

Running a collaborative international degree programme

Reflections on 6 years of leading an
EU Erasmus Mundus programme
at the IOE, University of London
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The EU's aims for Erasmus Mundus

- Promoting **Europe** (in competition especially with America) as a destination for top international postgraduate students (but **Europe** as distinct from any single EU country)
- Internationalizing European higher education (by promoting the development of ties with institutions outside Europe)
- 'Harmonizing' Europe's higher education system – bringing national regulations and laws more closely into line (related to the Bologna Process)

The Erasmus Mundus Scheme

- European universities have to form **consortia** (consisting of at least 3 institutions in 3 different countries) (from 2010, non-European institutions can also be included)
- These consortia then bid to the EU for **scholarship funding** for five years (*i.e. **five cohorts of students***)
 - scholarships originally only for non-EU students, but now available for EU students as well (a total of **20-24 per year**)
 - funding also goes to support **visiting scholars** from outside the EU
- Students have to study in at least two different European countries
- From 2010, PhD as well as MA programmes have been supported by the Erasmus Mundus scheme

The Erasmus Mundus Lifelong Learning MA

- Originally 3 partners:
 - Faculty of Education, University of Aarhus (Denmark)
 - Institute of Education, University of London (UK)
 - University of Deusto, Bilbao (Spain)
- First successful bid 2005 – first students started the programme in 2006
- 2010 – successful bid to the EU for another 5 years of funding
- From 2011 the Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne also joined (only European students can go here – to study one module mid-way through the course)

MALL course content and rationale

- A general course in Comparative Education, but with a particular focus on ‘Lifelong Learning’ (a concept that EU policymakers have been keen to promote).
- In addition to more general comparative education courses, students also study developments in vocational learning, workplace learning, adult education, etc. (i.e. they are encouraged to look at learning in contexts beyond conventional schooling and university/college education).

MALL structure

- A two-year, full-time course (different from the standard one-year English MA programmes).
- All modules are compulsory.
- Students take their first year either in London or Copenhagen, then go to Spain for a semester. In the final, fourth semester students can go to any one of the three partner universities to work on their dissertation.
- Assessed by:
 - 6 modules each assessed through a 5,000-word assignment;
 - A 20,000-word dissertation.

MALLL modules

- Semester 1 (IOE or Aarhus):
 - Comparative Education: Theories and Methods
 - Lifelong Learning: Theories and Perspectives
- Semester 2 (IOE or Aarhus):
 - Education Traditions and Systems in Europe;
 - Vocational and Workplace Learning
 - *[At the end of Semester 2, European students go to Melbourne to take one module there – in place of one of these two modules]*
- Semester 3 (Deusto, Spain):
 - 2 modules on the assessment and accreditation of learning in non-formal contexts
- Semester 4 (any partner university):
 - dissertation

Programme administration – the Steering Committee

- University of Aarhus performs the role of ***consortium coordinator***
- But all key decisions are discussed and approved by a ***Steering Committee*** consisting of the course leaders in each partner institution, plus another academic colleague.
- The Steering Committee:
 - jointly assesses applications from prospective students and visiting scholars
 - discusses and agrees all procedures relating to the running of the course
 - deals with any issues or ‘crises’ that arise
- Day-to-day running of the course within each institution is in the hands of the ***course leaders***

What do the partner universities aim to gain from EM?

- Faculty of Education, University of Aarhus:
 - International students (from outside Scandinavia)
 - a heightened international profile (beyond Scandinavia)
 - a broader range of international ties (visiting scholars are important)
 - Good relations with the European Commission in Brussels
- The IOE, University of London:
 - *Good quality* international students
 - Stronger ties with *key* international partner institutions (especially Aarhus, Melbourne – members of the ‘Global Alliance’)
 - The maximum possible *fee income*
- The University of Deusto, Spain:
 - International students from outside the Spanish-speaking world
 - A heightened international profile (beyond Spain and Latin America)
 - Good relations with the European Commission in Brussels
- Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne:
 - Stronger ties with key international partners (IOE, Aarhus)
 - European international students

What has the EM MALL achieved?

- Some very impressive students from a very wide range of countries (Armenia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Vietnam, the Philippines, Bhutan, Iran, Argentina...)
- Quite a strong network amongst these students
- Some students have gone on to study for PhDs in Education, others have gone into careers as government education officials, college lecturers, educational administrators, or education-/training-related jobs in the private sector
- The programme has strengthened ties between the institutions involved – despite problems in the early years, the programme runs smoothly in a spirit of trust and cooperation.

What challenges has the MALL faced?

- Different institutional aims
- Different levels of experience in running international programmes, and dealing with international students
 - reflected in different approaches towards the selection of scholarship candidates – especially over the issue of *language*
- Tensions over differences in regulations and procedures between different institutions/countries
- A tendency to view the programme as an arena for competition between the partners
- → ***Problems of trust between the partners*** (leading removal and replacement of the coordinator in 2009)
- Within institutions:
 - disagreements over ‘ownership’ of the programme – lack of clarity over who has responsibility for managing it;
 - failure to properly involve a sufficient number of colleagues ***from the beginning***, and persuade them of the benefits of the programme → unwillingness of some colleagues to participate or take on extra work.

Lessons from the MALL Erasmus Mundus experience

- Understand your partner institutions and their aims for the programme; accept that different partners will have slightly different aims – and discuss these openly;
- Make sure fundamental issues are agreed *before* the programme is launched, e.g.:
 - Who will coordinate the programme?
 - What will be the responsibilities of the coordinator and the partners?
 - Student registration
 - Advice on visas and travel documents
 - Accommodation
 - Insurance
 - Handling student complaints...
 - Will there be a ‘Steering Committee’? Who will belong to it? What will be its function?
 - How will the admissions process work? According to what criteria will applicants be assessed? *Who* will assess the applications?
 - What role will *language proficiency* have as an admission criterion?
 - Will there be one set *fee* for the programme? Who will collect it? How will fee income be distributed amongst partner institutions?
 - Will the consortium have its own budget for marketing the programme, paying for Steering Committee meetings, making grants to students and visiting scholars, etc.? If so, who will control this budget?

Issues internal to each institution

- Make sure that key academic and administrative colleagues within your university understand why the new programme is desirable, and are involved/consulted from an early stage;
- Be very clear about **who** has the main responsibility for running the programme within your university (international partners need to know with whom they should be dealing)
- Make sure that this person has the necessary support from senior management, administrators and academic colleagues