

RECOMMENDATIONS

on the Promotion and Further Development of Cross-border Study Programmes

final version as of 28th July 2008

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Preliminary Remarks

The recommendations made below refer specially to cross-border study programmes. For that reason they do not take into account questions which apply generally to study programmes, such as the introduction of degree courses which correspond to a genuine demand, the evaluation of lectures by the students etc. Neither do they deal with general social phenomena such as the decline in interest in learning the language of a neighbouring country. Instead, they concentrate on challenges which can be tackled in the higher education sector itself.

The recommendations are the result of a multi-stage collective research and elaboration process.

During an initial phase, extensive semi-structured interviews were carried out with some thirty directors and coordinators of double and joint-degree programmes and persons in positions of responsibility in administration in the Greater Region. Altogether, some forty hours of conversation were recorded.

In a second phase, the information obtained from these conversations was categorised and analysed according to a multi-dimensional matrix.

The information, having been thus sorted, and above all the problems, best-practice examples and wishes voiced by the interviewees served in a third phase as the basis for an initial draft with suggestions for recommendations for various target groups at levels ranging from local to European.

In a fourth phase – the basis of communicative validation – all the interviewees were requested to make comments on this first draft, and to criticise and add to it. The ideas which resulted from this were duly incorporated.

In a fifth phase, the revised version was discussed at a workshop with experts on quality assurance and experts on international programmes in the higher education sector. In turn, their comments and recommendations, and those of the participants in the final conference, were also incorporated.

In the final phase of the process, the provisional final version resulting from the fifth phase was validated by all the participants in the QUACE final conference. This version is available here.

A. Recommendations for Directors and Coordinators of Cross-border Study Programmes

1. COOPERATION

1.1. Diversity of Models

There are a variety of cross-border cooperation models for study programmes. In particular with regard to diverse requirements in different courses and on various levels (BA/MA/PhD), none of these models can be regarded as standard, far less as ideal. The following thus applies:

- 1.1.1. In order to find the model that seems best suited to the targets being aimed at or to further develop an existing model, the entire range of possibilities should be considered, without failing to take account of the institutional and legal framework conditions or the internationalisation strategy of the universities.
- 1.1.2. In most cases, the particular requirements of the cross-border cooperation scheme make it necessary to carry out specific adaptations to these models, especially in the case of innovative approaches. The effort likely to be involved in this should be taken into consideration from the outset.

1.2. Cultural Differences

Although they are similar in some respects, the institutional systems vary considerably in the way they function from one country to another. There are cultural differences in the way responsibilities are delegated, in the style of communication, in decision-making processes and in time and project management. More intense occupation with these various institutional and cultural peculiarities helps to avoid certain frustrating situations, makes it easier for partners to find creative solutions and increases the chances of the cooperation's establishment and success. We thus recommend the following:

- 1.2.1. Within your university, seek the advice of colleagues with many years of experience in cooperating with a university in the partner country or countries.
- 1.2.2. Make conscious use of the relevant specialist literature and the opportunities for further education in the area of intercultural communication and cooperation, both general and specific to the country or countries concerned.

1.3. Cooperation Management

On the one hand, effective long-term cooperation between the various partners in a cross-border programme is based on an awareness of the advantages, but also of the limitations of various kinds of propinquity (geographical, professional ...) and, on the other, on a series of conditions which are conducive to a certain continuity in formal and informal contacts, in particular:

- 1.3.1. Long-term personal commitment.
- 1.3.2. A small core team, in other words a few people who are on the same wavelength, for example on a steering committee.
- 1.3.3. A win/win situation, in which each party finds something to benefit from.
- 1.3.4. The organisation of meetings, e.g. once a year, in which the programme directors, coordinators and relevant administration staff of all the universities involved participate.
- 1.3.5. Multiple connections and exchanges at different levels (teaching and research, mobility of teaching staff and students, personal and professional contacts ...).

