YERUN
Guidelines for Good Practice in Developing & Running Joint Programmes at Bachelor and Master Level
Abridged version
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Joint Programmes in YERUN

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| PREFACE
PREFACE
JOINT PROGRAMMES IN YERUN

YERUN’s1 Strategic Plan, as approved in Lisbon (February, 2016), established as one of its aims:

To promote education collaboration through teaching collaborations, innovation, enhancement activities, academic exchange between staff, and students and the development of dual, multiple or joint international degrees within the framework of the EU’s academic partnerships and mobility programmes.

Given the importance of joint programmes in strengthening education collaboration within the network, YERUN members decided at their General Assembly (Konstanz, October 2016) to create a specific working group for joint programmes. The group aims to establish activities among the YERUN members to enhance the quality of education, innovate in teaching and learning methods, promote a culture of internationalisation among the students and staff, and increase student mobility.

This document is a short version of the YERUN Guidelines for Good Practices in Developing and Running Joint Programmes at Bachelor and Master Level, which was approved by YERUN’s General Assembly in Ulm, October 2017. For more information, the reader is referred to the full version of the Guidelines, which can be downloaded from the YERUN webpage.

1 YERUN (Young European Research Universities Network) was established in January 2015 as a partnership of 18 European universities. For more information, see https://www.yerun.eu/
1. INTRODUCTION
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1.2. JOINT PROGRAMMES: AIMS & PURPOSES

Joint programmes have been on the agenda since the beginning of the Bologna process in 1999, but have gained great impetus in the last decade as an essential instrument for the consolidation of the EHEA.

The Yerevan Comuniqué of the EHEA Ministers (2015) has explicitly identified joint programmes as one of the foundations of the EHEA, together with a common degree structure and credit system, common quality assurance standards and mobility. The importance of partnerships like those involved in joint programmes for the EHEA is perhaps most clearly outlined in the Communication European Higher Education in the World (COM (2013), Brussels, 11.7.2013).

Similarly, the renewed EU agenda for higher education (COM (2017), Brussels, 30.05.2017) stresses the role of the EU in promoting international cooperation, exchange and mobility to boost quality (p. 11). In parallel, the vision of a European Education Area, beyond 2020, identifies as a key element working towards truly European universities, which are able to network and cooperate seamlessly across borders and compete internationally (COM (2017), Strasbourg, 14.11.2017). Promoting education collaboration in YERUN through the establishment of joint programmes is fully aligned with that ambition.

Joint programmes are the result of two or more institutions joining forces with the objective of improving the quality of the teaching and research in the particular subject area covered.

A joint programme should be a programme of a higher academic standard than each of the participating institutions would achieve separately. Joint programmes enhance the mobility of students and staff, offering a truly European (or international) academic experience and when they involve substantial periods of study at participating institutions, provide a multilingual, multicultural experience, and contribute to the development of the European identity, as well as enhancing employability. As such, joint programmes constitute a higher degree of integration and commitment than standard mobility programmes. They involve ‘structured’ (vs. ‘unstructured’) mobility.

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2 All Comuniqués can be found in: http://www.ehea.info/pid34363/ministerial-declarations-and-communiques.html
Guidelines for Good Practice in Developing & Running Joint Programmes at Bachelor and Master Level

Enhancing employability and offering students access to programmes that can lead to professional accreditation in their field

Developing innovative international education, curricula, and mobility experiences for students

Improving the quality of courses by exposing them to challenging international standards both as to contents and as to teaching methods

Complementarity: offering courses that could not be offered by one institution alone and which complement partners’ curricula

Retaining high-potential home students who target to have a study experience abroad (beyond the Erasmus+ exchange programmes)

Attracting international students and promoting multiculturalism and multilingualism

Providing a structured mobility experience for students

Enhancing the European identity by being fully exposed to different higher education systems

International visibility and reputation

Internationalisation of staff (teaching and administrative)

Establishing close links leading to collaboration in other areas (research)

Strengthening links with partner institutions

This is a selection of answers given by members of the YERUN working group to the questionnaire in Appendix 2 of the full version of the Guidelines, which can be downloaded from the YERUN webpage.
2. GLOSSARY
2. **GLOSSARY**

a) **Joint Programme**

An integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions, which could lead, but not necessarily, to a (double/multiple or joint) degree.

b) **Joint Degree**

A single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme.

c) **Double and Multiple degree**

Separate degrees awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme attesting the successful completion of this programme.

d) **Certificate programme**

A study programme, integrated into the curriculum of the awarding institution, where students take pre-recognised courses at one partner institution at least in two semesters. Graduates receive a consortium certificate in combination with one degree from the awarding institution.

