
Support services related to the Quality of ERASMUS MUNDUS Master Courses and the preparation of quality guidelines

DGEAC Contract 2007-3736/001-001 MUN MUNETU
(January 2008 to December 2008)

HANDBOOK OF QUALITY

December 2008

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Contents

1	The ‘Handbook’ - Developing Excellent Erasmus Mundus Courses..1	
1.1	Facilities, Logistics and Finance (FLAF).....4	
1.1.1..	When Students Apply to Your Course	4
1.1.2..	Verifying Student Qualifications	6
1.1.3..	When Third Country Students Travel to Europe	8
1.1.4..	Introducing Students to European Academic Practice	10
1.1.5..	When Students Move Between Partner Institutions	12
1.1.6..	Placements and Internships	14
1.1.7..	Student Finances	15
1.1.8..	Communicating and consulting with students	17
1.1.9..	Benefitting from Alumni	18
1.2	Quality of Leadership and Institutions (QUIL)19	
1.2.1..	The highest quality academic staff	20
1.2.2..	Creating a Strong Course ‘Brand’	21
1.2.3..	Securing and Institutional Commitment	23
1.2.4..	Institutional commitment to international teaching and research	24
1.2.5..	Continuity and leadership	25
1.2.6..	Succession Strategies	26
1.2.7..	Financial Sustainability	27
1.3	Quality of Teaching and Learning (QATL).....28	
1.3.1..	Designing an Excellent Curriculum	28
1.3.2..	Communicating Course Objectives and Outcomes	29
1.3.3..	Consistent Assessment Methods	30
1.3.4..	Formal Course Review	33
1.3.5..	Ethical Standards	35
1.3.6..	Developing Learning Skills	36
1.4	Joined-up Practice and Integration (JUPI)38	
1.4.1..	Selecting Students	38
1.4.2..	Consortium Information System	39
1.4.3..	Policy for Course Fees	40
1.4.4..	Division of Labour across the Consortium	41
1.4.5..	A Consortium-Wide Quality Assessment Process	41
1.4.6..	Managing the Consortium	42
1.4.7..	Develop a clear policy for awarding the Master Degree	43

1 The 'Handbook' - Developing Excellent Erasmus Mundus Courses

This Handbook, along with the online Self-Assessment Tool (www.emqa.eu) provides a mechanism to explore, individually or collaboratively, where excellence is being demonstrated in an Erasmus Mundus Course, or whether a planned course is covering all of the key aspects of excellence. The online tool does this by inviting responses to a set of structured questions in the 'Assess my Course' option. The questions were derived from 18 detailed visits to partners at six existing Courses. They are not intended to be a complete and comprehensive set, but they should allow you to explore where improvement could be prioritised. There also is the facility for both staff and your students to assess a course, using a subset of questions that are directed to the student experience.

This **Handbook** material should be used alongside the self-assessment tool, and provides a structured checklist of actions for consideration, and provides examples of good practice from existing courses.

This Handbook has been built from a series of visits to six Erasmus Mundus courses across 18 European Universities:

CODE - Joint European Master in Comparative Local Development

Coordinator -Trento University, Italy (TU); Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary; University of Regensburg, Germany.

MERIT - European Master of Research on Information and Communication Technologies

Coordinator -Univ. Politecnica de Catalunya, Spain (UPC); Technical University of Turin, Italy (UoT); Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium (UCL).

NOHA - European Master's Degree in International Humanitarian Aid

Coordinator -Univ. de Deusto, Spain (UoD); University of Groningen, Netherlands (UoG); University College Dublin, Ireland (UCD).

MESPOM - Master of Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management

Coordinator -Int. Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics, Lund, Sweden (IIEE); Central European university, Dept. of Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management, Hungary (CEU); University of Manchester - School of Earth, Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences, UK (UoM).

AMASE - Masters Programme in Advanced Materials Science & Engineering

Coordinator -Univ. Saarlander, Germany (UoS); Institut National Polytechnique de Lorraine (INPL) National Polytechnic Institute of Lorraine Nancy, France; Luleå University of Technology, Sweden (LUT).

TROPED - Science Programme in International Health

Coordinator -Univ. Inst of Tropical medicine, Berlin, Germany; University of Copenhagen, Denmark (UoC); Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), Vrije University Amsterdam (VRI), the Netherlands.

A Call for voluntary participation in this exercise was launched late in 2007 by DGEAC. Nearly 40% of all Courses expressed their willingness to participate, and ECOTEC was provided with a list of the six courses above, having been selected by the Steering Group from 24. Each of the courses selected for the project were mandated to have at least three partners in other countries (though many were much more broadly based).

The core team for each visit was two colleagues from Ecotec, one who focused on the quality of structure and processes in the context of pan-European 'jointness' (ideally to confirm the documentary evidence of good practice and effective processes, and covering areas such as learning and teaching processes, assessment, and the available teaching infrastructure and resources), and the second focused on the quality outcomes and impacts (including the student experience, impacts on research and teaching developments etc.).

The team was accompanied by an external subject specialist who has the pedagogic knowledge of the course subject areas, focusing on the quality of the curriculum and its linkage to the quality of teaching and learning. The group of experts was identified by the Executive Agency from those who had participated in evaluation tasks. ECOTEC subsequently invited them to participate in the visits.

Members of staff from DGEAC and the Executive Agency (EACEA) participated in visits.

The relevant national Quality Assurance Agency was invited to participate in visits.

The Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association, and the European Students Union were asked to propose student representatives who accompanied us on almost all visits. The role of the student member was to provide a cross-cutting perspective on all the visit activities. Therefore students had the ability to participate in their own mix of activities.

Following the completion of the visits, the material was checked for accuracy and consistency and each set was then unpacked into a tabular structure classified against four principal components each containing a roughly equivalent set of sub-elements. These were named as follows:

- Facilities, Logistics and Finance (FLAF)
- Quality of Leadership across Institutions (QTLI)
- Joined-up Practice and Integration (JUPI)
- Quality of Teaching and Learning (QATL)

During each of the visits the Course teams contributed significant amounts of time, and spoke openly and constructively about the challenges they had experienced when building their courses. The students on the course also contributed their experiences as consumers of the courses, and the rich material that has been gathered is testimony to the professionalism with which course teams participated in this exercise.

There are four main Components of Excellence when building, developing and sustaining a successful Erasmus Mundus Course.

First, attention needs to be given to **Facilities, Logistics and Finance** (the mnemonic for this is FLAF). In a highly competitive global education marketplace, students with the right competences need to be attracted and the Course needs to verify that their qualifications are legitimate and are suited to the Course needs. Having attracted students to apply, their applications need to be treated efficiently and effectively, and communication with the students should keep them informed of the progress of their application. When offered a place on the Course they should be prepared in advance for the move to Europe; for the culture they will live in and for the academic environment within which they will work. Since the students will move between partner institutions during their studies, the Course will need to maintain efficient and coherent communication with them. When they graduate from the course the students become the Alumni and will be part of a growing community of support and advice back to the Courses.

The second dimension concerns the special set of leadership, management and academic expertise that is needed to build the complex and challenging Erasmus Mundus Courses. This is **Quality of Leadership and Institutions** (QUIL). The Course should attract the highest quality academic staff, because the students coming from Third Countries often are themselves of the highest calibre. Excellent staff and an excellent curriculum will attract excellent students. This cannot be achieved just within an academic department framework. The commitment of both the Institutions and their senior staff is important. Associated with that, there is the need to show clearly that the Erasmus Mundus Course contributes to the research and teaching strategies of the Institutional partners. Lastly, excellent courses will look to the future, both in terms of having plans for the continuity of skills and expertise and also to explore options for financial sustainability.

Dimension three covers the teaching and learning experience and is called **Quality of Teaching and Learning** (QATL). The curriculum needs to be designed as a coherent set of modules, not just something that is extracted from a range of existing course offerings. The Course objectives and the expected outcomes both need to be articulated, and the way in which the course is meeting them also needs to be monitored. The ways in which student work is assessed needs to be at least coherent (it should be clear to students how work is assessed at each partner site) and ideally consistent (student work should be assessed to the same criteria at all partner sites). The Course should be subjected to independent and external review so that the advice from high-reputation international academics can provide pointers to the future Course development. The multi-cultural nature of the student community can be acknowledged by developing a clear set of Course rules and ethical expectations (both socially and academically). Students from such diverse backgrounds can also benefit through the provision of opportunities to extend and enrich their learning skills.

The final dimension is what makes Erasmus Mundus such a powerful international academic brand and this is called **Joined-up Practice and Integration** (JUPI). The extent to which the partners and Institutions work together, coherently, will be a strong determination of the extent to which the Erasmus Mundus Course is working to meet the Bologna objectives. The selection of students needs the full involvement of all partners. Communication between partners, students, and the Institutions is best achieved through a robust information (for example to store and share student information) and communication (to provide a single point for communication) system. The partners need to accept that the division of labour is both equitable and that it will meet the demands of the curriculum being delivered to the students. Students across the Course should be given opportunities to provide feedback on the Course and to give advice on how the Course can further improve. Lastly, the Course Management processes should show efficiency and integration of practice, rather than just being an amalgam of different practices and procedures across partner sites.

The four dimensions are now explored. For each there are detailed aspects and for each of these there is a key challenge, and checklist of key actions. This is then supplemented by examples of practice drawn from the 18 visits made to the six Erasmus Mundus Courses.

To assess how your Course (existing or planned) is working towards covering all the themes, the online Analytical Tool (www.emqa.eu) will help you to build an overall 'picture' of your journey towards excellence; indicating where your Course is strong and helping you identify areas where more attention could be given to building overall excellence.

1.1 Facilities, Logistics and Finance (FLAF)

FLAF concerns the processes of promoting the Course, targeting potential students, recruiting them, and most importantly of all, supporting them through the challenges of moving to Europe. This entails preparing them academically for the Course, ensuring that they arrive in Europe 'ready to study' with the necessary infrastructure, such as accommodation and finance in place for them. It also focuses on the speed at which students are embedded both in the locality and the academic institution. Underpinning these processes is efficient and effective information shared across the Course.

1.1.1 When Students Apply to Your Course

The challenge: "Why should students from third countries **apply** for an Erasmus Mundus Course in Europe? What can courses do to **persuade** them and to **support** their applications in the face of international competition for excellent students?"

A key challenge for an excellent course is getting the right students to apply, making sure that the best of them choose your course and being regarded as fair and efficient in getting things going. Success here often comes from doing the obvious and simple things early and doing them well. A key is making sure everybody knows what they have to do, and that information is provided clearly and effectively to students and course partners throughout the selection process.

Checklist for Action:

- *Start the applications process early to capture the attention of the best students*
- *Make good quality documentation available in formats suited to the students*
- *Communicate the selection criteria clearly*
- *Provide interactive support to applicants during the application and recruitment process*
- *Communicate decisions on applications in a clear and timely manner*
- *Maintain an accessible and updated Web site that effectively communicates the Course information to students around the World, regardless of the bandwidth of their Internet connection*

In a competitive international education marketplace the task of publicising your Course (covered later) is a challenge, but so is the task of making sure that when a student applies for the Course the application is processed rapidly and that a channel of communication is opened with the student. Assume that the student is considering a range of other courses and that the challenge is to **persuade students that this is the best option for them**, not only because the curriculum is excellent, but also because the 'customer relationship' that will be provided is also world-class.

The channels of communication need to be relevant to the particular student needs. Accessing a heavily-designed Web site is not a problem for someone in Kuala Lumpur who has access to fast broadband, but accessing a complex Web site from an Internet cafe in Nepal may be more difficult if the line speed is dialup. In essence the aim is to recruit the best students from third countries in a way that is sensitive to their access to technologies, which minimises the bureaucratic overhead and maintains information integrity.

Sometimes simple Web tools can help students see quickly whether they are suited to a Course. Students have noted that it would be valuable if the Course sites provided a quick '**competence checker**' online so that they could make a reasoned decision about whether to proceed with an application. Too often they have to complete a full application and submit it before they are told whether they meet the key criteria.

For example, in the first cohort in the MERIT Course difficulties were experienced early on with computer scientists who lacked the **necessary academic background for the courses**, in particular lacking in engineering skills and knowledge. This was largely resolved by adjusting the recruitment and selection procedure. The course requires a background in hardware, but this is sometimes difficult to convey to potential students from other countries where interpretations (of "ICT" or "computer science") can be different.

A Web site can at least be used to allow **online submission of applications**, either by filling in an online form or downloading forms and sending them via email. In the MERIT Course the application of students is organised around a Web tool that has been built especially for this master. The Web tool was created by the Programme Coordinator at UPC and gives the possibility of having total control of the situation of each student record.

Students sometimes contest a decision to reject them. In that case MERIT asks the student to review the documentation already up-loaded on the online application. They are asked to review the completeness and correctness of the document and then to highlight in their CV their experience of the subjects and laboratory practice, directly related to one of the three MERIT areas of knowledge. The applications are then re-evaluated.