2. CURRICULUM

In order to come into their own, cross-border study programmes need certain special approaches and programme components. Among others, the following are particularly pertinent:

2.1. Languages and Cultures

- 2.1.1. The systematic inclusion of language, of cultural and area studies, and of intercultural communication as ECTS-relevant study components.
- 2.1.2. Innovative links between language education and specialized content, while maintaining the significance of both levels (general and specific to the subject concerned); for example, general language courses can be supplemented by courses in technical terminology, content and language integrated learning (CLIL) can be introduced etc.
- 2.1.3. Workshops or terminology modules which prepare the student for the period following his or her studies: assistance relating to presentations and job interviews, compilation of a curriculum vitae and a letter of application in the foreign language.

2.2. Partnership and Mobility

- 2.2.1. The curricular contributions of the partners should complement one another.
- 2.2.2. Workshops, seminars and summer courses should be held jointly by all the partners.
- 2.2.3. Genuine opportunities to spend time abroad (above and beyond daily commuting between the student's domicile and partner university ...) should be created.
- 2.2.4. Students should be sensitised in advance to the specific forms of teaching and learning and scientific work at the partner university concerned.

2.3. Learning Methods

- 2.3.1. Team-teaching by lecturers from different countries.
- 2.3.2. Blended learning (combination of face-to-face and online learning).
- 2.3.3. Learning by teaching (e.g. by students from various countries or research groups, their principal subjects being different and therefore complementing one another).

3. SUPERVISION OF STUDENTS

The quality of cross-border study programmes also depends on the supervision options available to students during the entire duration of their studies, i.e. from the moment of initial contact right up to the end of their study period and beyond.

3.1. Information

There are various measures which can improve the visibility, attractiveness and accessibility of cross-border study programmes. These include:

- 3.1.1. The course's having an independent website of its own in the various languages concerned, and to which reference is made at the portals of the partner universities.
- 3.1.2. The availability of brochures and other documents, both in print and in downloadable form; these should either be multilingual, or translations of the brochures should be available in the various partner languages.
- 3.1.3. The presentation of the programme at national and international target portals such as *www.mastersportal.eu*
- 3.1.4. A presentation of the course's added value in comparison with national programmes.
- 3.1.5. The integration of graduates in PR work for the programme.

3.2. Selection

A well thought out selection procedure which does justice to the respective target group or groups is a key factor for well balanced, efficient study groups:

- 3.2.1. Contact with those interested in studying and, if appropriate, also a preselection procedure in their country of origin (at students' fairs, university open days or via national representatives).
- 3.2.2. Appointment of a joint selection commission involving all the partners (either together at one table or for example by means of a video conference).

3.3. Support

Supporting students in a cross-border programme requires more attentiveness than it does in the case of local programmes. With the aim of achieving greater coherence and better continuity, the following measures should therefore be taken:

- 3.3.1. Intensive individual supervision, which should also remain uninterrupted during the mobility phases, in the form of various kinds of tutorial (transnational students' tandems, sponsorships, an individual programme coordinator as the student's preferred contact person ...).
- 3.3.2. The drawing-up of a manual with practical tips for students in cross-border studies.
- 3.3.3. The founding of a students' association and election of students' representatives.
- 3.3.4. Dual supervision of final papers by representatives of two partner universities.
- 3.3.5. The founding of an alumni association (for example as a permanent community within one of the international portals for social/professional networking).

4. QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

Various complementary measures which are regularly carried out and made use of in the spirit of a learning organisation are fundamental to the continuous improvement of cross-border study programmes. In addition to the measures which are recommended for all study programmes, the following should be mentioned here:

4.1. Internal Evaluation

- 4.1.1. Personal reflection on the part of the students on their experiences with the cross-border study scenario, either in the form of a written report or in the form of a dialogue with the lecturers, coordinators and directors of the study programmes.
- 4.1.2. Introduction of tools for the evaluation of the students' actual workload, with the aim of learning something about procedures which may vary from partner to partner and verifying conformity with the regulatory statements of the programme with regard to the awarding of ECTS points.

4.2. Exchange of Information

- 4.2.1. Explicit exchange regarding the respective evaluation and quality assurance approaches of the partners involved for the purposes of mutual inspiration, coordination and adaptation.
- 4.2.2. Joint investigations by nationality, in both a national and an international context, into the professional developments of all those who have completed the programme.