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*For a glossary of additional terms and definitions see the full version of the Guidelines. The definitions used here, as well as those in the full version, are all adapted from Aerden & Reczulska (2013).*
3. STAGES IN DEVELOPING & RUNNING JOINT PROGRAMMES
3.1. PROPOSAL STAGE

The purposes of the proposal stage are: identifying joint programme opportunities, developing a programme specification and evaluating whether to progress to the development stage.

3.1.1. Identifying new opportunities and developing the joint programme specification

A new joint programme should demonstrate alignment between the strategic goals of the participating institutions and have institutional commitment. It should also show how comparable subject level expertise at each institution could be used to develop a unique joint programme, which could not be offered by a single institution.

It is advised that, at an early stage, a common approach to the joint programme approval processes is negotiated and agreed, ideally with roles, responsibilities and timescales clearly articulated and communicated to all those involved. Consideration should be given to the following areas as part of the initial proposal:

- Programme rationale and complementarity of awarding institutions
- Joint programme outline specification
- Recruitment and marketing
- Costs and resources
- Quality assurance and operational arrangements

A more detailed list of points that might be considered under each area is provided in the ‘Proposal Checklist’ (Appendix 3 of the full version of the Guidelines).

3.1.2. Proposal evaluation and decision to proceed to the development stage

It is recommended, subject to variation in institutional procedures, that assessment and approval of the initial proposal broadly ensure that:
Whatever processes are agreed, they are applied systematically and operated consistently.

The criteria upon which new proposals will be assessed are clear to all partners, and consistent with the design criteria previously set out.

The academic standards and quality of the joint programme satisfy the requirements of each of the collaborating universities.

The requirements of external agencies, such as government departments of education, are met.

There is sufficient external or independent representation in the approval processes.

Where appropriate, students’ representatives should contribute to the design and/or evaluation stages of a new joint programme.

The curriculum of the proposed degree adequately reflects the title of the award and, where possible, this is verified and validated against recognised external referents and benchmarks.

Sufficient due diligence has been carried out with regard to academic reputation, market demand and capacity to deliver the proposed programme.

Decisions to approve or not to approve a programme, with associated conditions and recommendations, should be clearly communicated at the earliest possible opportunity. A clear timeframe should be given as to when re-approval of a new joint programme will be required.

3.2. DEVELOPMENT STAGE

The consortium agreement establishes a contractual relationship between the partner institutions. The agreement regulates the partners’ responsibilities within the consortium and towards the joint programme.

3.2.1. The consortium agreement

1. Overall programme objectives. An introductory section where the general objectives agreed in the proposal stage are presented and the degrees to be awarded are indicated.
2. **Joint programme** definition, where the main academic issues are described, including:

- Learning outcomes
- Programme structure and course equivalences
- (Possibly) a reference to national legal qualifications
- Programme timetable
- Assessment principles (including grades’ conversion table)
- Exit clause for students leaving the joint programme (including failure in achieving the required outcomes)
- Final thesis (including the role of the supervisor and the evaluation committee)
- Degree requirements and final overall grade

3. **Students' services**, where the main aspect concerning students’ admissions, enrolment and general students’ duties and rights are determined, including:

- Programme access requirements (possibly set differently between the two partners)
- Selection process
- Any preparation and mentoring activities
- Information to be transferred to the partner university before the exchange starts
- Information to be transferred to the home university when the exchange ends
- Reciprocal tuition fees waiver or any other agreement related to tuition fees
- Any other costs (such as medical insurance) that students might be required (or invited) to take at their own expense
- Any support given to host students (mainly referred to housing)

4. **Programme management**, where all the issues concerning an effective planning and management of the joint programme are agreed upon, including:

- Programme management structure (mainly the identification of the coordinator on each side, eventually an academic and an administrative coordinator)
- Provisions for a joint committee for managing/monitoring the programme
- Provisions for an academic staff exchange as it is often considered a way to strengthen a common approach to delivering and managing the programme
- Approach to be followed in the programme launch and marketing
- Any other initiative related to strengthening the joint programme

5. **Quality assurance**, where all the internal and external quality assessment procedures are agreed upon, in compliance with national accreditation regulations.

6. **Legal clauses**, final section of the agreement where are all the legal clauses required to make the agreement comply with national as well as the institutional regulations, are included:
3.2.2. The programme definition

The section concerning the joint programme definition in the consortium agreement aims to define an effective programme as to its academic content as well as to comply with the national regulations to issue a given degree. The key issues refer to:

- **Course equivalences**
  - **Different lengths**: In case of programmes having different lengths (e.g. bachelor of three vs. four years or master of one vs. two years)

- **Programme timetable**: the sequence of the courses and the place(s) where they will be attended by the participating students

- **Grades’ conversion table**: based either on the one already used for Erasmus exchanges (if available) or on a dedicated one

- **Final thesis**: presentation and defence

3.2.3. Conclusions and recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The consortium agreement should address all major academic and non-academic issues ahead of the programme(s) delivery.

