

AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA

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4.1 The quality assurance of joint educational offer

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

[The Internationalisation Strategy of the University of Ljubljana \(UL\) 2014-2017 \(2020\)](#) (in Slovene) prioritised internationalisation in joint study programmes.

The UL accredited the first joint programmes in 2007. Joint programmes represent the most integrated and complex form of cooperation in education between higher education institutions from different countries. UL have faced various challenges and sought solutions since the accreditation of the first joint programmes, to accommodate different national frameworks in partner institutions' countries. Despite numerous efforts at the European level and initiatives to simplify accreditation procedures and implementation, the situation is not improving as regards joint programmes. Terminology regarding joint programmes still differs among the countries of the European Higher Education Area and therefore joint programmes are regulated differently in national legislations. We encounter numerous administrative obstacles, which do not encourage cooperation and in certain cases even make it impossible.

In Slovenia, a change of legislation in 2016 enabled the implementation of a [European approach for quality assurance of joint programmes](#). Despite numerous efforts and initiatives on the part of UL, this approach has not been adopted in practice. Accreditation of joint programme still takes place in parallel or consecutively, depending on national or institutional rules of participating partner institutions, which is time-consuming and administratively exhausting.

We consider UL to be the most important player in Slovenia's higher education area as regards joint programmes, since it has the largest number of joint programmes, which differ from each other in view of their structure, management and implementation. The latter depends on the

number and the country that partner institutions come from. UL has by far the most experience in this field – according to the SQAA public record of accredited joint programmes it is the only institution in the country with a broad range of experience. Despite this, the initiatives and proposals which UL addresses to the SQAA, based on its considerable experience in this field, as it actively strives to achieve a flexible and competitive arrangement of the national system, fall on deaf ears. With the recent changes to its criteria in January 2023 ([Criteria for International Cooperation](#)), the SQAA placed additional barriers on procedures relating to the accreditation and development of joint programmes and increased their regulation.

At the institutional level, the UL adopted several guidelines based on both experience and developments in this field. The currently applicable guidance for preparation and accreditation of joint programmes at the UL are part of the document Instructions for the management of degree study programmes of the UL – Annex 2: Rules of procedure for designing joint study programmes (available in the intranet).

Joint educational offering at the UL

Currently, [one bachelor's](#), [nine joint master's programmes](#) and [one joint doctoral programme](#) are accredited at the UL. Previously UL had 17 accredited joint programmes, yet in individual cases cooperation has terminated for various reasons, which enabled UL to gain additional valuable experience.

In 2020 a brief analysis of the status of joint programmes at the UL was carried out, analysing the self-evaluation reports of joint programmes at the UL for two academic years (2017/2018 and 2018/2019). This examined the main strengths and weaknesses, the relevance of the content of the study programmes and their course units, and the quality of the teaching process.

The analysis revealed that the self-evaluation reports did not fully define or identify the characteristics that would be required for adequate assessments to be made, as the ones used were generic for all programmes, and no specific methodology was used in the self-evaluation for the joint programmes.

The following key findings on the status of joint programmes were obtained:

- 1) Three of the joint programmes ([EMTM](#), [TRIBOS](#) and [EMA](#)) show strong coherence and alignment with the consortium, along with ongoing, systematic, pre-established periodic self-evaluations, follow-up on results, and other effective measures. In this respect, they differ significantly from the other joint programmes. These three programmes reflect a high level of awareness with regard to the importance of and concern for quality in the implementation of the curriculum.
- 2) In terms of the number of open enrollment slots, the number of students enrolled, and the number of applicants, three joint programmes stand out: [EMTM](#), [TRIBOS](#) and [CogSci](#).
- 3) The four joint programmes of the UL Faculty of Arts show exceptional diligence and a high

level of awareness with regard to the importance of quality in the implementation of the curriculum (among individual departments and administrators/coordinators), although with less coordination at the level of the consortium. They can be seen as programmes that show a high degree of potential, but need further support in terms of evaluating study effectiveness and in areas where there is evidence of inadequate funding, staffing, and resources.

The key steps that should be taken are as follows:

- The elimination of bureaucratic formalities related to the accreditation of joint programmes.
- A revised definition of joint programmes and procedures for the accreditation of joint programmes, adapted to the nature of the activities of a given consortium of universities for a given programme.
- The introduction of flexible forms of joint programmes from the point of view of the student, and not accreditation.
- Efforts to improve the promotion and sustainability of joint programmes.

Strengths

Established sustainable cooperation in joint programmes (EMTM, TRIBOS, CogSci) with a high level of awareness of the importance and use of quality assurance mechanisms.

A broad perception of the scope of joint programmes and/or joint educational offering, and thus the development of more flexible forms of cooperation in education, regardless of any obstacles in national legislation.

The resilience of some joint programmes and other forms of cooperation despite the obstacles faced.

Enhancement areas

Further efforts to align national legislation and thus simplify procedures and create a more flexible and competitive national system for joint programmes.