4.3. Accreditation

- 4.3.1. Contributions to the definition of quality criteria which are peculiar to cross-border study programmes with a view to the development of a specific label.
- 4.3.2. Participation in the upcoming accreditation approaches for cross-border study programmes as a whole within the framework of a single transnational accreditation procedure.

B. Recommendations for the Faculties

At faculty level, international cooperation can be promoted, slowed down or even, in spite of all previous efforts, brought to a complete standstill. The foreign partners do not normally have any notable influence on these internal clarification and decision-making processes. It therefore follows that:

1. If there is interest in joint study programmes, it is vital that the motives and conditions of cooperation be clarified swiftly if a cumulative series of institutional bottlenecks between the partners is to be avoided.
2. The area of conflict between cooperation and competition ought to have been resolved internally before negotiations on formalised cooperation begin.
3. Formalisation fairly often leads to detailed agreements (cooperation contracts, joint study catalogues ...). As a rule, it is necessary to impart these details to the lecturers of the faculty actively, and to do so on more than one occasion.
4. Joint study programmes offered must be of high quality. They must represent genuine added value and guarantee wide access for students. The courses offered must reflect the special qualities of the faculties involved, and they must be complementary and multinational. Extensions and repetitions should be avoided.
5. The planning of many cooperation models sees some courses forming part of both local and cross-border study activities. This requires intensified cooperation and communication at faculty level and means that some serious thought should be given to questions of workload distribution.
6. When making staff appointments, the long-term continuation of cooperation programmes, which depend to a great extent on the interest, commitment and competence (e.g. linguistic competence) of the key personnel, should be part of the selection criteria. Otherwise, study programmes which have been successful over a period of years can run aground quite abruptly when there is a change of generation. The formalisation of the necessary criteria helps to ensure that cross-border cooperation schemes make generation transitions smoothly and survive in a long-term perspective.

C. Recommendations for Higher Education Administrations and Their Agencies

1. RELATIONSHIP TO EXISTING AND NEW INITIATIVES

To a great extent, the internationalisation of the universities is based on initiatives from chairs, institutes and faculties. The same applies to the inception and time-consuming establishment of double and joint-degree study programmes. However, at a different level, higher education administrations and their agencies have at their disposal a number of ways of exercising organisational influence, with which they are in a position to render the development of such programmes much easier or much more difficult.

- 1.1. Using suitable means, 'bottom-up' initiatives should be systematically incorporated in the institutional internationalisation strategy (regular review of new initiatives, their targeted briefing as regards the institution's internationalisation strategy, active linking of complementary initiatives, financial support and promotion of pilot and best practice projects ...).
- 1.2. The international students' offices should be involved in the local adoption and implementation of overarching reforms (such as the Bologna Process) and the development of specific internationalisation strategies.
- 1.3. Continuous training courses and international exchange facilities for staff members (directors of study programmes, teaching staff, coordinators and members of the administrative staff) should be made available on relevant topics relevant (for example quality management, Bologna Process, languages and didactics of language learning, intercultural communication and cooperation).
- 1.4. The creation or augmented support of interdisciplinary centres specialised in a language, a country or a cultural area which coincides with a certain privileged partnership can strengthen those cross-border cooperation schemes considerably.
- 1.5. A competent person in higher education administration should be responsible for drawing up the cooperation agreements. This should not have to be done by the directors of future cross-border study programmes alone.
- 1.6. By expressing esteem and offering positive feedback (for example in informal talks, by awarding prizes, by organising an annual reception for exchange coordinators and students, or by the participation of a representative at the awarding of diplomas, whether this is taking place at their own university or at one of the partner universities), higher education administrations have at their disposal eminently suitable means of increasing the value of this type of programme and ensuring that the motivation of those involved is maintained. What is more, these means have often only been exploited to a modest extent.

2. ALLOCATION OF FUNDS

Compared with local study programmes, cross-border study programmes involve greater effort – in some cases considerably greater –, especially in terms of their establishment, administration, coordination, further development and quality assurance. The directors and teaching staff must not be put at a disadvantage by their commitment to such a programme ('disadvantage' here being meant in a financial sense just as much as in terms of their subsequent career). If they are, there is a risk that academic staff may lose their interest in cross-border cooperation, neglect it or in some cases even abandon it completely.