For the TROPED Course the application process is open and on the Web with **downloadable application forms** <http://erasmusmundus.troped.org/application.jsp> .

The range of selection criteria has varied between Courses and these are for very logical reasons, given the disciplinary ranges of the courses. For example:

- In the AMASE course the criteria for selecting students are: study record 25%; letter of recommendation 20%; relation to materials science 15%; language skills for the initial location 10%; language skills for the second location 15%; motivation and experience letter 15%. Marks for each are in 5s, so the actual scale is from 1-20.
- For MERIT the criteria are: study results 30%; adequacy for the course 25%; language skills 20%; quality of home institution 15% (they use national rankings in students' countries, but also research themselves the departments in the student's countries and devise their own rankings); motivation 5%; recommendation letters 5%. We asked whether they had modelled this with differences in the loadings to see if ranking outcomes changed, but as yet this has not been done.
- TROPED criteria, where the Central Administration in Berlin processes the applications, use a grading system which includes 2 of 30 points, relating to whether the consortium knows the Institution from where the student is applying. There are 5 discretionary points for use where special capacity building is needed in a country, for example where female students apply from Afghanistan. The students selected from the initial batch are then assessed by consortium members and where the scores differ >8 points the application is discussed, with the highest and lowest scoring institutions reconsidering their evaluation. There are then telephone conferences across the consortium.

The considerable range of criteria mean that students (who will consider many potential courses, each with different criteria) will be best served by courses which communicate the criteria clearly, allow students to benchmark themselves quickly against the criteria and which respond quickly to student requests for information. For example, it is policy on the MESPOM course that **every e-mail from an applicant should be answered quickly**, to attract them to the course. So someone in IIEE, UoM and CEU must regularly check the Programme Coordinator account and respond to queries.

1.1.2 Verifying Student Qualifications

The challenge: "Do the **qualifications** claimed by the student confirm that they have the right background education to match them to the Course and that their **skill-set** will prepare them well for the academic work they will undertake?"

In the context of international concerns about faked qualifications, how can a Course both convince University authorities that the candidate details are legitimate and robust, while not putting in place a process that deters excellent candidates from applying?

The checklist for action:

- *Use international research networks to develop innovative ways of verifying the qualifications of students*
- *Build institutional procedures for the accreditation for foreign education*
- *Focus strongly on competences and practical experience as a means of adding contextual richness to the statement of formal qualifications*

Excellent courses aim to balance the burden of proof required from students with the need to ensure that the **Institutions are satisfied that the qualifications are legitimate**. However, in

some cases students experience significant administrative requirements and the process of legitimating qualification is becoming ever more challenging, even when assessing the authenticity of a claimed degree from a European or a North American University¹.

Therefore it is not surprising that Universities fear the publicised growth of “*fake visas and entry qualifications, dubious admissions practices, bogus institutions, plagiarism, dishonest grading and counterfeit qualifications*”². For example, Pakistani students were concerned that they were required to **obtain legal attestation about their qualifications** from Institutions in Pakistan. There is poor protection against fakes, especially when the information is uploaded on a Web site. It is particularly difficult to get 'legalised' diplomas.

Good practice exists where the Courses are using **formal processes to evaluate accreditation** of both the qualifications and also to extent the consideration into the accreditation or prior learning. Such considerations allow students the possibility of not taking courses where they clearly have prior competences, such as for TROPED using CBBU, a formal process of accreditation for foreign education. They ask potential students to request their University to send a transcript and this is processed centrally by the Berlin office for this Erasmus Mundus programme.

And for AMASE in Saarbrücken there is the use of an **extended international network to help verify the suitability of applicants**. All partners are involved in selecting candidates. There is a high application rate, so the challenge is to identify the best. There is a process of obtaining knowledge about the quality of universities in third countries through the German Humboldt Foundation. This is a global network of exceptional scientists who can be formally appointed as their own country coordinators and who can promote the course and advise on the selection of candidates. There is a yearly Humboldt conference in Berlin. This helps to **reinforce the strong network of trusted expertise**.

A clear admissions policy will therefore define the necessary qualifications and competences, which for NOHA is a **joint admission policy, decided by the Board of Directors**. This takes into consideration first cycle learning outcomes and competences and the emergence of a European Higher Education space. In this context the access requirements agreed by the Consortium are:

- A good level first cycle degree (bachelor degree, three or four years) in a discipline of relevance to humanitarian action.
- A recognised qualification in the language(s) of instruction of the university(s). Knowledge of languages of the place of study is an asset.
- Practical experience in the area of humanitarian action in governmental, inter-governmental, and/ or nongovernmental organisations and institutions is valued.

¹ BBC. (2003). *Bogus degree sites shut down*. (March 7) BBC, [cited March 8 2003]. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/2829237.stm>, BBC. (2004). *Fake universities thrive on the web*. (January 5) BBC, [cited January 6 2004]. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/3369567.stm, SINGEL, R. (2004). *No Third Degree for Diploma Mills*. (March 18) Wired.com, [cited March 20 2004]. <http://www.wired.com/news/politics/0,1283,62689,00.html>

² TYSOME, T. (2005). *Fraud Booms Worldwide*. (August 5) Times Higher, [cited July 5 2008]. <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=197701>

1.1.3 When Third Country Students Travel to Europe

The challenge “What should be done in helping third country students to **obtain visas** quickly and effectively, to **plan travel and accommodation** and to be advised of **local culture** at their destination, so that they arrive at the University ready to study?”

Preparing students prior to arrival in Europe and for their subsequent internal European mobility is part of the goal of ensuring that students are not distracted from studying, by not having to worry about the challenges of living and working in a new environment. The most significant concerns relate to obtaining visas, followed by the need to secure good quality and affordable accommodation. Actions to achieve this include:

The checklist of actions:

- *Ensure that the travel (mobility) support process starts as soon as a student is recruited*
- *Use the knowledge gained from Alumni and from the of former students to provide advice services for students*
- *Provide students with individualised integrated support for travel, accommodation and for living and working in a new cultural environment*
- *Ensure that students are provided with advice and support for their families, providing them with effective mechanisms to communicate with families in their home countries, and directing them to the necessary facilities and support services if their families are travelling with them to Europe*
- *Provide detailed assistance with visa handling*
- *Ensure that suitable accommodation is available to students*
- *Build support structures to facilitate cultural adjustment*

At the most general level, practice has meant that once an offer is made there is generally informal contact with students as they prepare to travel and so that they can prepare themselves academically. This is not currently a fully integrated aspect and contact with students seems more on an ‘as-needed’ basis.

There can be a **focus on information in relation to the programme, including practical and academic information**, such as reading lists, but this needs to be consistent across all institutions. If this is not the case it can cause problems with student expectations. For example, one problem with the high level of support provided to students at their first institution is that they may arrive at another institution in the second year of their course anticipating that they will receive the same level of support.

More sophisticated support can be developed, for example as they are recruited students can be joined to an **online virtual community**, which for MESPOM is “a Google group where students can communicate with each other before they start the course”. This is an activity which not only helps pre-socialise the students, but also encourages self-help and “enables them to ask questions like how to get visas – others answer the questions (students, alumni etc) and this saves the administrative staff time”.

Existing students can provide a support service for incoming students. For example, with AMASE a mentoring system is in place to allow the process of integration to start before their arrival in Sweden. The mentoring system encourages students in third countries or studying at partner institutions to build email relationships with current students at LUT.

Programme Coordinators are a focal point for knowledge about mobility. In TROPED visa advice is provided to students via email. For example, Denmark requires visa applications some 3-6 months in advance and the Programme Coordinator worked to expedite the visa application.

One of the most significant concerns for students is 'where will I live'? Leaving students to arrange their own **Accommodation** can lead to them being unhappy and not fully focused on their academic studies. In some locations students told us that accommodation was fully booked by the time they were provided with application forms, and they also observed that it was generally too expensive. They want clear and timely information to be provided. Students noted that they experience significant logistical challenges in obtaining visas, registering within the local community and integrating within it for residence and services.

It can be feasible to provide students with pre-arranged, short-term accommodation on arrival, after which they can find themselves more long-term accommodation having settled at the University. On the CODE Course in Budapest students can have the option of staying with local families, something the students say helps them integrate quicker into the local community. On the MERIT Course in Turin accommodation was provided for an initial period of one month. However, students who are left to plan their own accommodation often do not have access to the **details about renting laws and local regulations.**

Furthermore, while **accommodation can be pre-arranged**, there can be problems. For instance, students noted that while it was positive that accommodation was already booked for them prior to arrival, they were not aware of the situation when renting property where the law favours the owners and tenants need to check initially for defects – the documentation was in local language and they could not find people to check it.

Another option is to provide Erasmus Mundus students with centralised accommodation, but this may then **risk excluding them from wider socialisation with other students.** Actions can be undertaken to overcome this, for example on the MESPOM Course in Manchester MESPOM students are often housed in the same accommodation. At the same time, they are **helped to integrate into the wider student community** at the University through a field trip which forms part of a compulsory module.

For TROPED in Copenhagen, accommodation information and support is available online in advance. However, it is also important to ensure that provision does not then lead to problems where, for example, on another course where the students are obliged to take the accommodation provided, students experienced high administration costs charged and the low quality of University accommodation in relation to that offered, at a lower price, in the private sector. **Students will compare and contrast the accommodation offers and will expect value for money.**

Significant levels of personal support can be provided. For example, on the AMASE Course in Nancy 48 students renting accommodation must have a guarantor and members of the Course team have personally acted as guarantors for some 50 students. Therefore, in spite of the challenges and difficulties presented by local regulations, **the course team can work innovatively to make it as easy as possible for students to settle into the local community.**

In the end, however, students are reassured primarily by a situation where accommodation is ready for them to live in. It does not so much matter whether this is through the provision of University accommodation, or whether students find their own accommodation as a result of effective information and support before arrival. The core consideration for them: **'is the**

accommodation of suitable quality, is it affordable, are we informed of the necessary regulations and conditions. And, will we be safe living there?'

1.1.4 Introducing Students to European Academic Practice

The challenge: "How can a diverse community of third country students be provided with an **induction programme** that trains them into the **academic practices** of a European University?"

Whatever the academic practices have been for third country students, they need to be assimilated rapidly into the learning and teaching cultures that they will experience in Europe. A formal induction programme will train them to learn independently and to use learning resources effectively. Importantly, the induction programme will be informed by the previous experience of students, so that past problems can be avoided.

The checklist of actions:

- *Provide a clear induction process through briefings and through documentation that is readily available to students before arrival*
- *Ensure that the induction process has clear mechanisms in place to capture the views of and learn from students – current and past*
- *Make the induction process culturally sensitive enough to deal with the social and cultural needs of the students*
- *Ensure that the induction process prepares the diverse students for the learning environment*
- *Provide opportunities for intercultural learning so that students and staff enrich their learning and teaching skills by experiencing academic practices from other countries*
- *Implement student agreements that state clearly the rights, and the obligations, of students and staff when participating in the Course*

Once students arrive they need to be inducted into the Course, institution and the community. An integrated package of support can be provided, such as that in Trento for CODE students, where a **comprehensive package of support is provided to welcome and support students before, throughout and after their rotation at each university**. Students are enrolled prior to arrival, they receive Internet access and library card etc. on arrival. There is a dedicated person available to address personal/practical problems or signpost students to appropriate support. Practical information is provided to integrate students in each city/country, as well as to link with local students. There is support in dealing with immigration authorities, banks, embassies and the EC delegation in home country.

Academic induction can take the form of an **initial intensive programme of activities**, as in the NOHA Course where the programme starts with the Intensive Programme. This ten day initial inter-university joint course brings together NOHA students, lecturers, researchers, international experts, aid managers, policy makers and other guest speakers IGOs and NGOs. The programme combines theory (lecture style) and practice (workshops and case studies) allowing the discussion of key humanitarian action issues from the perspective of academics and actors in the field. The programme provides a **forum where participants from different backgrounds and perspectives can share their knowledge and experiences** in the area of humanitarian action.

Universities characteristically start to engage with students when they arrive in a Department. Prior to that, other services such as Accommodation or International Offices will provide some

level of advice and guidance. When this process is viewed in the context of the question '**What were your feelings as you stepped off a plane for the first time in Europe?**', and 'When you left immigration with your luggage how prepared were you for the next stage of your journey to the University?', it becomes clear that these activities need to start as soon as students are recruited.

The goal is '**Making available welcome processes that students feel safe, secure, and ready to study**'. Many students said they were frightened about whether the visa would allow them through immigration. Many were distressed at leaving behind family. They were uncertain about how they would make their way from the airport to the University, having knowledge of only a few words of local language. However, they said that once they were at the University the assistance and advice provided was good.