- The consortium agreement should be drawn with the support and involvement of all the relevant offices and departments of the university (teaching staff, international relations and administration) because the joint programme will have an impact on their activities.

- Specific academic and non-academic issues should be placed whenever possible in specific appendixes or annexes to the agreement.

- The early identification of both an academic and an administrative coordinator, with responsibilities for each role agreed between delivering institutions, is advised to facilitate the implementation of the joint programme.
3.3. MANAGEMENT STAGE

A joint programme should be fully integrated in the academic offer of the institution. Partner institutions should preferably avoid creating new management structures for the running of a joint programme independent from regular programme administration structures.

Management concerns every process that has to be dealt with before, during and after the students enroll in the course and complete their degree(s). A checklist for management is provided in Appendix 6 of the full version of the Guideline. The following are good practices to be established at the beginning of the process:

- The programme should have a dedicated webpage with all the relevant information for (current or prospective) students, academics, administrators and external evaluators.
- There should be a management timetable, establishing all the processes and actions to be taken each academic year throughout the entire running of the programme.

3.3.1. Students’ application, selection and enrolment

- **Application** may be centralised (by the coordinating institution) or decentralised. The application procedure should be clearly outlined on the programme website. Partners are recommended to use common admission criteria.

- **Selection** criteria should be clearly outlined in the consortium agreement, e.g. academic requirements (level and disciplines or subjects), language proficiency and experience (such as in research).

- As for **enrolment**, regulations concerning tuition fees and degree awarding, student visa requirements, etc. are of primary consideration. Where students are enrolled in just one institution, they must be registered in the other partner institution(s).
3.3.2. Teaching, learning and assessment

The learning outcomes of the programme should have been carefully designed in the early stages of developing a joint programme. However, the actual lecturers are not often the initiators of these programmes, so the course content, the methodological approach and the evaluation methods are often fully developed at the management stage.

- **Teaching and learning.** Partners must ensure that the content and structure of the joint curriculum enable students to achieve the programme’s learning outcomes. This may be done via a common thread that may provide coherence in the curriculum or a common teaching methodology.

- **Assessment.** Partners should be familiar with the grading system applied in all participating institutions and should make sure students are aware of it. They should agree on a common policy on grading, which should address how to deal with students failing courses, modules, dissertation and so on.

3.3.3. Degree and Diploma Supplement

The degree or degrees depend(s) on the type of joint programme. The Diploma Supplement should facilitate the comprehension of what is involved in the joint programme, as clearly and concisely as possible.

- **Joint degrees.** Joint degrees must be awarded in accordance with good practice.5

- **Double or multiple degrees.** It should be stated (either in each degree certificate or, if not possible, in a separate document) that the degree X has been awarded after the successful completion of a joint programme and that other identified degrees have been awarded as part of this programme.

3.3.4. Information and marketing

The marketing plan should emphasize the added value of these kinds of programmes, compared to the regular national programmes, and describe their particular features.

Partners should stress the complementarity of participating institutions and provide information about learning outcomes and employability, as well as other selling points such as internships.

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5 The reader is referred to Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees (European Consortium for Accreditation, in cooperation with the ENIC-NARIC network).
3.3.5. Practical issues concerning students in joint programmes

• All relevant information must be provided for students before and upon arrival; at least: academic information (course catalogue, examination and assessment procedures, introductory courses, language courses etc.), visa requirements, scholarships, housing and welfare and student services, with special focus on the needs of mobile students.

• It is good practice to provide a welcome package with practical information about being a student in this joint programme.

3.3.6. Alumni network

Joint programmes should have dedicated alumni networks, independent from those of the individual programmes they are built on. Alumni networks can be used for quality assurance purposes, for marketing, for career guidance and career-paths and employability.
4. QUALITY ASSURANCE

4.1. STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE OF JOINT PROGRAMMES

The European Approach© to standards and procedures for quality assurance is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), while taking into account the distinctive characteristics of joint programmes. A quality assurance model form (Self-Evaluation Report) for the use of YERUN members is provided in Appendix 7, available with the full version of these Guidelines.

4.1.1. Eligibility

• **Status**: Higher education institutions offering a joint programme should be recognized as such by the relevant authorities in their country. They should be legally allowed to offer the joint programme, even if not awarding the degree.

• **Joint design and delivery**: all participating institutions should be involved in the design and delivery of the programme.

YERUN partners are advised to keep records of the design and delivery process in order to document the involvement of each partner institution in these processes.

