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## PLA Outcome

HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS IN SPAIN

### *HERE-ES Project* *Quality Assurance of Joint* *Programmes*

University of Salamanca, 9 – 10 November 2015

### Salamanca Outcome

Around 40 experts and representatives from several European countries (Spain, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia-Brussels, The Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Portugal, France and Slovenia, representing national/regional ministries of higher education, quality assurance agencies, higher education institutions and other stakeholders such as the EC, ENQA, ESU, EQAR and ENIC-NARIC networks, met in Salamanca for the purpose of a Peer Learning Activity PLA on the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

The PLA was organized by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MECD) in the framework of the Erasmus + project Higher Education Reforms in Spain. The HERE-ES PLA was led by MECD in collaboration with the Spanish Quality Agency ANECA, the Spanish Conference of Rectors CRUE, ENQA and ESU.

Based on intense and constructive discussions during the PLA, and considering the state of the art and recent trends on the subject presented by experts in the field, the participants noted that:

#### **On the implementation of Joint Programmes:**

- A Joint Programme (JP) can lead to a Joint Degree (JD) or dual / multiple degrees



- Joint Programmes (JP) and Joint Degrees (JD) should not be seen as goals in themselves but rather as a means to achieve national, European and worldwide objectives related with the enhancement of the quality of higher education. JPs enhance transnational cooperation, the possibilities for internationalization, including joint working, international comparisons and benchmarking, provision of learning and knowledge, and mobility opportunities to both students and academic and administrative staff.
- The implementation of JPs (and particularly Joint Degrees JD) continue to face some challenges, coming from different regulatory frameworks and legislation, including a diversity or ambiguity of terminology, a lack of information on good practices and trust on specific implementation aspects, and differences in teaching and student assessment in different countries.
- For academically well-integrated JPs, the main challenges are largely the administrative and technical hurdles that currently make implementation and national recognition of JP/JDs difficult. These can discourage universities from entering into the development and implementation of transnational JPs.
- In spite of such challenges, however, JP/JD are now a reality, are growing in number, and have been demonstrably successful for HEIs, their students and stakeholders.

## Conclusion

*The reality of successful implementation of transnational JPs should be made clearer and more transparent at national and European levels.*

*There is a clear need for provision of precise and comparable information, (data + context) on the number and characteristics of JPs.*

## On the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes:

- Given that most countries still have national requirements in force before an administrative decision on the outcome of the evaluation of a JP can be achieved, there is a need to find a means to facilitate a single evaluation procedure and principles for mutual acceptance of the decision.
- Some countries exempt Erasmus Mundus Masters programmes from the need to undergo national accreditation systems. Whilst this was proposed as a possible model for wider development, it was also noted that the Erasmus Mundus selection procedure itself does not equate to an external QA process in line with the requirements of the ESG.
- The principle of single accreditation and multiple recognition, implemented for instance in the MULTRA project provides a proved way on how to go on to implement the single evaluation of Joint Programmes leading to multiple accreditation. The procedure is however based on extensive and detailed collaborations between specific QA agencies, and a more generic approach, applicable across the EHEA and beyond and irrespective of the evaluation outcome, is needed.



## Conclusion

*There is a clear need for a single evaluation procedure for JPs that leads to an internationally-recognised outcome within and beyond the EHEA. In addition to the European Approach, the ECA MULTRA project has shown that such an approach is possible at programme accreditation level, but a more-widely applicable methodology encompassing all forms of QA within the EHEA, and its partners, is required.*

### On the European Approach to the Quality Assurance of Joint programmes

- The establishment of the European Approach provides a generic approach to the QA of JPs.
- Work on implementation of the European Approach needs to be continued, without always waiting for a 'European blueprint', at each level, higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies and ministries
- Ministries should take all the necessary steps to facilitate and allow the application of the European Approach, perhaps by allowing exceptions / exemptions to regular compulsory external quality assurance procedures (e.g. national / QA agency general initiatives such as those of the German Accreditation Council and NVAO, specific initiatives such the 'automatic' accreditation of Erasmus Mundus programmes, agreement between Quality Agencies, etc.).
- Ministries should additionally take all necessary steps to ensure that students and graduates from transnational JP are not discriminated against with respect to students and graduates from regular programmes.
- Quality assurance agencies should identify, in their guidelines and protocols, differences between the European Approach and their regular national procedures. These differences should be made transparent to all the HEIs.
- Quality assurance agencies should specifically include in their external evaluation/assessment/accreditation procedures of JPs, criteria that address the 'jointness' of the programme, in cases where the European Approach is not implemented.
- National regulations concerning JP/JDs should be checked against the bases of the European Approach, to develop an enabling framework that fosters and supports JP/JD and guarantees the quality and transparency of JP/JDs.

### Conclusion

*The European Approach for the QA of Joint Programmes can provide a methodology that is widely applicable, that excludes the need for specific national criteria, and can encompass all forms of QA within the EHEA, and its partners beyond.*



*Implementation of the European Approach will (however) require coordinated actions by ministries, quality assurance agencies and HEIs at legal, administrative and pedagogical levels.*

### **On the Recognition of evaluation decisions concerning Joint programmes**

- There is no single model within the EHEA for the relationship between evaluation and recognition of evaluation outcomes, whether at programme and/or institutional levels. Implementation of the European Approach will require attention to the different (national) models.
- The MULTRA project provides a proven, though rather specific, way towards implementation of a single evaluation (for a Joint Programme) leading to an outcome with multiple recognitions (of that evaluation outcome).
- Generic agreements between national quality assurance agencies, to mutually recognize evaluation processes made by any EQAR-registered agency and their outcomes, will be needed as a means of overcoming current hurdles to the development of JPs and their QA/recognition.

### **On the Recognition of degrees from Joint programmes**

- Beyond the specific case of JPs, recognition of joint and dual/multiple degrees should be considered an essential policy issue, rather than a purely technical one.
- There is a need to consider transnational JP/JDs as something other than a pure national issue even when national qualifications are awarded.

### **On Terminology**

- There are currently various, different descriptions and legal definitions of Joint Programmes within the EHEA.

### **Conclusion:**

*It is proposed that the definition for a JP given in the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes could be used as the basis for the provision of precise and comparable information (data + context) on the number and characteristics of JPs.*

*Such an agreed, legally-binding EHEA definition will be required where the European Approach is incorporated into national regulations, to ensure straightforward coordination of the recognition of both evaluation outcomes and the degrees awarded by Joint Programmes.*



## General conclusion

*Through Joint Programmes and Joint Degrees, we can see an expression of the “Bologna paradox”. JP/JDs are, per se, transnational programmes and qualifications but developed, implemented, managed, quality assured and recognized within different national/regional contexts. Recognizing the ‘uniqueness’ of JP/JDs, this paradox should push ministries (and other stakeholders) support the implementation of the European Approach by implementation of an ‘enabling framework’ in terms of programme structure, quality assurance, qualifications framework(s), recognition, etc. Under such an agreed framework, JP/JDs could then be considered as ‘exceptions to the national rules’.*



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