The point at which the Course first 'meets' the students has a significant influence on the extent to which students can focus fully on their studies. Email communication is a basis mechanism, for example, one of the MERIT team at UCLouvain sends incoming students an email with information about local transport and University services. Students can be met and briefed as soon as they arrive at a University. For example, on their first morning in Nancy students meet the course tutor who gives them information such as IT facilities and email addresses. Students can also be encouraged to engage with central resources in Nancy. For instance, the Student Association at the University supports foreign students by recommending accommodation and the University also has a centre where foreign students can go for advice and support.

Students, however, feel at their most vulnerable when they first arrive in Europe. Sending information to students is a basic activity, but actually making the information 'work' effectively is challenging; an online map of an airport is no substitute for someone actually meeting them and reassuring them that the journey to the University will be without stress. Knowing that a bus can be taken from a train station is only useful if the precise route to the bus stop is known, and that the student is aware of any dangers that often are present around train stations. Students welcome coordinated support in preparing for their visit, but in some places when they arrived in the City they had to apply themselves for a resident card without understanding the procedures.

International Offices are an important source of support, but often they are not very experienced in dealing with third country students, because most international students they deal with are Europeans. They therefore need to develop a specific set of actions which have not been structured for third country students. For CODE students in Trento, the University arranges "**welcome buddies**", where a home student makes contact before arrival and helps the Erasmus Mundus student settle in. A 'caffè delle Lingua' is provided, with **a café setting for international students to informally present their home countries and cuisine**. There is a regular newsletter highlighting news and ongoing support; students receive this when abroad, for example at the rotation university, or during an internship.

For TROPED students in Copenhagen from September 2008 onwards, the Faculty is sponsoring a 'buddy' for international students. This person will be responsible for 11 activities, including meeting students at the airport, taking them to accommodation, guiding them in registering for medical care and general orientation in the city and University. **The 'buddy' will have a contract, and will be paid a fee.**

And for AMASE international students who are arriving new in Lulea the university provides an **individual pick-up service** from Lulea airport.

Once on site at the University the next activity for the Course is to **brief the students about local issues and to introduce them to the University resources** that they will use. This does not necessarily have to be a formal process. For instance, in the case of MERIT students in Turin, we were told by students that people in the University and in Turin in general, were very helpful and students felt well integrated. An informal process can work well with small numbers of students, but more formal practice has value, such as the Handbook for arriving students at the AMASE course in Saarbrücken.

For TROPED students there is a **pan-Course induction meeting** held in Berlin. All students and staff from each partner site are brought together and students value this social opportunity to integrate into the course. The induction activity starts at the airport (or other point of arrival), where students are met and greeted. They are then taken to the accommodation and provided with orientation in Berlin. In addition, they receive academic preparation which helps them to **overcome anxiety about teaching styles**, the mix of people and the challenges of social interaction. Many students were not used to cultures where a lot of self-learning was undertaken and need **structured training in self-learning skills**.

1.1.5 When Students Move Between Partner Institutions

The challenge: “How can students **move from one institution to another**, so that they assimilate rapidly to the new local environment and experience a **seamless transition in their learning**?”

Students need to move between institutions in a way that avoids academic culture shock. While the diversity of academic cultures in Europe is part of its richness, students must be prepared for what they will experience. Furthermore, as with the mobility to Europe, their internal mobility needs to be prepared efficiently and the process of obtaining visas for their next destination should not require them to be distracted from their studies.

The checklist for action:

- *Assist students coherently in making the necessary transitions from institution to institution, from the provision of accommodation to ensuring the sufficient stability of the learning environment to support their learning*
- *Provide well-informed assistance with visa handing for students*
- *Provide students with good quality and timely information about the institutions they are to visit and the particular local issues that will affect them*
- *Ensure that the experiences of current and past students, on the inter-institutional movement process, have been recovered and embedded in the information provided to new students*
- *Avoid unnecessary student travel by ensuring that students who fail examinations at one institution are able to re-take the examination whilst at another institution*

Getting to the EU is a logistical, and expensive, challenge for Third Country students. This is something that the European Parliament has been aware of as the debates have been taking place for the next phase of Erasmus Mundus. For students, the processes required to obtain visas are challenging. As EU citizens we are now familiar with the ease of movement through Schengen, however, for third country students the intra-Schengen boundaries are very real, and while EU Passport holders can move seamlessly across the borders, those from Third Countries

have very real challenges moving across Schengen borders, and students often noted the challenges of complying with

local bureaucracy such as local registration, banking, and health registration.

Each EU member state has its own immigration procedures and processes and there is a double overhead for many students applying for two sets of visas for two countries. For example, a Pakistani student spending the second year in Italy needs to apply for an Italian visa in Madrid, a process that is both expensive and time-consuming.

There is a definite attraction for students to go to the USA (where the visa application may be time-consuming, but one visa only is required), and there is a danger that the post 9-11 'windfall' of students for Europe (many came to Europe as the USA increased the difficulty of applying for visa under Homeland Security restrictions) may be reversed soon, making Europe less attractive.

This critical mobility issue is well known and was specifically mentioned in the Communication of August 2008:

"The complicated migration rules which are continually being changed (and becoming increasingly inflexible) constitute another problem to bear in mind in relation to academics and students from third countries. In no way can or should this constitute grounds for impeding the mobility of lecturers, researchers or students. In particular, the European Council resolution on granting visas to students and teachers involved in this type of programme should be finalised".³

Because of the timing and academic cycles, a 2.5 year visa would be appropriate for Erasmus Mundus students. Whereas in the EU a visa is generally issued for two years, in the US it is normal to provide five-year visas (even for a course lasting two years). It is therefore to be welcome that the European Parliament Decision for Erasmus Mundus Phase 2⁴ understands these concerns and the Commission is considering the possibility of implementing specific "**Erasmus Mundus visas**".

It is also clear that **Course teams are aware of visa problems and that considerable efforts are put into helping students overcome these**. Course administrators can assist with practical issues concerning visa applications. Senior University Officers can communicate issues to politicians. For example, the Vice-Rector at UP Catalunya, for the MERIT Course, noted that there are regular 'visa nightmares' and that the Rectors of Catalan Universities were all concerned about the negative impact on international students. They have been talking to the Police and Security authorities, but in the end they have been told it is the staff of the embassies who control the process, and for example the Spanish Consulate in Shanghai reported that they have difficulties in differentiating legitimate and forged documents due to the large amount of applications (overload) and scarce resources.

³ EUROPE. (2008). *European Parliament and of the Council establishing an action programme for the enhancement of quality in higher education and the promotion of intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries (Erasmus Mundus) (2009-2013)*. ((2008/C 204/18), August 9) European Commission, [cited August 16 2008]. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:204:0085:0088:EN:PDF>

⁴ EUROPE. (2007d). Proposal for a DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL establishing an action programme for the enhancement of quality in HE and the promotion of intercultural understanding through co-operation with Third Countries (Erasmus Mundus) (2009-2013). (COM(2007) 395 final, July 12) European Commission, [cited August 6 2008]. http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/doc/com395_en.pdf

Programme Coordinators can provide guidance and support through formal communications, such as in the AMASE Course students told us of significant problems in obtaining visas to study in Europe and also noted how course teams at different locations had assisted them in overcoming problems. In Lulea the course team helped them to apply for a French visa. When first going to Lulea students from Malaysia and Vietnam said they were given an offer letter which they took to the Swedish Embassy in their home country.

Students in all courses were vociferous about the extent to which they experienced problems with visa applications, even extending in some cases to a requirement by the second year country that students return to their home country in Asia to apply for the visa.

1.1.6 Placements and Internships

The challenge: “How can **internships and placements** be a key attractor that motivates students to apply to the course, both **enriching the learning experience** of the students and to prepare them for real-world working environments?”

Internships and placements benefit all parties involved. For students it provides a valuable opportunity to link theory with practice and to experience commercial cultures in Europe. For the academics involved the students can be valuable and highly skilled capacity in joint research projects with industry. For industry the students bring new knowledge, both in terms of their academic training and in terms of the information they can contribute about the market in their home country.

The checklist for action:

- *Use a structured process for obtaining placements or internships*
- *Make the placement/internship system flexible and diverse so that the academic needs of the students are satisfied*
- *Create or structure the existing placement/internship vetting system*
- *Capture, structure, and learn from student feedback on placement/internship*
- *Ensure that the balance of placement options across participating institutions is fair and appropriate*

Internships and industry placements (we use the term placement generically) are not mandatory, but in most of the courses visited **placements and internships clearly add value**. This was confirmed by the CODE team in Trento, where internships are an integral part of the Master course and provide essential practical experience with a relevant employer. Partner universities provide extensive support in setting up internships and in mentoring students.

The NOHA team in Deusto also highlight the advantages of internships. Deusto have agreements with NGOs for internship periods for its students. These include the Red Cross, MSF, UNICEF, Oxfam and other international NGOs, as well as local NGOs. This **enhances the employability of students** as this is a valuable experience in the labour market. They can also obtain employment in the institution where they undertook the internship.

Internships provide additional value, because the staff in the placement organisations can act as assessors of the competences and skills acquired by the students during the Masters Course, and the relevance of these skills to industry or to professions.

It is important that students feel there is a consistency in the availability of internships across a consortium, or else that there are clearly justified reasons for that not to be the case. For example it can be difficult to arrange industry placements in Sweden, since most of the students do not speak Swedish to a level where they can engage effectively in a company, and thus it is difficult to locate suitable host companies.

There also is a balance to be found between deciding for students where they will be placed, and encouraging them to explore the options themselves. In Groningen on the NOHA Course students are encouraged to use the University internship office in person and encouraged to think creatively about the organisations (not restricting their thinking by the provision of a closed list of organisations) where they would like to undertake their internship and improve their job-searching skills.

Moreover, students come to the programme from very different backgrounds and providing a central list of preferred organisations may not be suitable. Some former NOHA students are currently also now in a position to offer internships to those undertaking the programme.

The Course Web site can be a useful forum for internship information, and on MESPOM in Budapest the Web site has a space for a clearing house for student internships. It shows potential host information and the information on what students are looking for.

1.1.7 Student Finances

The challenge: “How can the Course ensure that the **finance is allocated according to academic priorities**, that students do not experience **financial hardship**, and help students to avoid confusion regarding **local regulations**?”

The allocation of finance in most courses is undertaken by simple division among the partners. However, an excellent course works within the constraints of institutional practice (and the practice also can be national, such as that in Scandinavian countries where course fees are not permitted) to allocate the finance on the basis of the academic needs and priorities of the course.

In addition, whatever the level of finance paid to students through their scholarship, there is often a time-lag between them being required to pay in advance of arriving in Europe (for example for accommodation) and actually receiving their scholarship money. That also links to the need for them to obtain bank accounts into which the scholarship can be paid and to register for local essential services such as doctors.

The checklist for action:

- *Allocate the finance transparently and efficiently across the institutions so that the money is linked to the delivery of the Course objectives*
- *During the recruitment and induction processes, inform and support students in areas of finance and financial management*
- *Be aware of and provide interventions for, any particular issues such as insurances (health or others required by national legislation) and local residency regulations, that might be confronted by students*
- *Organise in advance the financial distribution mechanisms among partners,*
- *Prepare the banking facilities/arrangements for the third-country students before arrival,*
- *Ensure that the EU insurance scheme is comprehensive enough and if not, prepare for additional social security coverage*

Money matters in attracting the best third country students, but so does receiving assistance in **helping students cope with the uneven flow of money** and with **the challenge of learning a new language as well as studying in a different academic and cultural environment**. In this context both the Departments and the Institutions can enhance the student experience.

Financial issues concern scholarship levels and their relative value to students in each country. Another financial consideration is the provision of financial assistance to the students. When considering, the Erasmus Mundus Course students noted that the USA remains a more attractive academic option. Important criteria that encouraged them to select Europe were: the scholarship amount; the course content and scholarship levels; a clear match of the course to the student's own intended career area; a clear entry possibility into PhD research, the double degree; and the chance to live and study in two countries.

There is a finite pool of scholarships. However it may be possible to expand the opportunities for more students by securing other funding. For example in the MERIT course at UP Catalunya, with regard to scholarships, non-EU students receive €21k per year. A regional bank offers studentships at €1370/month plus €630 installation and student fees. An internal scholarship fund is provided by institutions, with 3 per institution (12 in total for the course), based on ranking the reserve list. This covers course fees. MERIT provides support to students in applying for scholarships.

The **relative cost of living between different countries has a direct impact on the value of the scholarship** for students on Erasmus Mundus Courses. This is especially the case in countries such as Sweden, where no tuition fees are applied and the level of the Erasmus Mundus grant appears relatively high, at €21,000. However, the Erasmus Mundus Programme was designed by the Commission to operate using a flat rate, so that the administrative burden in distributing grants is not too onerous. Consequently, students on courses where course fees are applied may feel that their grant is 'worth' less than students on courses where fees are not charged across all partner sites. In light of this, students need to be informed of the reasons for the disparities and reassured that in spite of these they are being delivered value across the consortium.