• **Consortium agreement**: The terms and conditions of a joint programme should be clearly laid out in the consortium agreement, which should be signed by the competent authorities of each partner institution.

4.1.2. Learning outcomes

• **Level**: The learning outcomes of the joint programme should align with the corresponding level in the European Qualifications Framework to ensure that the joint programme is recognised and accredited.

For YERUN partners, this is especially important in those cases in which different number of ECTS are required in different countries (see § 3.2.) to achieve the same level in the European Framework

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• **Disciplinary field**: The learning outcomes should comprise the knowledge and skills of the joint programme’s fields of study and disciplines. It is important to specify what knowledge and skills are provided by the joint programme which could not be provided by each partner institution alone.

• **Regulated professions**: If the programme’s graduates fall under one of the regulated professions specified in the *European Union Directive (2005/36/EC amended by 2013/55/EC)*, the programme should adhere to the education and training requirements specified in that directive.

• **External stakeholders**: The learning outcomes should be shared with external stakeholders.

### 4.1.3. Study Programme

• **Curriculum**: The content and structure of the curriculum ensure the achievement of the joint programme’s intended learning outcomes.

• **Credits**: Credit distribution among the different courses/institutions should be clear. The average time to complete the programme should be monitored.

### 4.1.4. Application, selection and enrolment

• **Application**: The application procedure is outlined on the programme website. The consortium should agree on responsibilities regarding the verification and evaluation of documents submitted by applicants.

• **Selection**: Shared selection criteria are essential to match students’ knowledge and skills with the joint programme’s curriculum.

• **Enrolment and registration**: The enrolment and registration procedures should be specified in the consortium agreement (see § 3.2.1.)

### 4.1.5. Teaching, learning and assessment

• **Teaching and learning methodologies**: The teaching and learning methodologies applied should be directed towards the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Partners should strive to provide a coherent curriculum across the institutions (as specified in § 3.3.2.).

• **Assessment**: Assessment methods should be clearly specified for all courses and should be applied in a consistent manner. Provisions for student failure should be in place (see § 3.3.2.).

### 4.1.6. Student support

• **Information**: The joint programme should have a dedicated website. Partners must make sure that students are provided with all the necessary information before and upon arrival (see § 3.3.5.).

• **Mobility**: The programme should provide adequate support services to students in order to facilitate mobility (practical and academic).

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4.1.7. Resources

- **Administrative staff**: Administrative staff at different partner institutions should work together in all relevant activities concerning the management of the programme.

- **Academic staff**: There should be sufficient and adequate academic staff to implement the joint programme. Staff mobility within the programme is recommended.

- **Facilities**: The facilities should be adequate for the implementation of the programme.

4.1.8. Degree and diploma supplement

- **Degree**: In addition to what has been said in § 3.3.3, double/multiple degrees should be clearly identified as being awarded by a joint programme.

- **Diploma Supplements** must contain the necessary information needed to comprehend the awarded degree without prior knowledge of the joint programme.

4.2. QUALITY ASSURANCE

4.2.1. Internal quality assurance

There are two main approaches towards internal quality assurance:

a) A system built on existing procedures at the institutional level.

b) The consortium may have a dedicated quality assurance system for the joint programme.

In both cases, the systems implemented should be consistent, reliable and simple, and they should cover both academic and administrative aspects, as both have an impact on quality.

Stakeholders (students, staff, employers and graduates) should play an active part in the internal quality assessment process.
4.2.2. External quality assurance

The European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) offers guidance for quality assurance and accreditation of joint programmes. The joint programme should be evaluated as a whole, to prevent the assessment of only the credits offered at partner institutions, which misses the assessment of the quality of the programme as a whole, and thus, the added value of offering a joint programme for the institutions involved. The participating institutions should select a suitable EQAR-registered agency for the evaluation of the programme.

The Self Evaluation Report (SER) jointly submitted by the partner institutions should be the basis for the external quality assurance procedure. It should contain information referring to the standards outlined in § 4.1 (see Appendix 7 of the full version of the Guidelines).
5. CONCLUDING REMARKS
In the concluding remarks, we identify ten key aspects for the success of a joint programme. Details about this key aspects are given in the full version of the Guidelines.

1. The motivation for the joint programme
2. Choice of partners
3. The academic programme
4. Institutional support for the programme
5. Resources
6. Sustainability
7. Information about the programme
8. Communication
9. Monitor and review
10. Recruitment and marketing


EGRACONS project (European Grade Conversion System). Download from: [http://egracons.eu/](http://egracons.eu/)


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Guidelines for Good Practice in Developing & Running Joint Programmes at Bachelor and Master Level

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*YERUN wishes to acknowledge the contribution of former members of the Working Group: (Cornelia Lindenau (Universität Konstanz) and Stijn de Strake (Maastricht University).