- 2.1. Cross-border study programmes require staff of their own and/or also require that those responsible be given some relief in terms of their other duties.
- 2.2. Extra incentives could be offered, either in order to recognise the special commitment which is required or to stimulate it.
- 2.3. If part of a staff member's remuneration depends on his or her actual performance at a university, his or her commitment to directorial responsibilities in a cross-border programme should be taken into consideration just as much as teaching, research and other responsibilities.
- 2.4. Special funds/staff resources should be made available for quality assurance and quality development. Paradoxically, if this is not the case, the relevant measures are often called for and implemented at the expense of the quality of central tasks in teaching and research, since the time budget available for the latter is then reduced accordingly. In view of the differing approaches in matters of quality at the various partner universities and increased need for coordination occasioned by them, this general set of problems applies more strongly to cross-border study programmes.
- 2.5. Making it possible to credit lectures given at the partner university against the teaching load at the lecturer's home university would simplify and promote the exchange of teaching staff.
- 2.6. Foreign students in cross-border study programmes must be included in the calculation of teaching and administration effort, and also when determining the resources and premises required.
- 2.7. It would be of considerable advantage if cross-border study programmes had a global budget which could be financed from various sources and with which it were possible to bridge occasional gaps in funding.
- 2.8. The development and communication of a coherent, reliable and transparent strategy is recommended, laying down the criteria and procedures according to which cross-border study programmes whose external funds, depending on the duration of the funding, have either been cut or completely cancelled, would be able to benefit from a contribution from the university's own budget.

3. STUDY PROGRAMMES: ACCESS AND CONDITIONS

Students in cross-border study programmes have more requirements to fulfil than their counterparts in local programmes. The following measures would make a contribution to facilitating their integration at the various partner universities and their transition from one university to another:

- 3.1. Exemption from tuition fees for students in cross-border study programmes or a reduction in said fees to the rate applicable at the university of origin. Additional expenditure incurred by students during their stay should be covered (library fees, local public transport, language courses ...).
- 3.2. Preference for students in cross-border study programmes in the allocation of student accommodation.
- 3.3. A general simplification of enrolment conditions. Students should be able to enrol at a university of their choice, after which the administration concerned would accept the enrolment documents automatically and pass them on to all the partner universities as quickly as possible.
- 3.4. The creation of joint procedures and tools for the communication of examination results, the data always remaining transparent and accessible for the students independent of their whereabouts at any given time.

D. Recommendations for Cross-border Regions and Regional Cross-border University Networks

These cross-border institutions and networks can support cross-border study programmes by means of selected measures such as have not been planned in existing regional, national or European aid programmes. In particular, they can assist as follows:

1. By promoting the cross-border regional higher education sector in general and cross-border study programmes in particular, by participating in suitable fairs and exhibitions worldwide in order to attract more international students to the Greater Region.
2. By offering a modest budget, on which the directors of cross-border study programmes could call without much red tape, for example to cover travel expenses for certain students not able to obtain any other financial assistance – preferably as a lump sum budget, said costs not having to be particularised and authorised in advance, but only after the event.
3. Stimulation of cross-border inter-institutional projects in higher education.
4. More effective networking and creation of facilities for the exchange of information between persons in positions of responsibility and coordinators of cross-border programmes independent of subject and programme.
5. Suitable measures for the promotion of lecturers' mobility, which would often help to promote student mobility as well.
6. Determination of quality criteria for cross-border study programmes with the aim of developing a specific label.
7. In view of the fact that only a small number of those involved in actual cooperation schemes are familiar with the facilities offered by the cross-border region and the regional cross-border university network, it would be helpful to start up a special information campaign and to organise and finance forums.