Of rather more direct concern to students is **the stage at which they can actually access their scholarship money**. Some significant costs (such as bonds for accommodation) can be required before students arrive in Europe and the bureaucratic process involved in authorising payments can result in late access to finance. Universities can be proactive in minimising the impact on their students. The NOHA Course at University of Dublin puts great care into the well-being of its students and ensures that the Erasmus Mundus student grant is paid to students, even if the EU has not paid the University yet.

On the same Course at University of Groningen, **the University pre-finances the transfer of grants to Erasmus Mundus students on a monthly basis**. Flight cost can also, on request, be advanced by the University for Erasmus Mundus students and the costs are then deducted from their grant allocation.

Underpinning the students' ability to focus on their studies, are quality processes that ensure their general well-being. The many **national and local practices for registration in the local community** mean that students can find it challenging when registering with local services.

Students noted that they experience significant logistical challenges in registering within the local community and integrating within it, and for residence and services.

It may be possible to deal centrally with health insurance, and this is the case in the NOHA Course at University of Dublin the health insurance is compulsory for the students, and is organised by the University.

It is important to **make sure that students are prepared for some of the complexities and idiosyncrasies of local regulations**. For example, in one country students informed us of requirements for third country students to obtain a medical certificate proving that they do not have a number of diseases, but the certificate is only available after consultation with a local doctor. This is patently illogical, if an EU resident with tuberculosis can travel freely around Europe and when the students are not allowed to obtain a medical certificate in their home country to show that they are clear of disease. Students argued that those who have a disease will have infected people between the time of arrival and seeing a doctor.

Getting to Europe is a problem. Becoming legally settled into the local community also is a challenge, and again the students have to negotiate a multitude of different **local registration requirements**. MERIT students in Turin told us that the issue of residence permits was a source of concern, because of the long delays often experienced in obtaining it. Lacking a permit means students cannot travel outside Italy. While the University did all it could, the permits were issued centrally and delays sometimes meant permits were received only just before the end of the mobility period in Italy.

Students in many locations noted **big challenges in opening bank accounts** (which require evidence of accommodation and bills from services such as electricity), and registering for local services. It is to the credit of many Programme Coordinators that they invest so much time and effort into helping students to overcome the many mobility challenges, but as the European Parliament Communication shows, it requires more central strategic attention.

Lastly, Courses need to **prepare students well in advance for the formal processes of approval by the Commission**. On one course we were told of two good students who were lost due to late decisions by the Commission, although the new Phase 2 of Erasmus Mundus is addressing this through a faster decision-making process. Also, in 2007 a student from Cuba gave up trying due to logistical and bureaucratic problems in securing permission.

1.1.8 Communicating and consulting with students

The challenge: “What processes and procedures are needed to ensure that there is consistent communication and consultation that is coherent across the consortium?”

Excellent students from third countries have much to **contribute to further developing the excellence of a course**. The students are often more mature than domestic students, they have much more experience of international studying, and they are generally very focused on obtaining the maximum value from their studies.

Therefore Courses need to **plan and implement robust student consultation across the consortium**, using **communication channels** that students most prefer. Furthermore, the consultation needs to result in **demonstrable outcomes** that are relevant to enhancing the learning and teaching environment for the students.

The checklist for action:

- *Implement efficient systems to support to learning and student-based Course evaluation*
- *Create opportunities for dialogue with students, and value the perception of students about the usefulness of information systems, with equal weight to that of teaching staff*
- *The information system in place is “fit for purpose” and regularly reviewed, it is timely, accurate and regularly updated*
- *Consult students regularly about the effectiveness of the support provided to them*

At the most general level Courses can informally consult with students, but that only generates unstructured and general outcomes. While there may be an “open door” policy of access to staff, and occasional staff-student consultation meetings, they provide little differentiation across teaching, learning, and curriculum content. They certainly do not help to identify any uneven standards across the consortium.

At the personal level, student evaluation requires a clear line of communication. For instance, in MERIT at UoT there is a **‘Student ombudsman’** who is formally a component of QA activity and takes their authority from students and colleagues to address any aspects that are not working.

The next level is one of process, where **the nature of the consultation needs to link to outcomes that have value to students**. There is little point in students completing questionnaires about the Course modules, only to receive limited feedback and to be told that the feedback is only assessed locally because there is no formal University process of Course evaluation. This does not encourage students to engage with the evaluation process and as a result, response rates will be low.

So, student assessment should be linked to outcomes relevant to the students and to benefit future students. It should be anonymous and collected effectively. For example, in Budapest for MESPOM students, student feedback was originally collected on paper, but now **student feedback is collected online via ‘Survey Monkey’ software**.

For MERIT at Turin the student contribution has clear linkage to outcomes for the staff and anonymous student surveys are used. The student survey system has been in place for more than 15 years. Institutionally, **the performance of individual professors is monitored and appropriate measures are taken where there are problems**. There is **an institutional board for the evaluation of student feedback that includes student representatives**. The explanations provided showed clearly that this analysis of the data results in concrete reactions from the deans of the faculties, for example in the case of staff underperformance.

For AMASE there is a pan-consortium process. Saarbrücken (UoS) has developed a pan-AMASE questionnaire and students who went to UoS were given a presentation of the results. The impression given is that the Erasmus Mundus students are more constructive in their views than EU domestic students.

1.1.9 Benefitting from Alumni

The challenge: “How can past students remain embedded in the development of the Course and how can their experience be recovered so that current students can benefit?”

An Alumni Association can risk being a passive list of past students who occasionally meet at events. Of more importance is to ensure that **past students retain an identifiable commitment to the course**, through activities such as securing sponsorship, finance, providing opportunities for placements and recruiting students.

Furthermore, past students can feed back their experience of the Course as an entity (as opposed to conventional student consultation at each Course site) and can provide guidance on policy and business trends that help the course to **keep the curriculum at the research and application frontier**.

The checklist for action:

- *Put a system in place to build, and manage, a sustainable alumni association for graduates of the Courses*
- *Ensure that the alumni association in place is active and is “fit for purpose”. For example, providing facilities for career advice and dealing with “post-course” issues are in place as part of Course administration*

Alumni are a rich source of support for current students and alumni can also enrich a Course through the contacts and skills they can contribute as they develop their careers. The NOHA Alumni Association supports students well after they have finished their programme and offers information about different aspects, such as employment offers. It can also serve as a useful point of contact for students who are moving to a new destination and can learn about NOHA students in the area where they are going.

The role of an individual Course Alumni Association is noted elsewhere in this document, for example in providing assistance in internships. At the level of the Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association, who provided excellent students to accompany us on our visits, course students have also suggested that a wider service function is developed to coordinate advice about such issues as visas and mobility across the whole programme.

The students we met regard the Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association more as a consultative forum. Student representatives attend meetings of the Association. They seek views from their peers locally, although they often receive little response from other students. Instead the students encourage the Alumni Association to become an organisation that focuses on services to its stakeholders. They see **value in it coordinating information relating to visas and mobility, in sharing information across students and in communicating student problems to the Commission**, in a way that generates action.

1.2 Quality of Leadership and Institutions (QUIL)

QCLI concerns the people who make the Course a success – the students and the staff. A Course is of little value unless it attracts and energises students of the highest quality. This requires a detailed understanding of why students may apply for the course, effective assessment and approval their applications using the most robust information possible, ensuring that their cultural differences contribute to a well-integrated student community and working with the students to deliver value that leads to successful career paths.

From the staff perspective there is the assembling of a high quality team, with research and teaching competences that are successful across cultural boundaries. The construction of an Erasmus Mundus Course is further enabled by specific leadership qualities in key personnel. Leadership is a key mechanism to ‘glue together’ the consortium and also provides strategic direction in the future sustainability of the Course. Supporting the staff will be Institutional policies

and practices that demonstrate clearly that an Erasmus Mundus Course is both valued by the institutions and that participating in the Course will have a direct impact on staff career paths.

1.2.1 The highest quality academic staff

The challenge: “How can we recruit the best staff from across the consortium to teach on the Erasmus Mundus Course?”

This is not as simple as it sounds. The best researchers often have significant demand on their time that means they prioritise research over teaching, and to secure their participation in teaching the course the consortium needs to develop strategies that **engage and retain research and teaching excellence**.

The checklist for action:

- *Secure the highest quality staff from the relevant disciplines across the institutions*
- *Build an Erasmus Mundus academic quality cluster with research as well as teaching and administration credentials*

Academics with strong research and teaching competencies, who have strong research links with industry and business, and who can work across institutional and cultural boundaries, **are an ‘a priori’ requirement for a successful Master Course**.

The value that this delivers is evident on the MESPOM Course. All the **partners have experience in delivering courses to international students and working together enables the exploitation of synergies**, to create a high quality (excellent) Course. For example, by studying in a mix of European locations, students are able to gain different perspectives (Western, Northern, Central and Southern European) on the subject. This is a particular attraction in comparison to studying in America.

The act of building these diverse competencies into a ‘course identity’ is what then makes it possible to deliver not just a successful Master course, but a successful Erasmus Mundus Master Course. For the MERIT consortium, their joint membership of the Cluster.org⁵ meant that **the consortium was already ‘socialised’ and could then accelerate the planning and delivery of an international Course**. Cluster.org membership helped them to produce a competence matrix for the Course members, covering teaching, research and project involvement. UPC also uses this to develop collaboration with other universities, such as a dual degree with Georgia Tech (USA) and the UPC Faculty of Informatics. China is now a major target area for collaboration.

For the TROPED course in Copenhagen (UoC), there was a basis of previous development where in 1987 the Danish National Body of Health, NGOs and the Red Cross requested courses in tropical diseases. The first diploma course was established at the University, but needed assistance in delivering it. Links were established with Bergen and Stockholm, with contributions from London and Liverpool. The course ran in 1989, 1991, 1993, and 1995, and in 1998 there was a vision for a Master course in International Health, which was launched in 1999.

Blending the diverse range of academics into an identifiable ‘team’ requires both leadership and a set of behaviours that allow collaboration. For NOHA at UoG, the team was highly self-critical in a formative and proactive sense. There was an atmosphere of **openness and a constructively**

⁵ <http://www.cluster.org/> “12 leading universities of Science and Technology working together”

critical exchange of ideas. The team demonstrated a commitment to 'change' via dialogue and by being open to new ideas from other settings.

And the culture can extend beyond the academic team to create a culture of togetherness across the course. This was evident at UoS where the AMASE **students praised the intimate academic relationship that they had with staff, the strong pastoral support and the feeling that they are treated as equals.** Similarly, at LUT, students highlighted the friendly environment where they felt they were treated as responsible adults. These views were also expressed by TROPED students at UoC where they benefited from extensive interaction with staff in Copenhagen. The students regard the **course administrator as being very supportive.** They feel that they are treated as equals by the course team and they note that the course team members are readily available for communication.

1.2.2 Creating a Strong Course 'Brand'

The challenge: "How can the Course identity be created and marketed, so that excellent third country students work with excellent academics, in creating a definable educational brand that host institutions value strategically?"

Courses need to understand how their **marketing and promotional activities were perceived by the 'consumers'** – the prospective students. There should also be mechanisms in place to understand the **personal and the academic motivations for students to come to Europe** and to feed this information back into the marketing process. Students should be persuaded of the value that will be delivered to them, for example in terms of their **career value.**

The checklist for action:

- *Make Erasmus Mundus a brand that attracts exceptional students, who are attracted by the prospect of studying at high quality institutions, with high quality staff, on a course with relevant and robust content*
- *Ensure that the host institutions see Erasmus Mundus as an opportunity to build their own academic quality by bringing in the brightest and best qualified students*
- *Maximise the utility of the course Web site in creating a strong course brand,*
- *Engage relevant professional bodies, and international associations in the constitution of a brand name for the course*

The students we met during our programme of visits were exceptional people. We asked them 'Why come to Europe to study?' Responses included: to become an international citizen and researcher; experiencing courses that link theory to real-world applications using world-class facilities and infrastructure; being challenged by different academic cultures and learning to adapt intellectually and academically. There were particularly personal motives, such as getting away from the control of parents and 'becoming an individual'. However, an over-riding attraction that enables this to happen is the level of scholarship and students expressed that if it had been lower they would have considered other options.

The students have, to a large extent, been the most significant agents in making the Courses 'join-up'. They are clear in the reasons why they select Europe rather than North America for their studies and this goes well beyond the important levels of the scholarship. Students highlighted the great benefit of the **multicultural nature of the student population in the Master Courses** and **the collaborative environment** constructed by them. The students are very capable at self-organisation and have shared information relating to accommodation, travel and visas.

Put these characteristics together with an excellent Course environment and a rich academic experience can be created. For example on MESPOM at IIEE (Lund), the focus on the individual, which continues beyond admissions and throughout the delivery of the course, is extended beyond graduation to the course alumni. This was felt to be quite unusual for Higher Education. As a result, MESPOM students were said to be 'special', particularly for their commitment to the environment and also for their sense of 'community'.

