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Paper

Title: Discourse on the EUA report “Challenges and enablers in designing transnational joint education provision”: Additions and extensions to the given recommendations

Abstract

This paper adds to the recommendations of the European University Association (EUA) Learning and Teaching Paper #22 “*Challenges and enablers in designing transnational joint education provision*”. The thematic peer group report from March 2024 defines Transnational Joint Education Provision (TJEP) as education jointly developed and delivered by two or more institutions in different countries. The authors of this paper have extensive experience in the management as well as quality assurance of an international MBA programme. The International Business School Alliance (IBSA) dual degree master’s programme is a double degree programme with elements of a joint degree carried out by currently four universities from four different countries, which together form IBSA. Established in 2003, the Alliance enables students to study at two universities in two different countries, thus receiving two MBA/Master’s Degrees. After completing the core modules - which are identical at all locations - with the first IBSA-partner, students move to a second IBSA-partner to continue with one of the offered specializations. The authors’ goal is to complement and expand upon the recommendations already in place in the peer group report by EUA. To complement the recommendation category *Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*, the authors suggest adding communication structures and additional tests and quizzes. They also suggest further refinements to some of the existing recommendations in the categories *Organizational-Level Recommendations* and *Staff Collaboration and Expertise*. The authors seek to portray good practices in regards to the design of transnational joint education that can be transferred to other higher education institutions.

Introduction

The Learning and Teaching Paper #22 “*Challenges and enablers in designing transnational joint education provision*” by the European University Association (EUA) discusses the benefits of engaging in Transnational Joint Education Provision (TJEP) for the institutions, staff and students, as well as challenges regarding quality assurance, organisational-level challenges, and staff collaboration and expertise. The paper then provides nine recommendations in the following three categories (1) Quality assurance of joint programmes, (2) Organisational-level recommendations, and (3) Staff collaboration and expertise.

This article compares the EUA’s recommendations with the practical experience gained from the dual degree master’s programme, which is a double degree programme with elements of a joint degree that has been offered since 2003 by an international university alliance. The International Business School Alliance (IBSA) currently consists of four partners in four different countries. The core modules of the first semester are identical at all partner universities, whereas the offered specialization modules differ between the partners. Students study their first term at one of the four universities, and then move to a second university for their second and third semester. Thus, students study at two universities from which they receive two MBA/Master’s Degrees.

Based on the experience with the management as well as joint quality assurance for a dual degree master’s programme that is conducted within a strategic partnership, the recommendations given in the peer group report by EUA are complemented and expanded upon in this paper.

Definitions

The definition of TJEP used by the thematic peer group report, namely ‘education jointly developed and delivered by two or more institutions in different countries’ (page 3), is also used in this article.

Types of transnational joint education provisions	Definitions
Double/multiple bachelor's, master's and PhD degrees	The student follows a joint programme and obtains (at least two) degrees from the participating universities, which are based in different countries.
Joint bachelor's, master's and PhD degrees	The student follows a joint programme and obtains one degree, delivered in common by two or more participating higher education institutions from different countries.
Strategic partnerships (University alliances)	A formal alliance between three or more higher education institutions developed through an international process whereby the partners share resources and leverage complementary strengths to achieve defined common goals, such as joint courses and degrees.

Table 1: Forms of transnational joint education provisions and their definitions. This excerpt of the original table is taken and adapted from the Learning and Teaching Paper #22 "Challenges and enablers in designing transnational joint education provision" by the European University Association (EUA), 2024, (page 4).

Additional and extended recommendations

This article lists all the nine recommendations that are stated in the Learning and Teaching Paper #22 by EUA, with the aim for a better comprehension on why recommendations were added and extended. In total, two additional recommendations were added, and six recommendations were extended. The additions and extensions are indicated with the terms *Additional* and *Extended Recommendation*. Following the added and extended recommendations, reasons for their addition are stated.