E. Recommendations for Ministries of Education and/or Ministries Responsible for the Higher Education Sector (regional/national depending on jurisdiction in the country concerned)

Both parallel to one another and in the way they act in combination, cross-border study programmes have to be able to cope with the legal framework conditions of all the partner countries. These framework conditions can make a decisive contribution to the surmounting of obstacles relating to cooperation and mobility. However, orientations and practices which would prove useful in these respects cannot yet be taken for granted everywhere. It would therefore be desirable to:

1. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1. Take greater account of the international dimension in the development of national policies, for example to consider the consequences of the national implementation of the Bologna reform on cross-border cooperation and existing partnerships.
- 1.2. Bring up to date the listing of existing cross-border cooperation schemes across sectors (education, economy, culture ...) before the development and implementation of a new policy.
- 1.3. Coordinate in detail the programmes of the various ministries for the stimulation and support of cross-border cooperation.
- 1.4. Develop a coherent policy (which must neither favour any particular study programmes or subjects nor be to the disadvantage of any others), involving experienced protagonists from the field in a consultative capacity.
- 1.5. Clearly identify contacts for cross-border university activities to whom those responsible at the universities and those responsible for study programmes can address themselves.
- 1.6. Take into account the innovative pilot character which is peculiar to many cross-border cooperation schemes, by providing for experiments and catering for exceptions from the rule of the kind often required in order to make it possible for them to function adequately between different legal systems.

2. SPECIFIC MEASURES

- 2.1. Facilitate and guarantee all measures involving accreditation, quality assurance and internal and external evaluation in all cross-border study programmes under the same conditions as those which apply to national programmes. Appoint exclusively institutions which are specifically qualified and authorised to carry out transnational procedures. Mutually recognise evaluation and accreditation procedures and decisions in the European higher education sector.
- 2.2. Take all necessary measures to ensure that the criteria applied in the context of national and international ranking lists of universities and their study programmes reflect their cross-border and international activities more strongly.
- 2.3. Develop and make available schemes which enable marks from another national system within the European higher education sector, and ECTS marks, to be converted in a given national system in a way which is both valid and uncomplicated.
- 2.4. Facilitate and support double and joint degrees, also in areas which were previously under national protection (including for example engineering courses, teacher training, courses involving special kinds of higher education establishments ...)
- 2.5. Make the special qualities and the added value of cross-border study programmes known to employers, schools and the general public.
- 2.6. Further develop the necessary infrastructures for the facilitation of students' mobility (students' accommodation, insurance, public cross-border transportation ...)
- 2.7. Take all steps necessary to ensure that access to and participation in cross-border study programmes are made possible and facilitated for non-European students.

3. MEASURES SPECIFIC TO PARTICULAR COUNTRIES: FRANCE

- 3.1. If the universities were in a position to enter into cooperation agreements directly, the implementation phase for cross-border study programmes could begin earlier.
- 3.2. Cross-border study programmes often require more flexibility in terms of organisation and combination of their study contents than is possible within the framework of the four-year plans used at French universities. (International partners are thus compelled to adapt unilaterally to the French system.) As a matter of basic principle, more freedom should be given to cross-border study programmes in this respect.

- 3.3. Existing cross-border study programmes with *Grandes Ecoles* are at risk as they are not based on the BA/MA structure. Some specific cooperation models need to be developed here rapidly.

4. MEASURES SPECIFIC TO PARTICULAR COUNTRIES: LUXEMBOURG

- 4.1. The compulsory mobility semester in the bachelor programme renders it impossible for students at the University of Luxembourg to receive ERASMUS assistance a second time for their mobility in a cross-border master programme, which is also compulsory there. It follows that the students at the University of Luxembourg are at a disadvantage compared with their counterparts at other universities who do not have compulsory mobility in their bachelor programmes. National policy-makers are called upon to remedy this matter.

5. MEASURES SPECIFIC TO PARTICULAR COUNTRIES: BELGIUM'S FRENCH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

- 5.1. All necessary measures should be taken to ensure that it is possible to send and receive students in cross-border study programmes: recognition of final examination qualifications, in particular the bachelor degree, a co-diploma option between *Hautes Ecoles* and universities in the French community, full financing of students in cross-border study programmes.