Promoting cooperation with partner institutions in more flexible ways.

4.1 The quality assurance of joint educational offer

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The university's strategy emphasises joint study programmes

The University of Ljubljana (UL) emphasised internationalisation in its 2014-2017 (2020)

internationalisation strategy, and joint study programmes are also emphasised in the university's strategy. The first joint study programmes were already started in 2007. The programmes represent deeply integrated, multinational educational cooperation. According to the audit visit, the implementation of joint programmes has encountered various challenges, such as adaption to disparate national frameworks between the partner countries and navigating administrative hurdles. The complications persist even amidst European-level efforts and initiatives meant to streamline accreditation processes and implementation. Varied terminology and regulations regarding joint programmes between countries in the European Higher Education Area present further obstacles, sometimes even hindering cooperation significantly.

As highlighted in the self-assessment report, the 2016 legislation change in Slovenia permitted the utilisation of a European approach to assuring the quality of joint programmes, but this approach has not been adopted in practice. The accreditation of joint programmes remains a burdensome process, occurring either in parallel or consecutively, contingent on the national or institutional rules of the partner entities, entailing significant time and administrative resources.

While the University of Ljubljana is esteemed for its diversified educational offerings, its catalogue of joint study programmes remains modest compared to its overall scale and reach. From 17 previously joint programmes, the UL has reported one bachelor's, nine joint master's programmes and one joint doctoral programme in its self-assessment. In 2020, the UL undertook a brief analysis of such offers by looking at the UL faculties and academies self-assessment reports. Due to the limited information in those reports on joint programmes, the analysis did not lead to detailed findings. However, the UL emphasises the need for development and expansion of such programmes, which can foster richer, integrated learning experiences and potentiate collaborative research opportunities across international borders. This strategic orientation has been implemented towards the UL's commitment to the European University Alliance Initiative in general and the UL's participation in EUTOPIA, one of the EU funded Alliances.

The university faces the imperative to balance its evident tendency towards joint and double degrees with a fortified emphasis on expanding joint educational provisions, leveraging its existing international partnerships, and fostering the EUTOPIA alliances. The self-assessment report provides somewhat generic observations mainly addressing the given national accreditation practices and some institutional aspects including financial issues, which could explain the decrease of joint programmes at the UL.

The engagement within educational consortiums, such as EUTOPIA, is commendable, reflecting the UL's commitment to developing connected learning frameworks and embracing collaborative research. Exploiting such initiatives to foster joint study programmes could enrich the academic portfolio of the UL and its consortium members, enabling students and staff to engage in a multifaceted, international educational and research environment.

The individual commitment of staff is strong

The UL has considerable strengths that highlight its successful implementation strategies,

collaborative ventures, committed personnel and agile quality enhancement within the context of joint educational provisions. The joint programmes of the UL have good completion rates and optimal study time indicators, reflecting a successful implementation of its programmes and efficacious student progression and achievement. This is indicative of robust curricular design, delivery and supportive student services and guidance mechanisms that facilitate smooth academic journeys. This strong performance in implementation showcases the university's capability to offer stable and reliable educational pathways, which is particularly pivotal in the context of joint educational provisions, ensuring consistency and reliability across collaborative platforms.

The enthusiastic commitment of the individuals involved in the development, coordination, and teaching of joint educational provisions at the UL stands out as a strength. This entails dedicated efforts in curricular development, thorough planning, and effective delivery, ensuring that the joint programmes are well-structured and well-executed. This strength is mirrored in the quality of the educational experiences provided to students and the outcomes achieved, which are crucial in maintaining and enhancing the UL's reputation and performance in joint study programmes.

The UL's quality improvement approaches will strengthen its ability to cope with the complexity and dynamism of today's higher education environment. Flexibility allows the UL to adapt approaches to the specific needs and circumstances of different programmes and collaborations. Agility is indispensable in the realm of joint educational provision, where the ability to respond rapidly and effectively to arising challenges and opportunities while maintaining quality can significantly impact the success and sustainability of the programmes.

These identified strengths provide the University of Ljubljana with a solid foundation upon which it can continue to build and expand its joint educational provisions as an institution. Implementation achievements, staff cooperation and commitment provide the basis for international educational cooperation. By leveraging these strengths, the university will strengthen its current degree offerings and pave the way for the enhancement and improvement of future joint educational initiatives, contributing to global academic cooperation and discourses.

Quality assurance for joint programmes should be simplified

The UL's quality assurance mechanisms need to facilitate an environment where joint educational provisions can be initiated, developed, and accredited in a complex structure and decision-making processes based on the fragmented nature of the UL structure with its faculties and academies. Existing strategies, institutional approaches, the language of instruction regulations, the "Rules of procedure for designing joint study programmes", and mainly the existing external accreditation processes allow but do not fully support nor stimulate the provision of joint educational provision to the full potential of the UL.