Category 1: QUALITY ASSURANCE OF JOINT PROGRAMMES

Recommendation #1

Higher education institutions across the EHEA are encouraged to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

- Higher education institutions are encouraged to use the European Approach in their own quality management systems. Based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG)¹ and on the Qualifications Framework for the EHEA (QF-EHEA),² it allows partner institutions to assure and enhance the quality of their joint programme holistically, beyond the parts provided by each partner.
- This should be possible without restriction in systems that allow institutional self-accreditation and grant institutions the autonomy to establish programmes. In countries with no programme accreditation requirements, institutions may nevertheless use the European Approach and its criteria as part of their internal QA.
- Where programme accreditation is still required, and for joint programmes, institutions may also lobby, both individually and through their representative organisations, for the integration of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes into their respective national QA systems, as agreed by the minister in charge of higher education of the countries of the EHEA in 2018.³

¹ Footnote taken from the original paper: https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf (accessed 23/01/2024).

² Footnote taken from the original paper: <https://www.ehea.info/page-qualification-frameworks> (accessed 23/01/2024).

³ Footnote taken from the original paper: 2018 Paris Communiqué: https://www.ehea.info/media/ehea.info/file/2018_Paris/77/1/EHEAParis2018_Communique_final_952771.pdf (accessed 23/01/2024).

Additional Recommendation 1: Higher education institutions are advised to facilitate regular personal exchange of key management, faculty, and administrative staff.

- Key management, faculty and administrative staff who are involved in the design, teaching, and administration of a joint study programme should meet regularly for a personal exchange. This exchange can be done in the setting of a yearly conference. In this setting, senior management has the opportunity to take relevant decision-making processes concerning strategy, direction, and budget decision regarding the joint study programme. Faculty are given the chance to exchange on the module content, teaching and assessment methods, as well as learning outcomes. Staff with the administrative responsibility for managing the joint programme in their institution get to discuss admissions procedures, setting the academic year calendars, and other coordination challenges. Overall, these meetings aim to enhance the quality of the joint programme, and give the participants an opportunity to exchange good practices.

In the IBSA network, personal exchange at the yearly conferences is central to ensure quality assurance of its joint study programme. As described in *Additional Recommendation 1*, this exchange provides the opportunity to discuss, and agree on quality standards for the conduct of the programme.

Additional Recommendation 2: Higher education institutions are encouraged to discuss the learning objectives of the joint study programme, as well as measure whether they are met on an ongoing basis by using various methods.

- To make sure that the students from the different partner universities do not just meet the learning objectives of the individual modules, but also of the whole study programme, it can be measured to what degree the learning objectives of the joint programme are met by the students in each semester. This can be done by using different methods, such as through an online quiz, which contains questions related to the modules covered each term, or with samples of Masters' Theses. Faculty as well as senior management can then discuss the results, preferably during a personal exchange (see *Additional Recommendation 1*).

Additional Recommendation 2 was added to highlight the importance of a joint quality alignment. To ensure consistent learning outcomes across all partners and cohorts in the IBSA dual degree master's programme for the first semester, in which the modules are taught similarly at each partner location, it was agreed on by the alliance partners to conduct quizzes, and take samples of Masters' Theses. These additional methods support with the check on whether the learning objectives are met.

Category 2: ORGANISATIONAL-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #2

Institutional regulatory frameworks are advised to be more flexible in terms of TJEP.

- Higher education institutions are encouraged to be more flexible in terms of their internal regulations, with respect to curricula, academic calendars and international regulations.
- Where these depend on external national policies and processes, higher education institutions are encouraged, either individually or collectively, to negotiate and lobby for more flexible arrangements to enable TJEP, for instance with regard to reporting requirements for TJEP (including deadlines, criteria, required documentation, etc.) and curriculum requirements. For example, if regulatory frameworks set conflicting requirements for curricula, such as those relating to ECTS credits or teaching language, this can complicate the development of TJEP.
- A transnational study programme always represents a compromise between the conditions and constraints of the respective national study programmes, and flexibility is therefore key to making transnational study programmes possible.