F. Recommendations for the Franco-German University

The Franco-German University supports numerous cross-border study programmes, not only with financial aid but also with specialist know-how. In general, the directors of cross-border study programmes who were interviewed expressed high esteem for the work and support of the Franco-German University. Having said that, some of those interviewed pointed out that improvements might be made in the following areas:

1. Maintenance of financial aid at the same level from one year to the next, in view of the fact that students' mobility does not decrease as time goes on.
2. Further development of the evaluation procedure with a view to being able to derive from it concrete improvement suggestions for a given programme more easily.
3. Revision of the deadlines for applications for assistance and of the dates of payment for financial assistance, so that they can be brought more in line with the actual course of events in a study year.
4. Contributions to the definition of quality criteria especially for cross-border study programmes with a view to the development of a specific label.

G. Recommendations for EU Programmes and the Relevant DG's at the EU Commission

1. GENERAL

Cross-border study programmes are especially well suited to the monitoring of the development of joint visions and procedures with regard to internal quality assurance procedures in the European higher education sector (as provided for in the Bologna Process).

- 1.1. Additional funding for the implementation of quality assurance and quality development pilot projects is necessary, as without it questions of quality in the context of such cooperation schemes are only rarely gone into in the necessary depth.
- 1.2. As a matter of basic principle, institutions which are interested in European programmes should be able to take part independent of their own financial constraints. It follows that the possibility of an associated partnership should exist in all European programmes without exception.
- 1.3. Since very little research is being done into cross-border study programmes, the EU is called upon to take the initiative and selectively sponsor research and publications on the subject.
- 1.4. A completely different procedure for project sponsorship is considered desirable, so that the relationship between the necessary effort of writing applications and the benefit of a joint project is perceived as reasonable by the initiators and coordinators of study programmes. In this context, it would be necessary to simplify the procedures, which are often very complex from an administrative point of view, for example by:
 - making available application forms and guidelines a considerable time prior to the beginning of the programmes;
 - reducing the amount of information that is necessary in the various phases of application, particularly in the first phase;
 - taking into account the special aspects of development projects as compared with output-oriented projects;
 - revising reporting requirements.

2. ERASMUS MUNDUS (Directorate-General for Education and Culture)

Above all the (previous) distribution of funds has come under criticism:

- 2.1. The difference in grants for European and non-European students leads to inequalities. Abandoning this principle partly or completely would place a greater number of European students in Erasmus Mundus study programmes and enable the numbers of European and non-European students to be better balanced.
- 2.2. The coordination of the various study programmes is inadequately sponsored (it would not even be sufficient to finance a part-time post), though experience shows that the success and sustainability of cross-border study programmes depend to a decisive extent on just such a post.
- 2.3. National quotas impede the selection of the best students at international level and ought to be abolished.

3. INTERREG (Directorate-General for Regional Policy)

With the help of INTERREG programmes it has been possible to promote several projects for the establishment of university cooperation schemes. However, some university lecturers are of the opinion that there are, considering the relatively modest funds available, some disproportionately large bureaucratic obstacles.

- 3.1. In the future too, it is important for the EU to promote cross-border initiatives in the area of inter-university cooperation in all European regions and incorporate this promotion even more clearly than before in its programmes.

4. MARIE CURIE PROGRAMME (Research Directorate-General)

The fact that the allocation of funds in initial training networks is location-oriented and not person-oriented leads to a lack of flexibility in the partner networks.

- 4.1. More flexible, person-oriented allocation mechanisms would fit in much better with the reality of mobility patterns as well as the dynamic organisation of institutional partner networks.

H. Recommendations for the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

At present, the evaluation and accreditation of cross-border programmes by national authorities is difficult, if not impossible, in both financial and logistical terms. Accordingly it would be desirable for the ENQA to:

1. Contribute to the further development of the competences of national agencies with regard to the evaluation and accreditation of cross-border programmes.
2. Organise the best-practice exchange between the agencies (by means of publications, workshops, databases ...) and, in particular, involve those agencies which are less active at international level.
3. Sensitise policy-makers to the problems in the operative implementation, evaluation and accreditation of cross-border study programmes and in the recognition of final examination qualifications in the context of the Bologna Process.