For the AMASE Course, the combination of excellent students with excellent opportunities is evident. Erasmus Mundus masters students provide research inputs via the projects they carry out prior to the second-year thesis. So **theoretical and experimental work is closely linked with teaching and learning** and students are given the opportunity to analyse "real-world" technical problems including: work related to the space shuttle programme; involvement with collaborative projects with the US Air Force; and projects on aero engines, wind turbines and the Swedish "stealth" warship "Visby".

Students can see value also in the context of their career prospects. On the TROPED course we were told that students can experience considerable career benefit back in their home countries. 29 students from Ghana have been on the main TROPED course, including nurses and midwives, and their gender empowerment was considerable on return – **the Master qualification increased their 'bargaining power' back in their home organisations**. Therefore there was organisational change back home by re-plugging staff into their roles with a new authority, based on their new qualification. In addition, some were given higher impact jobs as the result and the extra evidence-based skills changed their power relationship.

Therefore, **the combination of excellent research and teaching networks of excellence, the level of scholarship provided and the variety of academic and cultural experiences through the mobility, persuade the students that Erasmus Mundus remains cost beneficial in coping with the personal challenges in moving to Europe** and dealing with the significant bureaucratic overheads.

Many students remain in Europe to research for PhDs. This helps build research capacity for both students and departments and this was generally evident across the Departments we visited. For example, students on the AMASE course felt that there were several opportunities to continue into PhD research at UoS and many were considering this study option. They expressed the view that staff and current PhD students were keen to highlight research opportunities to AMASE students and support them in applications for these positions.

It is important therefore that **students clearly see that good career potential is a characteristic of the course**. Details of alumni career paths can be posted on the course Web site to encourage new students to apply as it showed that the course facilitates strong career prospects. On MESPOM each year a careers fair is held at CEU, where international companies from a range of sectors based in Hungary exhibit. AMASE at INPL monitors and communicates student destinations. The general expectation is that students will move to industry after graduation: 69% go to industry, 22% to PhD research, 3% are in transition with jobs, and 3% are unknown and 30 former students work in the European Patent Office in The Hague.

1.2.3 Securing and Institutional Commitment

The challenge: “How can the Course ensure that there is institutional commitment for sustainability, and that this commitment is clearly articulated across the consortium?”

An Erasmus Mundus course is never likely to be a ‘profit centre’ for a University, indeed significant extra resources often have to be committed to the course. Therefore, there needs to be **clear recognition by all institutions that the course has strategic value**; that it fits into the **learning, teaching, and research strategies**; and that **senior staff** in the institutions articulate the importance of the course throughout the institution.

The checklist for action:

- *Ensure that the Course has wide recognition at institutional level and is fully embedded into university structures*
- *Ensure that the Course fits within an institutional strategy that values its international reach and educational objectives*
- *There is long-term buy-in for Erasmus Mundus by the people who matter in the participating host institutions*
- *Identify senior players in key academic positions, who can take on a role as champions for Erasmus Mundus*

Institutional ‘buy-in’ is an important component both in creating and sustaining an Erasmus Mundus Course. In the creation stage, the Institution can provide authority, but it can also delegate, giving power and flexibility to the course team. For example, on the NOHA Course at Dublin, UCD staff highlighted that the university has shown much flexibility in relation to NOHA. Thus, the programme has been built to suit the consortium needs, rather than UCD regulations. The University has decided to accept “what was there” and not interfere with the programme in terms of time-table, etc.

In some academic cultures where there is strong autonomy at Faculty or Departmental level, there is not necessarily the need for high-level support to create a Course, but we were informed that situations can change. For example, support is seen as lacking where Universities take a harder line on financial sustainability of Master courses. However, the general picture is one of **strong institutional support at many levels**, such as for AMASE at INPL, where the government of Lorraine has produced a document about European collaboration and AMASE is highlighted in the document. For NOHA at UCD, there were two mobility dimensions to UCD’s internationalisation strategy during the period 2004-2008. One of them was to provide 15% of UCD’s undergraduate and post-graduate Irish students with an international experience (EU-US-Australia) to broaden their horizons. A second dimension was to increase the number of non-Irish UCD students to 20% of the university students. Erasmus Mundus fitted well with this aim.

Institutional support pervades successful courses. For MESPOM in Budapest CEU has a general **policy to increase the number of joint programmes** delivered by the University, so MESPOM contributes directly to that policy. So far, MESPOM, plus two programmes run by the Gender Studies Department, have the involvement of other prestigious European universities. These are now being registered in Hungary.

For CODE in Trento Erasmus Mundus is a key element of the University's aim to internationalise. There is the full commitment of the Rector and Deans of the three faculties. The Rector lobbied

the European Commission for continuation of Erasmus Mundus, and wrote to the Minister for Education in the new Italian government to promote the case for Erasmus Mundus.

For MERIT in Turin, the UoT has always been active in terms of internationalisation and in sending and receiving students from abroad. Courses were offered in English through an early collaboration with the University of Illinois. An early ICT course was identified as a major attractor for students and it was therefore decided to base the new MERIT degree around that field. At the same time the number of courses available in English expanded to other areas so that currently there are many courses in English across the curriculum. Nevertheless, the availability of courses in English is only one part of developing an excellent course, and it is the coherence of the overall academic offering that contributes to **making the University attractive to overseas students**.

For NOHA at UoG, the commitment of the Rector was clear from the pre-financing provided to the programme when it started in Groningen and the delegation of competencies associated with NOHA, to its Director within the context of the NOHA Brussels-based legal structure. Lastly, at UPC, thirteen Masters are currently taught in English including seven Erasmus Mundus Master Courses. The University sees clear institutional benefits in creating international courses. It is part of UPC **becoming an international university by acquiring as many international students as possible**, since at present 95% of UPC students are from Spain/Cataluña.

1.2.4 Institutional commitment to international teaching and research

The challenge: “How can the course deliver the highest quality of learning and teaching to third country students?”

Courses need not just to develop a **strong curriculum, taught by the best academics**, but to surround it with **world-class resources**, such as libraries and information technology services. The consortium should also provide opportunities at each site, for students to **study real-world applications** in related institutions, in locations such as Science Parks.

The checklist for action:

- *Welcome students as important international members bringing with them an additional contribution to the life of the institutions*
- *Provide an appropriate institutional level commitment in place to ensure that Erasmus Mundus students can expect high standards of support*

Excellent students demand much from Erasmus Mundus courses, as noted on the NOHA course, where the universities recognise the NOHA students by the very high expectation they carry into absolutely every aspect of the course and the university services. On MESPOM at Lund, during the first year at CEU, students are given access to Lund University library’s digital resources. This access is maintained for four years and some of the student representatives suggested that this access to the Lund library during the first year at CEU was a key factor in their decision to attend Lund in the second year. They also praised the opportunity to **access a fund to purchase books they might need for their work**, if these were not already in the library.

On the AMASE course at UoS there is **proximity to a Science Park with start-up companies emerging from University research activities**. The Science Park has won a national best practice award, specialising in biosciences, biochemistry, materials science. The Liebnitz Institute houses the Institute for New Materials. The Fraunhofer Institute for Non-Destructive Testing is on-site and it provides **leading research and consultancy experience for students**. The

European School of Material was established in Germany and is linked to the ESM site in Nancy. The Fraunhofer Institute has a strong emphasis on income generation from industry through consultancy and presently has around 60% of income from industry, 40% from donations, government and EU project funding. Members of staff from the Institute contribute to lectures, carry out research with faculty, and host students for projects and thesis research. The Institute could be said 'to provide on-site industrial internships without the overhead costs of managing remote industrial relationships'.

1.2.5 Continuity and leadership

The challenge: "How can academic leadership be secured to take forward the development of the course and how do the institutions identify and reward teaching excellence, as well as research excellence?"

A successful course needs a strong consortium, with **strong intellectual leadership** and there needs to be a **clear benefit accruing to the senior academics**, who take the initiative to develop challenging Erasmus Mundus Courses. To facilitate their involvement, the institutions need to provide **formal support through recognition and reward** for the investment of time made by course leaders.

The checklist for action:

- *Be sensitive to the opportunity costs experienced by those academics who commit significant time and energy to ensuring the success of the course*
- *Offer institutional recognition for the "teaching intensive" contribution of those academics who commit significant time to Erasmus Mundus*

In an academic environment where research is the activity that generally is most prioritised and rewarded, active engagement with teaching a demanding international Master course can take time away from research.

Nevertheless, there are clear attractions in being part of high-profile courses. The mobility aspect, coupled with the possibility of linking with a wider network of Universities across the world, is seen as an **opportunity for professional and personal development of the staff**. Staff also reported that each year peer reviewed papers or similar publications should be obtained from students' work in collaboration with their tutors, which is a **clear incentive to work with excellent international students**.

However, it is essential that **institutional recognition is given for the time invested in Erasmus Mundus**. In Budapest this is now being considered in terms of staff progression, because to date CEU has quite strict research-focused criteria. However with the new types of activities (such as EM joint courses) the policy for staff progression is being revised and will be developed to compensate for the hard work which goes into this kind of project.

Where a system is clearly in place is in Dublin where UCD has a strong emphasis in quality in both teaching and research. So, although recently the University President has put strong emphasis on research performance, a new track for promotion through excellence in teaching has been created for all academic staff scales. This is important for NOHA staff as they put much emphasis on teaching and student support (and doing transnational academic coordination work), sometimes to the detriment of further research activities.

1.2.6 Succession Strategies

The challenge “How can staff turnover be mitigated across the consortium so that the continuity of the course is maintained?”

A clear strategy needs to be developed in a multi-partner consortium across countries and institutions, so that **staff loss or unavailability** does not lead to a reduction in the academic offering for the students. Furthermore, the individual leadership that characterises excellent courses needs also to have a plan for **sustainable leadership succession**.

The checklist for action:

- *Maintain a robust approach to ensuring the long run sustainability of the consortium that recognises the need for leadership and key staff changes over time*
- *Develop strategies to accommodate short-term leadership changes as well as more fundamental issues for leadership succession*

Erasmus Mundus courses have often emerged out of significant acts of personal leadership, involving teams of academics whose time is in demand and who are very mobile in career terms. Therefore, planning for leadership and team continuity must be a high priority. The NOHA team have addressed this in detail. To ensure that sustainability, the universities involved have explored the following options:

- Maintenance of critical mass in the interdisciplinary teams.
- Development of a cross-university curriculum development teams.
- Development of joint research teams and participation of staff in different activities in the partner universities.
- Closer links with key people in the field and with former students. For example, some of them teach or participate in the Course.
- The development of the Academy and shorter courses as sustainable options.
- Focus on improving quality.
- Maintain a strong institutional anchorage.
- Explore future developments such as doctoral students.
- Decentralise coordination with more staff taking responsibilities for different parts of the administrative development.

The TROPED network **maintains commitment and quality of members through an initial formal accreditation process** and there are site visits to member institutions. In Deusto the Institute on Human Rights was created by UoD as a result of the activity associated with the Master and to give 'anchorage' to the programme. The Course team receive support from the team at the Institute.

Sustainability can, however, be threatened by national political circumstances, which can affect the levels of institutional and political support. There has been a low level of Danish student participation in TROPED because of the issues of course fees, especially since 2007 when Danish Universities must not take fees from students. We were informed that a Danish university had to withdraw from an Erasmus Mundus Course in Forestry so that Danish students could participate in it. It would not be possible to offer the course to Danish students if a Danish University was part of a consortium that charged fees.

One further act to ensure sustainability is through **the agreement of terms for partners both to leave and to join a consortium**. When NOHA recently considered expanding its network it embarked on a series of presentations to potential European partners, to stimulate applications for membership. This strategy was so successful and attracted so much interest to join NOHA, that a second step was necessary to filter candidates. This took the form of a questionnaire sent to interested institutions. Institutions were required to provide information about the existing political support in their University to join NOHA, staff background, specialism (the network was particularly looking for members which were strong in NGO participation in Eastern European countries at that stage), facilities, etc. From the responses to the questionnaire a selection was made.

1.2.7 Financial Sustainability

The challenge: “How can the future sustainability of the course be achieved?”

There is no guarantee that EC funding will be secured in the future, so courses need to develop **flexible financial plans** that aim to secure funding from diverse sources. In addition, financial sustainability should be enhanced during the period of EC funding by securing resources that **add more value to the learning and teaching experience of the students**, thus enhancing the reputation of the course and making it more marketable to future students.