Recommendation #3

Higher education institutions need to be aware of the differences in academic calendars for the joint degree and other forms of TJEP, and endeavour to minimise the impact of these differences, where possible.

- For those higher education institutions that are constrained in their negotiations and ability to accommodate different term dates due to national legislation, systems-related constraints or contracts, it is advised that lobbying takes place at national and institutional levels to influence and effect change when required.
- Extended Recommendation 1: It is crucial for the administrative staff at the individual partner universities that are responsible for the scheduling of the modules, to stay in close contact to allow for a certain flexibility when setting the academic year calendars. For a productive cooperation, it is also beneficial to meet regularly in person e.g. to review relevant procedures at each partner institution, coordinate the exchange of grades and transcripts, discuss student issues, as well as marketing ideas, and other pertinent issues.

In addition to lobbying at national and institutional level to influence and effect change when required, the importance of lobbying at an operational level is added in the *Extended Recommendation 1*.

Recommendation #4

Higher education institutions are advised to include key decision makers and systems administrators in the process of developing and delivering TJEP from the outset.

- This will allow for a discussion on administrative systems and processes and an exploration of how these may be deployed effectively to allow for a seamless staff and student experience. It will also ensure that the barriers can be discussed, actioned and potentially addressed and that there is no unnecessary delay in reaching agreement.
- To accomplish this, it is essential for participating institutions to differentiate between the rules and norms that are based on the law (fixed), and the practices or requirements that are university policies (flexible) that can be adapted.
- Extended Recommendation 2: Showing commitment to the partner institution(s) by the Deans and other key decision makers is crucial for the successful continuation of a joint programme. Therefore, frequent - also personal - exchange of senior management is advised to overcome obstacles, as well as to discuss the future strategy, common quality standards, and a possible extension of the alliance members.

Extended Recommendation 2 stresses the importance of a continuing exchange of senior management beyond the phase of the establishment of a joint programme, as there are ongoing challenges to be dealt with, such as changing laws and regulations in terms of student immigration, or Artificial Intelligence.

Recommendation #5

Higher education institutions are encouraged to take the necessary steps to ensure the students enrolled on joint programmes, particularly as part of European Universities alliances, have full access to university life and resources, keeping in mind the challenges they face, in particular with regard to induction processes and accommodation.

- Higher education institutions are encouraged to provide clearer induction processes that focus on the specific needs of students enrolled on joint programmes who need to change institutions/countries for each semester of study (important deadlines for each partner institution, log-in credentials required for each institution, contact details of coordinators of joint programmes, dedicated internship opportunities, etc.). This could involve in-person orientation as well as online meetings just before the beginning of the year to answer any induction-related questions.
- Higher education institutions are encouraged to organise dedicated social events for students enrolled on joint programmes to ensure a sense of belonging and community. This is needed particularly for students who change institutions for each semester of study and feel that they belong to no single institution.

- Higher education institutions are encouraged, where possible, to set aside places in halls of residence for students enrolled on joint programmes who have to move to a different country for each semester of study.
- **Extended Recommendation 3:** Higher education institutions are encouraged to have a designated office for international students which is responsible for supporting the students before their arrival, as well as during their stay. Having a main point of contact facilitates the process for students looking for the right person to contact when they need support with different issues. It is also beneficial for students to receive support on their arrival, in the shape of a pick up service, with the application for a residence permit, with opening a bank account, the provision of health insurance, access to (emergency) medical care and to counseling services.

As students are often unsure of who to contact at a university for support for their various needs, *Extended Recommendation 3* points out the importance for students to have a central contact who can then refer them to the right contact person.

Recommendation #6

Higher education institutions that participate in TJEP are advised to establish standards and baseline requirements with their partner institutions.

