**, as a key factor in ensuring their successful design and implementation. Jointness, defined as the level of integration within a joint study programme across all its components, distinguishes these programmes from others that may involve collaboration but do not require the same level of integration.

Achieving jointness across all components of the joint programmes can **yield substantial benefits**. At the **programme level**, a high degree of jointness may (i) improve the quality of the programme from pedagogical, innovative and sustainable perspectives; (ii) foster a sense of community identity among partner universities and students, creating a cohesive environment; (iii) enhance efficient collaboration between partner universities by streamlining and simplifying administrative processes; and (iv) increase the programme's visibility and attractiveness globally by leveraging the resources of partner institutions. At the **institutional level**, jointness can strengthen long-term collaboration and encourage continuous improvement within institutions.

However, several **factors can influence the level of jointness** that an EM partnership can achieve during the design and implementation phases. The most prominent ones appear to be (i) the national or institutional regulatory context governing each partner institution; (ii) the level of experience of academic and administrative staff involved in running EM programmes; and (iii) the mindsets and attitudes of the various institutions towards jointness and its relevance.

The impact of these factors on the implementation of joint approaches varies across the different components of a programme. Partner universities are more likely to achieve jointness in student admission and selection processes, curriculum design and delivery, and internal QA mechanisms. In contrast, EM consortia face greater challenges in implementing joint approaches for components such as external QA and accreditation, joint degree awards, exams and assessments, student services, and industry and employment strategies. These become particularly pronounced when involving non-EU partners in the programme, which might explain why they are often incorporated as associated partners rather than full partners, limiting their integration in the programme.

The findings show that EM consortia can only achieve so much without the support of their **institutions, as well as national and European authorities**, which play crucial roles in overcoming obstacles to the full achievement of jointness within their programmes. Integrating joint programmes into the broader institutional framework and strategy to align internal regulations, processes and human resources is essential for effectively managing EM programmes at the local level. Institutionalising EM collaboration, as seen in other initiatives like the European Universities alliances facilitates jointness both within and among partner universities.

National and European authorities also play a role in addressing the challenges hindering jointness by (i) establishing clear regulations and enforcing stricter measures at EU level to compel national governments to enact supportive legislation, (ii) promoting the sharing of best practices among practitioners at European level, (iii) raising awareness of currently implemented models beyond national borders, (iv) facilitating tools and systems for standardisation across the EU, and (v) empowering coordinators to advocate for the importance of jointness at both national and European levels. While the first measure is considered the most impactful by the EM community, all are regarded as highly influential in fostering jointness.

Seminar participants are encouraged to reflect on and discuss the findings of this report, which hopefully inspires EM practitioners to strengthen their joint approaches and increase their visibility within their own institutions and national authorities. Additionally, the report may assist the EU in the evaluation of EM joint programmes when assessing their level of jointness for funding decisions.

## ANNEX

### Annex I – Approaches towards jointness for each component of the programme

The table below summarises the identified joint approaches that consortia could implement to achieve a high level of jointness across the various components of EM joint programmes.

Table 7. List of joint approaches per component of the programme.

Programme’s component	Joint approach
<b>Joint admission and selection</b>	Establishing common eligibility criteria
	Defining joint guidelines for evaluating applications to ensure consistent standards and trust among all consortium partners
	Creating a joint interoperable platform that streamlines the process from application to selection
	Implementing a multileveled evaluation process in which tasks are either evenly distributed among partners or conducted jointly
	Using Excel files/matrices to facilitate a more collaborative approach to evaluating and rating candidates
	Holding a joint meeting or board with members from all involved institutions to make the final decisions on selected applicants
<b>Quality assurance, mutual recognition, and joint accreditation</b>	Recognising the internal QA schemes of participating institutions, incorporating this mutual recognition into the Consortium Agreement or developing joint internal QA mechanisms together from scratch
	Establishing common feedback mechanisms to gather input from students, graduates, and faculty, including surveys and open communication channels with student representatives
	Holding a joint QA meeting or board with members from all involved institutions, students and Alumni representatives, and associate partners to make decisions on programme improvements

Planning and delivering jointness in Erasmus Mundus Master’s Programmes

	Assigning a dedicated QA director at consortium level responsible for the QA processes of the programme
	Having all QA-related documents in a common platform within the consortium to facilitate QA
	Using the European Approach for Quality Assurance to accredit the programme
	Delivering a joint degree
<b>Learning and teaching</b>	Organising co-creation workshops with all partners to jointly design the programme’s learning outcomes
	Organising co-creation workshops with all partners to jointly design the programme’s curriculum
	Developing joint syllabi
	Establishing joint teaching practices involving mobility and co-teaching methods
	Using shared interoperable tools to provide seamless student access to course content regardless of location
	Implementing joint monitoring practices in the form of regular meetings to track programme delivery
	Periodically updating the curriculum through joint research and seminars
	Participating in or hosting academic events that bring together partner institutions to promote academic collaboration, enhance research outcomes, and drive innovation
	Organising joint exams and establishing an Examination Board at the consortium level
	Creating a common grading scale to ensure consistent grading and trust among all consortium partners
	Involving external examiners to provide an independent overview of assessments
Developing common policies/guidelines for the joint supervision and evaluation of theses and exams	

Planning and delivering jointness in Erasmus Mundus Master’s Programmes

<b>Students services and mobility</b>	Establishing contact and assigning roles and responsibilities within the administrative offices of each institution
	Setting common standards for delivering support services at each institution
	Consolidating the support services offered at each institution into a comprehensive joint student handbook for the overall study cycle from application to graduation
	Encouraging administrative staff mobility and job shadowing opportunities
<b>Industry and programme sustainability</b>	Providing shared career guidance services including the development of a joint catalogue of available job positions and internships
	Implementing common feedback mechanisms for graduates to measure graduate employability
	Organising joint networking events to connect industry, alumni and current cohorts
	Involving industry partners and alumni in the programme’s QA boards and meetings
	Appointing dedicated marketing staff at consortium level