The checklist for action:

- *Develop creative approaches to long-run finance, including considering the prospect of a cessation of Erasmus Mundus funding*
- *Use contacts such as Alumni, Local and Regional Organisations (Grants and Foundations), Business and Industry (Private Capital), to supplement the Erasmus Mundus finance that it receives*

For a University balancing the overall costs of an Erasmus Mundus Course just from course fees can be challenging. Courses are often supported with additional resources by a University because they fit with the broader aims of the institution and its philosophy, showing the institutional commitment on maintaining the Course. However, in some cases **the sustainability of the programme** without EU funding would be ensured as the programme attracts both Erasmus Mundus grantee holders, and also other third country and EU students; the Erasmus Mundus Course can be built upon existing successful models for national Master courses. However, overall **Erasmus Mundus funding and support needs to remain attractive enough to justify engaging with the Scheme**. The focus on finance with these early pioneering courses has to date been more about obtaining additional resources (for example ‘in-kind’ resources for placements and internships), than about long-term sustainability, which will become a key focus as the course matures.

1.3 Quality of Teaching and Learning (QATL)

Excellence in teaching and learning is fundamental in energising high quality third-country students to achieve academic excellence. This is further enhanced by the cultural and social mobility that they experience during their time in Europe. Course consortia should demonstrate flexibility in enhancing teaching and learning through flexible use of the best practices. The curriculum delivered to students needs to have a clear structure, to minimise duplication of course content between partner sites and to focus on the goals of the Bologna process. The teaching and learning objectives should be clearly stated at all levels from Department to Institution.

The course components should, as far as possible, be equally weighted across all partners, as should the methods for assessment, examinations, and feedback of results to students. Academic standards should build on formal local, national and European practice.

1.3.1 Designing an Excellent Curriculum

The challenge: “How can the curriculum be designed and constructed so that it forms an integrated programme? And, how can the Course progression, and Course materials, be designed consistently so that students experience continuity in their learning experience?”

The checklist for action:

- *Document and agree a clear academic design that underpins the entire curriculum*
- *Show how the curriculum can be characterised as an integrated whole with clear links between Course elements wherever taught*
- *Plan the sequencing of the modules and of learning support activities to be consistent with the design*
- *Show how the Course progression clearly underpins student progression to achieve the best learning outcomes*
- *Ensure that Course materials show that academic content is consistent with contemporary knowledge in the relevant disciplines*
- *Update reading lists and other core learning materials consistently across the course*

Erasmus Mundus as a programme is **contributing towards Bologna objectives** through the building of coherent pan-European Master Courses. While the ideal Course is one that is designed from the outset to be Erasmus Mundus, the Courses we visited are early, pioneering Erasmus Mundus Courses where it was very challenging to create full integration and coherence from the outset. It is also clear that achieving the Bologna objectives is not just a process of designing a homogeneous course, but in **building on richness and diversity in a coherent manner**.

While students want more consistency throughout the consortium in support facilities, they do accept that academic diversity (provided that they are well prepared) is beneficial to them. There is a potential paradox between this and the Bologna process. The **students observe that the diversity of the EU experience makes them better global citizens**, especially in times of political and economic uncertainty.

The MESPOM consortium is explicit about diversity: MESPOM is interdisciplinary, and this is a cultural phenomenon. You have to move people from one culture to another. You have to show them how science works at Manchester, not in classrooms in Budapest. **A truly interdisciplinary ‘European’ course cannot be delivered by one institution.**

The MERIT course was launched at the same time as Bologna, so from that early stage the consortium has followed a dual path of **working together pragmatically to improve integration** and following the official institutional routes to formalise the processes. While the Master has been built on existing experience, a large percentage of the subjects are brand new, created exclusively for the Master. UPC (Barcelona) has awarded 4-6 national students each academic year with a scholarship to support professors in developing academic material. At the University of Karlsruhe the master was also new. AT UCL and UPC, MERIT is strongly based on the existing Bologna masters on Electrical Engineering.

For the CODE course there is a team-based progression towards Bologna. **The team progressively reduces inefficiencies through shared learning practices and standards**, through making it easier for students to access consistent learning and learning resources. The mobility of teachers makes it easier to use capacity tactically and to construct a course offering that minimises duplication, and which maximises the availability of staff expertise to students.

With the development of the AMASE programme, LUT has also made efforts to renew the curriculum structure of the Masters programme. The previous situation was hard to sustain as it was characterized by a large number of courses and a small number of students. However, with the AMASE programme, the number of curriculum units was reduced, having in mind the mobility requirements, and it was decided to adopt English as the main working language from the beginning.

1.3.2 Communicating Course Objectives and Outcomes

The challenge: “How can the Course objectives be defined in a way that achieves an integrated Course, yet respects the institutional priorities of each partner?”

The checklist for action:

- *Set out and clearly document the objectives for the Course*
- *Communicate the Course objectives and expected outcomes to teachers and learners*
- *Teaching and learning activities are appropriately aligned with course objectives and learning outcomes*

The six courses we surveyed display a range of objectives, but in all of them the **focus on clearly agreed objectives across the consortium is a key foundation for success**. Furthermore, for each partner site there may be locally-relevant objectives and this makes it even more important that the **individual objectives are negotiated into a formal consortium agreement**.

For example, a key motivation for LUT at Lulea in Sweden to participate on the AMASE course is the strong competition between higher education institutions within Sweden. The course leaders explained how recruitment of students in Sweden was becoming increasingly difficult due to the high quality of institutions and competitive recruitment strategies. Erasmus Mundus provides **opportunities to recruit extremely high-calibre graduates from outside of Sweden**.

For the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam, the TROPED Erasmus Mundus Course provides visibility for the Institution which is not core funded. KIT is ‘output funded’ by the Ministry and is dependent on project funding, tenders and other contract sources such as the World Bank, DANIDA, and DfID. The Course **provides an important label of quality that strengthens their case for funding**.

The CODE course emerged from previous Masters programme on Local Development in the Balkans. It has expanded the focus of this course to make it international in focus – strengthening the partnership and **providing greater international credibility and visibility**.

Clearly formalised processes for agreeing objectives for MESPOM were reported at the Lulea visit:

- Purpose – agreement on the purpose of the course is perhaps the most important part, but is often the element which is least discussed. As a joint course, partners were forced to discuss the purpose and explain it to themselves and to the outside world.
- People – the course must relate to both faculty (producers) and to students (consumers).
- Practice – MESPOM enables students to connect their thinking to practice. It also gives them access to networks which can assist them in terms of career development.
- Pattern – developing and delivering MESPOM implied both making new patterns (i.e. new ways of working) and breaking old patterns (re-assessing how things had been done in the past).

Institutional objectives are important and for some universities the **need to expand their international profile** fits in well with the Erasmus Mundus Brand. UoD supported participation in the Erasmus Mundus programme because it allowed the NOHA programme to **attract students from all over the world**. For UPC in Barcelona, there was a similar desire to maximise the participation of international students in a Catalan University and the MERIT Course was one way to achieve that objective.

The UPC Department is an active research group, which aims to combine both research and teaching strengths. The size of the Department provides economies of scale that help support the Erasmus Mundus Course. The **Departmental strategy had identified the need for a research oriented Master degree**, and they view this as a natural linkage between Bachelors and PhD programmes. The relevance of this Master for the Department is evident in that 50% of the faculty work at some time on this Course.

Complementing the University-wide objectives will be those relevant to individual Departments. On the AMASE Course at Nancy, the Department EEIGM is a graduate engineering school with a predominant focus on industry. In an environment where it is difficult to attract French graduate students to a Master course, **the Erasmus Mundus programme is producing potential international researchers**, through the use of the EEIGM course in year 1 and the Master thesis in year 2. For the CODE Course at Budapest, the Department approach is to keep teaching and research strongly linked and Erasmus Mundus offers the chance to help **transform the Department into a graduate school**.

1.3.3 Consistent Assessment Methods

The challenge: “How can the different academic practices at partner sites be resolved so that the students are provided with consistency in their workload across institutions and so that their work will be assessed consistently throughout their period of study?”

The checklist for action:

- *Show how the assessment weightings given to Course elements are carefully adjusted to the balance of the overall curriculum*

- *Communicate the marking, assessment, and feedback criteria to students*
- *Show how the assessment criteria meet the objectives of ECTS⁶*
- *Justify how assessment weightings take workloads and Course progression properly into account*
- *Document how the assessment weightings are designed to take account of the different backgrounds of the students*
- *Plan a review process for Course weightings to ensure continuous improvement of the Course*
- Provide transparent information to students about assessment and examination loads, marking methods, and timetable

Earlier sections have noted the challenges of welcoming Third Country students into the European academic environment. However, the 'academic environment' is not homogeneous and it has been acknowledged that exposure to a diversity of experiences can be valuable for students. In some areas, however, consistency is also valuable and one of the key areas relates to the ways in which student work is assessed and the ways in which they receive feedback about their work.

Students have been quite clear about their needs: **students need to know the criteria on which their work is being assessed; students want to know that when they submit work for marking it will be returned in a timely fashion** (put bluntly, why should students have to observe work deadlines if staff do not also observe marking deadlines); and **when work is returned with a mark, the students need sufficient comments to show why the mark is given** and to understand where they could have improved their work (comments should be focused on positive reinforcement, rather than negative criticism).

What is planned needs to be put into action and in this area students can be quite critical. Students on some courses told us that the feedback often was inconsistent between partner sites. Some students noted that there was little feedback received on assignments, some delays in actually receiving grades and that whilst some professors gave feedback on work, some didn't. Individual staff set work independently and set their own submission deadlines.

Students regarded some examination timetables as being intensive, reporting occasions where several exams are scheduled on the same day. These students would welcome more time to prepare for exams. Students wanted to know why they got the results they did. They need good feedback not just on formally submitted work ('summative' work where marks contribute to their degree), but also to other 'formative' work such as laboratory exercises. More formative assessment and more elaborate feedback would certainly enhance the student experience.

For the MERIT course, the need to be consistent is clearly stated. There is **a systematic process across the consortium for agreeing marking criteria** and this is noted in the consortium agreement. Similarly with MESPOM there is robust marking of dissertations, which undergo double marking and a moderator oversees significant differences in the marks allocated. Also in MESPOM marking criteria are defined to ensure that marking is consistent across the universities.

On the MESPOM Course in Lund, the students expressed praise for the quality of assessment, noting that the **feedback given was individual and detailed**, often challenging students on their

⁶ ECTS (see http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48_en.htm) is the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, which "makes teaching and learning more transparent and facilitates the recognition of studies (formal, non-formal and informal)".

work, which “pushes you further”. In order to promote consistency in the grading of final dissertations, a **standard marking template** was devised by MESPOM and there is a **formal document outlining the Examining Board Procedures**. In addition, **cross-reading of student assignments is carried out across partner sites**, which has enabled the teachers to gain an understanding of partner institutions’ grading systems and scales.

On the TROPED course at UoC, they must comply with a regulation that all Danish courses must have **fixed dates for the submission of work by students and return of marks to them by staff**. This further demonstrates that the variability of practice can be a function of the national educational framework, but it also suggests that excellent Erasmus Mundus Courses will aim at least to **build a coherent assessment process up to the standard of the best partner**.

As well as knowing that their work is being marked against consistent and clearly communicated criteria, students also want to know that their work counts consistently towards their final degree. It does not convince students that consistency is in place if a 3000-word essay counts differently towards their degree outcome in two partner sites. Here the ECTS goals have been influential.

For the early Erasmus Mundus Courses, the progression towards ECTS has been challenging. In the MERIT course the ECTS grading system is not as yet fully applied in the consortium proportionally, but has been used more as a grading system that has been adapted progressively to the different national grading systems. The national grading system had to be adapted for MERIT. In Belgium it is possible that a student obtaining 9 over 20 can be awarded a “pass” mark in exceptional cases.

This corresponds to the approach of other countries such as the “passed” mark that was awarded some years before in the United Kingdom for students obtaining from 40% to 50%. In most of European countries a mark of less than the half corresponds to a failure and UCL has decided not to allow giving a passed mark if a 9/20 is obtained. Therefore, **a process of negotiated compromise over marking systems is a pragmatic part of the journey towards coherence**.

In the NOHA Curriculum development process, active negotiation is evident. Lecturers involved in the different modules have provided comprehensive and detailed outlines of their courses and learning objectives, in terms of competences. As a result, each university involved in NOHA has been able to create similar learning activities, with a common logic and approach and **common learning outcomes. Students are provided with lists of the competences they are expected to develop, with relevant indicators and descriptors**.

The NOHA network has participated in training organised by the Programme Coordinator, an ECTS national counsellor. Also within the institutions of the network there are three **ECTS counsellors who undertake 'quality checks'** that include the use of the grading scale which the network has decided to use.

For the MESPOM Course the Consortium worked on mapping **grades across partner universities**. An external examiner indicated that the outcome was satisfactorily mapped to ECTS. The most difficult point to agree on was how to identify distinctions. As distinctions are awarded in the UK but not in other countries, this was submitted to the University Administration at Manchester for approval.