- This would allow institutions to ensure a core agreement within partnerships, for example regarding enrolment procedures, timelines, examination requirements and accessibility, which have to be respected.
- **Extended Recommendation 4:** In addition to the above mentioned agreements, an alignment on the recruiting and marketing strategy, admission criteria, teaching and learning methods, study fee structure, learning outcomes, assessment methods, faculty and staff exchange, the process for determining new partners in case of an alliance, and further policies and practices could be manifested in a handbook.

Extended Recommendation 4 has been added to emphasise the importance of agreement with the partner(s) not only on rules and regulations, but also on other key elements for better alignment.

CATEGORY 3: STAFF COLLABORATION AND EXPERTISE

Recommendation #7

Higher education institutions are encouraged to deploy various incentives for and recognition of staff engagement in TJEP.

- These incentives can take various forms, such as salary increases/bonuses, a decrease in other teaching or administrative workloads, project-based funding and time compensation. A systemic approach to incentivising TJEP requires the setting up of a transparent workload model and a time calculator to recognise staff's TJEP time and effort. This model would account for the various teaching and administrative tasks, such as those for in-house teaching, as well as for travel time. In the case of long-distance travel, for example, the institutions may consider providing recovery days or time off in lieu. It is also important to include TJEP staff efforts in yearly assessments and career advancement.
- **Extended Recommendation 5:** An incentive for faculty to teach in a joint programme could be the participation in regularly organized visits to the location(s) of the partner institution(s). In addition to professional development opportunities (see *Extended Recommendation 6*), these visits add to the personal development opportunities by engaging with faculty and staff in a different cultural setting.

Extended Recommendation 5 was added as the exchange of faculty to a different partner university within the IBSA network each year is seen as a major benefit to faculty to teach in the IBSA dual degree master's programme.

Recommendation #8

Higher education institutions are encouraged to provide substantial professional development opportunities for their staff involved in joint degrees.

- Online self-paced continuous professional development could be a model for transversal skills and digitally enhanced learning and teaching approaches. Another option is to use intra- or inter-university mentoring as a professional development opportunity. Moreover, specific attention needs to be devoted to supporting staff to engage in faculty-to-faculty transnational collaborations, such as COIL activities or inter-university massive open online courses (MOOCs).
- Extended Recommendation 6: It is beneficial for faculty to exchange reflections from the past academic year with each other. Topics covered could include teaching and learning methods, course contents, learning outcomes and assessment strategy, and recent developments in their academic fields. By sharing good practices, if possible in person, professional development of faculty can be achieved. This exchange could also foster opportunities for additional cooperation, such as joint research.

Extended Recommendation 6 adds to the suggestion of the intra- or inter-university mentoring, as not just one-sided mentoring, but also mutual mentoring is beneficial for the professional development of faculty.

Recommendation #9

Higher education institutions are encouraged to support faculty members engaged in TJEP through staffing, technological and collaborative resources.

- To ensure a smooth implementation of TJEP and avoid faculty overload, it is advised that complementary human resources are offered, namely specific academic and professional posts, to provide expertise such as instructional design and international mobility administration. Such posts are crucial, given that the staff involved in TJEP will need training, advice and assistance to ensure the success of the training programmes and activities. These arrangements would also improve faculty opportunities for transnational teaching and networking. In the case of European Universities alliances, partner institutions would benefit from capitalising on their mutual expertise and good practice.
- It is also important to provide access to software, apps and technical support for pedagogical platforms suitable for transnational joint programmes.