The UL with its quality approach, collaborative engagements, and diverse implementation practices is positioned to enhance its joint educational provisions. However, streamlining the

accreditation processes, ensuring support mechanisms, and fostering a culture that embraces and facilitates joint educational initiatives is pivotal. While the diversity of implementation practices across the UL stimulates innovation, establishing a harmonised framework for the development and management of joint educational provisions is essential. Such an initial framework through the procedures described in the UL's "Rules of procedure for designing joint study programmes" supports consistency in quality, as well as the student experience, and outcome alignment between various joint programmes. However, the UL has a fragmented and overall less effective quality system including a large diversity of structures and procedures at the faculty level (see also the discussion in Chapter 3). This diversity is also mirrored in the quality approaches of existing joint educational offers and makes a harmonised and common approach difficult at the UL.

Integrating the European Approach in programme accreditation would facilitate more fluid and effective international cooperation in joint programme development, ensuring that quality assurance and accreditation processes are harmonised and mutually recognised between participating institutions. A structured and comprehensive institutional description, clearly defining the various types and natures of joint educational offerings, is important to ensure clarity, coherence, and strategic alignment in the development and implementation of such programmes.

A more institutionalised and structured approach needed for joint educational offer at the university

The university must ensure that joint programmes are structured and supported by the relevant departments at both university and faculty levels. The university should implement regular forums to facilitate the exchange of information between programme leaders and academic and administrative staff and ensure that good practice, challenges and innovations in the development and implementation of joint programmes are shared, discussed, and exploited across the board. This would streamline processes and optimise the efficiency and effectiveness of such programmes, ensuring consistency, quality, and strategic alignment across programmes and across the UL's faculties and academies. According to the audit visit, some programmes have minimum standards, so the partner universities can unify issues and contents of the joint programmes.

Based on the complexity and importance for the UL, joint programmes should be coordinated at the UL-level. This coordination should cover the development, implementation, and evaluation of all joint study programmes. This would lead to the standardisation of processes and ensure a common and high-quality standard as well as fast and agile decision-making processes. Common procedures would also ensure that the diversified practices contribute to the overarching institutional and collaborative objectives. The UL senate should also acknowledge and support these initiatives. A shift from an individual to a more institutionalised approach should be implemented.

A transparent student selection process and standardised recognition of credits and micro-

credentials should be introduced. Such an approach will ensure consistency, fairness, and strategic alignment in collaborative educational initiatives and should be rolled out and followed across the UL. Based on the audit visit, it was found that students sometimes have problems getting their studies at foreign universities accredited in their faculty. Developing joint approaches for validating and recognising prior learning in joint programmes, in collaboration with partner universities, would facilitate smoother student transitions and progression within such offerings.

Maintaining and enhancing the quality of joint programmes requires that quality enhancement systems are integrated and documented across partner universities and that such information is transparently shared with relevant stakeholders. Universities and national agencies should accept and respect the quality assurance procedures of other national higher education systems.

The evaluation mechanisms for study abroad phases of joint programmes, such as adapting Erasmus mobility quality assurance instruments, should be further refined to ensure that the data collected is optimally utilised for the continuous quality enhancement of the joint study programmes. Ensuring timely implementation of standards, such as tutoring systems, and precisely defining arrangements (e.g. credit transfer processes) well in advance supports student progression and enhances the overall student experience in joint programmes.

Sustainable funding is essential for the continuity of joint programmes

Structural and financial support mechanisms need to be scrutinised and enhanced to support joint educational provisions. The UL's engagement with funding programmes, such as Erasmus and CEEPUS, provides a solid foundation that could be built upon and expanded. Leveraging such schemes to facilitate joint programmes could enhance the practical feasibility and attractiveness of such provisions for students and staff, ensuring their viability and sustainability. Crafting strategies to ensure sustainable funding, particularly following the conclusion of initial external funding phases, is pivotal to the continuity and stability of joint programmes, ensuring that such initiatives are financially viable in the long term. Prioritising comprehensive information provision regarding semester(s) abroad, course selections and logistical considerations is critical to ensure that students are well-informed and adequately prepared to navigate their joint educational journeys.

In summary, nurturing a culture that empowers and motivates staff and students to engage in and contribute to joint study programmes can substantiate the university's commitment to internationalisation and collaborative education. This may involve recognising and addressing potential challenges and barriers experienced by staff and students in navigating joint educational frameworks, thereby facilitating a supportive environment for joint educational offerings. However, this culture needs clear and transparent structures and procedures. Such common procedures would ensure that the diversified practices would contribute to the overarching institutional and collaborative objectives.

The UL must substantively refine its joint educational provisions, ensuring that such initiatives are

not only robustly structured and implemented but also sustainably managed and continuously enhanced. In doing so, the UL will further develop its position in collaborative international education, fostering enriched academic experiences for its students and solidifying its contributions to global academic discourses and practices.

The UL should continuously monitor and weave its commendable strengths and identified opportunities to advance its joint educational provisions. This will enhance its contributions to, and impact within, the global academic community. In the continually evolving landscapes of higher education, the UL navigates through both its success and challenges in joint educational offerings.