For the NOHA Course there were other negotiations and compromises necessary. The length of the programme has been a point of discussion within the consortium. Sweden and Belgium, countries where partners in NOHA are located, limit the time of their Master programmes to either 60 or 120 ECTS credits. In the case of Sweden, the Ministry of Education was informed of the

commitments to the NOHA programme and the Ministry did not enforce an immediate move from 90 into a 120 ECTS degree programme. The NOHA degree programme has a duration equivalent to 90 ECTS, delivered in 3 semesters:

- Intensive programme (5 ECTS) – all students in one university (rotating per year)-
- Core programme (25 ECTS) –each student is based in its university of enrolment
- Specialisation (30 ECTS) –each student in any of the universities of the programme
- Research/ internship (30 ECTS)-each student, in a NOHA university or a humanitarian aid organisation

1.3.4 Formal Course Review

The challenge: “What arrangements need to be in place to ensure that the Course benefits from institutional review and independent external review⁷, in a way that takes into account the diversity of institutional practices?”

The checklist for action:

- *Design the curriculum so that it is sufficiently flexible to allow for a reasonable degree of institutional difference in the participating universities*
- *Plan for inevitable variations in staff availabilities over time*
- *Plan flexibility in the curriculum and the staff structure to cope with the unexpected*
- *Implement a regular system of independent external review of assessment and quality control*
- *Encourage and support opportunities for student review of the course design, involving both current and former students*

The process of curriculum design has in part been addressed through the considerations of content, Bologna and ECTS. In this section the emphasis is on the process of **engaging critically, constructive external advice, so that the consortium can benefit from independent guidance**. There are three levels of Review activity, which are focused on ‘local’ (the students and their Institutions), National (for the Consortium and through national organisations), and European. Student consultation has been partly covered under the FLAF section ‘Communicating and Consulting with Students’.

The NOHA Consortium have structured the process of curriculum design in a process of ongoing review. The need for constant updating and reflection, coming from teaching experience, inspired the creation of the NOHA Curriculum Development Taskforce in 2004. It is supervised by the Advisory Board and members are nominated by the Board of Directors, which has overall responsibility for the programme. It is composed of one member of the teaching staff per university.

On the MERIT Course, UPC in Barcelona has an established formal University-level process of **student appraisal of courses and teaching**, where there can be some impact on the salary of teaching staff if poor student appraisal is experienced consistently. The “Education Premium”, a monthly salary increase, can be given to professors every five years after positive evaluation of academic performance.

⁷ External Review can include review by independent bodies such as national professional associations or quality assurance agencies, and can also involve a review by a group of independent experts recruited by a course. For the purposes of Erasmus Mundus the external review process is ideally implemented across the course and the partner sites.

At KIT in Amsterdam, on the TROPED Course there is structured student assessment of teaching. After each lecture there is a feedback form. The information from the forms is given to lecturers on a regular basis, along with the comments. The **teachers tell the next group of students what has changed since the last course**. The feedback from core courses is discussed with students and overall Course scores are published in the Course handbook. Poor scores are discussed with the staff involved and actions planned.

At UOT (Turin), on the MERIT course, there is an annual analysis of feedback on courses from students who complete a questionnaire. There is also a Faculty **committee where issues can be discussed and degree courses modified if necessary**.

In the context of student evaluation there is the issue of participation rates. In the AMASE Course at Lulea there is a system already in place to record course evaluations by students, although response rates are low. Yet, students who we met praised the teaching and learning environment. The LUT quality evaluation process is complemented by the AMASE internal and external quality assessment procedures. Students are invited to complete a questionnaire at the end of the year and they receive feedback on its results. However, it is important to emphasise that **students must be sufficiently motivated by the review process to participate**.

Formal review processes at an Institution level can at the same time both contribute to good practice (if the experience is shared across the consortium) and also make consortium-wide practice more difficult, by imposing local administrative procedures on a Course. At LUT, on the AMASE Course, the University quality assurance team is pressing for more systematic documentation in the shape of the PDSA ("Plan, Do, Study, Act") model being introduced for the University as a whole. This is used to plan with the student, conduct and to follow up and improve the programme, together with both students and the consortium.

Internal Audits also will evaluate particular local components of a Course and for KIT in Amsterdam, on the TROPED Course, the Free University of Amsterdam carried out an internal audit of the TROPED Course in 2006, this confirmed the quality of the Course.

At the national level, for TROPED at UoC, ACE Denmark will accredit all 900 Danish academic programmes over the next 5-7 years. The formal quality assessment will focus on relevance. The University is developing a central approach to quality assurance and a pilot phase is underway, where some programmes are being assessed. **Subject benchmark statements** are also being developed.

Italy previously did not have a national agency responsible for overseeing quality assurance in higher education, but this is being addressed in a new system to be implemented in the sector. At UoT, on the MERIT Course, the University has collaborated not only with the national authorities on quality assurance developments, but has also carried a range of joint QA development activity with other Italian HE institutions including those in Rome, Bologna and Ferrara, as well as activity internationally. This encompasses "generic" QA, as well as work in the specific field of electronics.

At the consortium level, on the MERIT Course, there is a less structured process of quality assurance. Each partner trusts each other to ensure quality, but there is not a formalised consortium-level system.

For the CODE course there is a structured process for the four partner universities. **An Academic Committee works to ensure quality of course across the partner universities**. Its membership includes independent external experts and examiners. Quality assurance standards

are set for each Course, supported by a “diploma supplement” covering key elements such as procedures, outcomes, programmes and assessment.

For MESPOM there is a **yearly inter-university quality assurance review**. This activity compares the quality of teaching in the partner universities. Students are able to give comments during this process and are given feedback on the issues they raised and how they will be responded to.

A detailed insight into quality assurance structure is provided for the NOHA course. Every university has been, and is being, subjected to internal and external quality assurance systems in agreement to both institutional strategies and national requirements. At European level there is a system of quality assurance for the NOHA programme. This involves a vision of quality, where the constitutional document of the NOHA Association of Universities specifies the strategic objectives to implement its mission and vision. **Responsible Bodies for quality assurance established by the network are an Academic Standards Committee (ASC) and a Programme Evaluation Committee (PEC)**. Activities include:

- Mechanisms for the Standard Committee: This committee sets out each year the materials it requires in order to implement the QA process.
- NOHA Quality Assurance Visitation Procedures or Peer Review: it involves each institution in the Network being visited by an academic from another institution.
- Students’ evaluation of the programme.
- Staff evaluation – self assessment prior to peer review and report.
- Guidelines and tools, agreement on content of quality assurance at Course level and module level through 'Tuning'.

The area of structured quality assurance is a challenging one at the consortium level, because it is clear that there are so many other powerful QA processes being developed at institutional and national levels. Navigating a coherent path through these processes will remain a significant challenge for Erasmus Mundus Courses.

1.3.5 Ethical Standards

The challenge: “How will students be prepared for the ethical standards and cultural practices they will experience at the European Universities?”

The checklist for action:

- *Provide students with a written code of ethics which they sign and agree to comply with them*
- *The code has clear mechanisms for the communication of ethical problems, with a confidential and transparent process being used to evaluate and resolve the problems*
- *The code is responsive to the range of cultural and religious practices of Third Country students*

An Erasmus Mundus Course will have a complex mix of cultures and academic backgrounds. Just as it is important to prepare students for their time in a range of European societies and cultures (covered in earlier sections), it is also important to **prepare them effectively for the academic and social behaviours that will help students and staff to focus on the teaching and learning**. It is not enough to ‘expect respectful behaviour’ between students themselves and between students and staff. There need to be clear examples of what is acceptable and what is showing good practice.

On the TROPED Course at KIT Amsterdam, there is not a formally published code of ethics, but the **behaviour ‘ground rules’** are displayed in classrooms. The rules are jointly owned by students and staff and wherever possible positive reinforcement is used rather than punishments. For example, a student arriving late for a class, without a legitimate reason, would be expected to say sorry by bringing cookies to the next class.

Lastly, the code should be sensitive to the range of religious and cultural practices among the students, acknowledging issues such as dietary requirements, the need to pray at certain times, and particular requirements such as single-sex accommodation.

1.3.6 Developing Learning Skills

The challenge:”How will students be prepared for the learning standards and practices they will experience at the European universities and what processes and facilities are available to them to cope with the languages spoken at each partner site?”

The checklist for action:

- *Provide students with initial training in learning skills, including writing styles, plagiarism prevention, and presentation techniques.*
- *Provide students with a suitable range of bibliographic management tools to help them effectively structure their lecture material and readings*
- *Language training is provided in an appropriate form to support both learning and cultural adjustment.*

Students do not just need to be told that plagiarism is regarded as a major academic ‘crime’, but they need to be shown what is regarded as plagiarism, they need to be given the study skills and resources to avoid plagiarism, and they need to be clearly informed about the consequences of it.

On the MESPOM Course each University has its own ethics committee, which deals with cases of plagiarism if they occur when a student is attending that institution. At the start of the programme, **students are briefed about plagiarism**. When assignments are submitted, they must have a cover sheet confirming that the student has not plagiarised any material. The ‘Turnitin’ plagiarism checking software (<http://turnitin.com/static/index.html>) is also used. The software checks student work against material on the Internet and generates an originality report.

Best practice is undertaken on preventing plagiarism on the CODE Course in Budapest. Full guidance and tuition is provided to students at the outset. For example, guidance is provided about how to reference a source, how to quote, the nature of plagiarism, the policies and sanctions, the use of online checking software and the procedures of the Academic Board. These **policies and procedures are applied as consistently as possible across the consortium**.

At Budapest on the MESPOM Course there is a **Centre for Academic Writing** (<http://web.ceu.hu/writing/>) with language-specific support staff who provide support to the students. The Centre teaches students not just to speak and write in English but also to write professionally. Students are entitled to a certain number of hours with the Centre to discuss their assignments.

The development of wider academic skill-sets can be important for students. At UPC Barcelona on the MERIT Course, one of the transversal courses is called ‘Critical Thinking’. Students regard it as an excellent course that provided them with important study skills. It addresses key aspects such as **technical and academic reading and writing, plagiarism, and referencing**.

Transversal subjects offered in UCL (MERIT) address competencies on business, languages (French) and other subjects related to humanities. The business-related subjects are organised in a modular way and include contents for **entrepreneurship** which are so important in this Institution with the tradition to create business spin-offs.

For Courses that are taught predominantly in English, but where the mobility is between countries, a key challenge is for **students to gain competencies in local languages and to engage effectively with the communities they are living and working within**. For example, integration with French students will be limited if there is no ability to engage in conversational French. Language skills also apply to the staff, for there may be instances where the English language skills of some students are better than those of the staff.

In Budapest on the MESPOM Course, all students attend a course in 'survival Hungarian' and some will opt to take more advanced courses. Compulsory classes in English for academic writing are given to students whose first language is not English and they receive two **course credits for participating in language classes**. At UoT (Turin) the MERIT modules are taught in English, but the Department offers Italian language classes to MERIT students and six credits can be obtained from the language classes.

Proactive language preparation will also benefit students, so that they arrive at another university with basic language skills. At LUT (AMASE) the Course provides access to preparatory language learning (for example if students were moving from Sweden to France/Germany/Spain) from an early point. The decision to make **preparatory language learning** available from the first semester was taken as a response to the student Course feedback/evaluation system. LUT also offer intensive courses in the partner languages towards the end of the academic year.

The AMASE students in Nancy said they were well integrated with French students and noted in particular the intensive French course provided for them, as well as the French tuition provided before in Lulea. **Students did value the challenges of learning a new language** and said that it was beneficial to them, so local language tuition was important in helping them to integrate with French students and the local community.

At UCL (MERIT) some 70% of the courses were taught in English as of early 2008 and the migration to full English teaching is progressing. During this time **a teaching assistant is available to students to help them clarify lecture material that is taught in the local language**.

Where students did express concerns was when Course modules were not taught in English. The additional challenge of learning the scientific local language, so that they could understand lectures was too demanding and they felt they lost academic value in the lectures. However, **students also were aware that poor local language skills could restrict their choice of placements and internships**. Some students expressed regret that they had not been able to access internships through the MESPOM Course at IIEE. This was attributed to language difficulties, since most of the students do not speak Swedish and thus it is difficult to locate suitable host companies.

1.4 Joined-up Practice and Integration (JUPI)

Joining up processes across Europe, Institutions and Disciplines, is central to what makes Erasmus Mundus a unique educational programme. This Component assesses the extent to which Course Consortia have a fully integrated approach in areas of: marketing their course and recruiting students; in using integrated information to transfer information between partners; in using this information to build intelligence about the course and in communicating it to students; and in agreeing a transparent division of labour between partners through clearly defined procedures and processes.

There also needs to be a transparent division of finance, linked to the responsibilities of the partners, and the scholarships need to be attractive enough to recruit the best students from Third Countries. The teaching activities need to demonstrate consistency and clarity in areas of pedagogy, workload planning, student working practices, teaching practice and support.

Lastly, all these activities are enabled by an excellent consortium that has previous experience of working together and that has the capacity and practice to maintain and further develop the consortium.