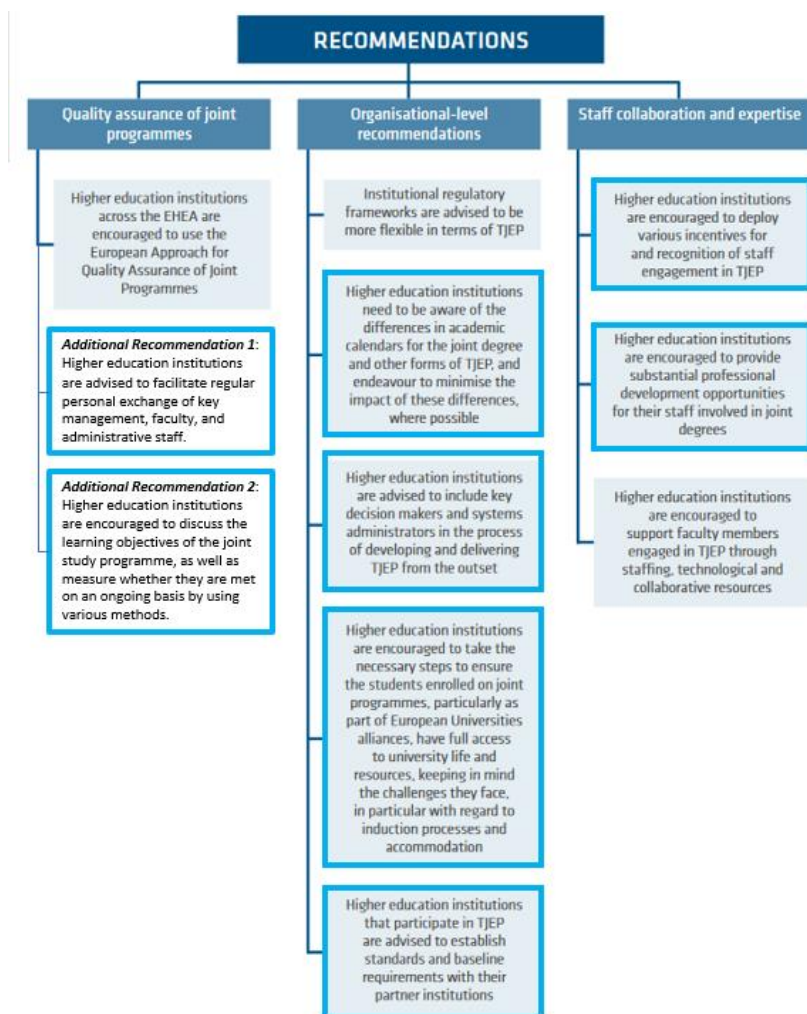


Figure 1: Overview of adapted recommendations. Adapted from the Learning and Teaching Paper #22 Challenges and enablers in designing transnational joint education provision by the European University Association (EUA), 2024, (page 19). Copyright 2024 by EUA. Adapted with permission.

In figure 1, the overview of the original recommendations from the Learning and Teaching Paper #22 by EUA, including the two *Additional Recommendations*, is shown. The figure also indicates the six *Extended Recommendations*, which are added to the nine stated recommendations, with a coloured frame.

Conclusion

The additional and extended recommendations were added based on the learnings within a higher education alliance that together conducts a joint study programme. Even though the IBSA network has been successfully implementing these recommendations for many years in their IBSA dual degree master's programme, higher education institutions who would like to adapt a number of the suggested recommendations might face some challenges and restrictions. This could concern the organization and conduct of joint conferences, which add to the workload of management, faculty, and administrative staff, as well as to the expenditures of the conduct of a joint programme. However, the costs are outweighed by the benefits as this exchange provides an opportunity to enhance the quality of the joint study programme. By building long-term relationships between management, faculty, and administrative staff with the members of the partner institution(s), challenges can be overcome more easily. In addition to the formal meetings where exchange on strategy, teaching and assessment methods, and procedures takes place, there is also space for informal talks, and teambuilding activities that strengthen the bond between the alliance members. These factors all add to the commitment of the alliance members to the joint study programme.

References:

European University Association (EUA), 2024, Learning and Teaching Paper #22 Challenges and enablers in designing transnational joint education provision.