1.4.1 Selecting Students

The challenge: “How can the student selection process be undertaken in a way that involves all the consortium members, but also operates efficiently and effectively?”

Courses need to **develop procedures and practices that operate across partners**, linking together a multi-institutional consortium with potential students, who may be in Third Country locations with low-speed or limited access to the Internet. The **application process** must be **easy for students to complete**, and the **criteria by which they will be evaluated** should be clearly stated. The application process also should inform students about **the academic offerings they will receive across the consortium**.

The checklist for action:

- *Involve all consortium members in the student selection process*
- *Take into account the different circumstances the students will encounter from host to host*
- *Make the selection process transparent so that students can quickly match themselves to a Course*

In an earlier section the need to communicate clear application and selection criteria to students was highlighted. The emphasis in this section is on the coherence with which the consortium will evaluate the applications and then ensure that the best students are recruited. It is possible, for example, to use external student recruitment agencies to manage the process, but there are associated risks in not being able to ensure that the process is specifically focused on the Erasmus Mundus course.

On the AMASE course, particular partners use the assistance of colleagues in Third Countries. The partners can provide coordination assistance, or their own national networks, which add value in the selection of students. For example, at UoS there is a process of **obtaining knowledge about the quality of universities in Third Countries** through the German Humboldt Foundation. This is a global network of exceptional **scientists who can be formally appointed**

as their own country coordinators and who can promote the Course and advise on the selection of candidates. There is a yearly Humboldt conference in Berlin. This helps to reinforce the strong network of trust.

The number of applications to a Course can be high, with an associated overhead in filtering them. On MERIT the applications totalled more than 700 in the 2007 academic year. This forced the consortium to put into practice concrete measures to be able to **select only the candidates having competences well-suited to the course**. This system consists of the Programme Coordinator reviewing all the CVs and eliminating the ones that do not satisfy the minimum prerequisites. Among them there is the so called “affinity with the study program”, which is understood as whether the student has an electrical engineering background or not. This filter served to leave in the pool 120 students in the last selection exercise, a more reasonable number for a thorough evaluation.

After an initial filtering by the Programme Coordinator, the remaining candidates are measured by a minimum of two evaluations from each consortium partner. The selection criteria at this stage were clear, although again there were some subjective indicators such as the quality of the home institution, which is not easy to measure for some countries, unless there is a formal structure such as the one noted above for AMASE in UoS.

A secure **Intranet can allow all partners to contribute to the evaluation in a coherent way**, keeping all information in a single system that is constantly updated. For MERIT this also extends to a secure facility that allows students to track the progress of their application. There is a Web tool for the applications of students, and it is used for monitoring their status: this tool allows **consortium members and potential students to keep track of the status of each application** at any time.

1.4.2 Consortium Information System

The challenge: “How can we design and implement a course-wide information system that manages student information effectively and securely and that makes teaching and learning information accessible to all the students regardless of their location?”

Courses should avoid the transfer of paper between partner sites. Instead, a **secure Intranet** should be developed that **integrates all the vital information related to students**, their assessment records, and also provides an **integrated communication** mechanism between staff and students.

The checklist for action:

- *Use a secure Intranet facility with a robust content management system for the structuring and storing of student information*
- *Enter and store student information (from personal details to Course selection, assessment and examination marks) efficiently and securely*
- *Be transparent with students about the information that is stored on the system, with relevant assurances under freedom of information rules, that they can view and validate personal information*
- **Make available a teaching Intranet so that students can access teaching materials in an integrated manner, regardless of their geographical location**

Consistent and coherent communication is central to the efficient functioning of a consortium distributed across several countries. The MESPOM Course uses a single Web site where there is

a login area, which can only be accessed by MESPOM community members, and there is a MESPOM agreement that students will check their MESPOM intranet e-mail account.

The transfer of students from one institution to the next requires the efficient and secure transfer of their information. This needs to be undertaken in a way that respects the privacy and data protection regulations at both locations.

1.4.3 Policy for Course Fees

The challenge: “How can the finance from student fees be allocated across the consortium so that the money is invested according to academic objectives? How can the fee policy accommodate different national and institutional policies across the consortium?”

The checklist for action:

- *Set Course fees through a formal consortium policy*
- *Allocate Course fees per student across the institution so that academic objectives are met*
- *Agree a formal pan-institutional policy regarding the distribution of Course fees to cover management overheads and academic activities*

Formalising agreements about the flow of money is a key challenge for Courses. At one level there will be a desire to ensure that there is financial equity across the consortium. There is a powerful logic in taking this approach, if it is accepted that the consortium is made up of partners of equal quality (subject to the partners continuing to justify their role based on their performance), then an equal distribution of finance could be a justified decision, even if the equal distribution is adjusted for relative costs. In such a case there could be an expectation that each partner site will host the same number of students. However, other factors influence the flow of finance, such as the relatively higher Course fees charged by UK universities.

On another level, student choice could also be a powerful influence. In meetings with students they frequently noted that their choice of location was often constrained by quotas equally distributed between partners, rather than the finance flowing to partners depending on student choice. The lesson from any of these scenarios is: that **there is no substitute for a clear articulation and communication of the financial principles that underpin the course and the consortium.**

For the CODE Course the **Memorandum of Understanding sets out clear principles and clear details for Course financing.** For example, while the scholarship allocation may be equally distributed across a consortium, the resulting flow of resource among the consortium can be decided on the basis of a budget attached to each task, and each university receives budget on basis of each task performed. At IIEE (MESPOM) there is a decision that the allocation of scholarships, and charging of course fees, will be dealt with more ‘explicitly’ in future, for instance by holding an initial meeting with students to ensure that they have a good understanding of how their fees are delivering academic value to them.

A contentious area relates to the setting of Course fees, with **a range of national and institutional policies regarding Course fees** presenting challenges to the EC requirement that course fees are equal. This ranges from the no-fees policy of Denmark, to the full-cost-plus fees in the UK. There is a State Law in Bavaria that tuition money must be used for the improvement of study and the academic programme it relates to. There are unexpected tensions between the Erasmus Mundus Course and the political level regarding course fees in higher education,

because there is not a tradition in Denmark of students paying for higher education. The MERIT Course at Turin is affected by the fact that in Italy scholarships are subject to taxation at a rate of 20%. This problem was resolved when the first students arrived three years ago, by arranging to have the funds disbursed from the co-ordinating institution in Barcelona.

At the institutional level some universities deliberately set fees low and for UoD (NOHA) the Course makes a loss for the University. However, NOHA is supported because it fits with the broader aims of the Institution and its philosophy, showing the institutional commitment on maintaining the course. The strategy, in general, has been to try to keep fees low compared to other programmes of the University.

On the MERIT Course the consortium has agreed a **common tuition fee policy** of €2500 for EU students and €5000 for third country ones, per each year of the Master. The UCL team found this common tuition fee policy issue useful to solve some problems created by the delay experienced by some students on ending the second year of studies in another institution: this delay requires extra-fees to be paid internally at UCL. The payment system at consortium-level covers these expenses without intervention of students.

1.4.4 Division of Labour across the Consortium

The challenge: "How can all members of the consortium reach acceptance on the division of labour in a way that meets all the academic objectives?"

The checklist for action:

- *Agree and document the process by which tasks within the division of labour are allocated and can be reviewed*
- *Document the division of labour between institutions, in the context of clear effectiveness and efficiency criteria*

These issues relate to the previous section which looked at finance, and here the issue is how the finance is linked to the human capital to deliver an excellent course.

For the NOHA consortium, detailed job descriptions of each position have been developed. The profiles are transparent and explained to the team members. The NOHA Director, Programme Coordinator and Administrator meet regularly to discuss the most important academic and non-academic issues and to establish priorities and agree tasks. There are also ad hoc meetings in order to discuss new issues that appear during the week. The NOHA Director and Programme Coordinator organise meetings with module coordinators and faculties, to discuss teaching and research objectives and challenges that come out of students' evaluations of the programme and each module.

1.4.5 A Consortium-Wide Quality Assessment Process

The challenge: "How should staff internally review their course and how can structured student feedback on the Course be obtained in a way that clearly communicates the outcomes to those who contributed to the consultation process?"

The checklist for action:

- *Use information provided by each partner institution to regularly review the quality of the Course content and the teaching of the Course*

- *Use the information to ensure that the Course modules are normally delivered by the best available teachers across the consortium*
- *Obtain feedback from students at all partner sites and review, harmonise and act upon the outcomes at the consortium level*

Internal review is different from external review. Whereas external review provides an independent benchmark of the Course against national and international standards, internal review is more focused on **doing things better, doing them more efficiently, and delivering value to the main beneficiaries, the students.**

For the TROPED course there is a General Assembly which reviews all learning objectives and assessment methods.

For NOHA the process of improving overall quality also included networking activities, regarded as helping the 'organic growth' of the NOHA learning and teaching infrastructure. The **physical networking of partner institutions and the building of relationships between representatives of the institutions** are considered central to the process. The growing teaching and research linkages are serving to enhance partner interdependence. It is the strength of professional and interpersonal relationships and the atmosphere of mutual trust, that for AMASE, achieves 'jointness' through a delicate balance between individual, departmental and consortium initiative, as well as the formal processes of harmonising practices **within a consortium agreement that is ratified and supported at a University level.**

1.4.6 Managing the Consortium

The challenge: "How can we implement performance expectation and performance management across the consortium, in a way that respects the authority of each Institution and each Department?"

The checklist for action:

- *Ensure that individuals in the consortium have significant prior experience of working together, through formal collaborative structures, joint research and teaching*
- *Define criteria for the expected performance levels of members and clearly state expectations for potential new partners*
- *Agree a management hierarchy and a level of in-built trust that allows Programme Coordinator s to have widely delegated operational responsibility*
- *Develop and implement a formal consortium agreement that records the agreed procedures and practices in the management of the Course*
- *Agree protocols for communication and conflict resolution as devices to build and sustain trust)*

Managing an Erasmus Mundus consortium can be challenging, with a high overhead in terms of time and effort. UPC Barcelona (MERIT) noted that consortium-level decision-making processes can be slow, largely because the Programme Coordinator has little executive authority over partner sites and decisions can require formal ratification by partners. The administrative burden of such a Course, including the reporting overhead to the European Commission, was estimated to be an additional 80-100% over a conventional Master Course.

Furthermore, the formal decision-making processes at institutional level can work at a slower rate than the speed at which the Course can be established and **the consortium works**

pragmatically to minimise the impact of slow institutional decision-making processes. MERIT was one of the pioneer courses for Erasmus Mundus. In the first year, 2004, discussions were still ongoing related to consortium-level decision making and cooperative aspects. More recently, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the four institutions. This not only sets out the basic governance, but also reflects the learning acquired in the last few years. The MoU had been signed by Rectors in 2004 and the double degree was ratified by the four institutions in November 2007 and signed in full March 2008.

For MERIT two consortium meetings are organised per year (one more than originally foreseen), for the student selection and to mark the start of the academic year. The **decision-making at consortium level is mainly organised around regular meetings.** The meetings also need to overcome the situation where the people around the table have limited formal decision-making capacity on behalf of the University.

For MESPOM, at a very early stage, the Consortium agreed on the responsibilities of each institution, based on both experience and practicalities. It was agreed that CEU would take responsibility for the payment of scholarships, due to its particular level of experience in administering such grants. The approach was thus not to allocate the workload so that each of the four partners was responsible for a quarter of the burden, but to **allocate the workload in relation to strengths and practical factors.** This was felt to be the right approach in order to facilitate effective teaching and learning across the Course. **A MoU was drafted at an early stage during the development of the course proposal,** in order to formalise this agreement. This 'codification' of responsibilities was felt to be very important in order to successfully deliver the Course.

NOHA Directors hold **Business Meetings to reflect and take decisions on all aspects of the Network.** They are assisted by other staff members of each participating institution, in particular the university NOHA links or NOHA Coordinators. These seven people, one at each university, have a half time employment by the programme. There is one programme co-ordinator per participating university. He/she assists the NOHA Director and carries out day-to-day administrative and technical tasks for the students. He/she liaises with other links, the Project Manager, students at other universities of the network and with external partners (NGOs, IGOs, government institutions/agencies, etc).

For the CODE Course there is a Course co-ordinator at each partner university, with TU providing (crucially) the overall co-ordination. **The consortium meets twice a year and maintains regular contact in order to take actions,** such as transferring student information, ensuring parity in academic standards and updating Course content.

1.4.7 Develop a clear policy for awarding the Master Degree

The Challenge: "How can the national and institutional policies regarding Master degrees be resolved so that students are awarded an identifiable Erasmus Mundus Master degree?"

The checklist for action:

- *Set out clearly, in the consortium agreement, the ways in which the Erasmus Mundus Master Degree will be awarded*
- *Provide full transcripts of student achievement in a format that can be accepted by institutions back in their home countries*

In the NOHA consortium, some previous partners left the programme due, amongst other factors, to their impossibility to provide joint degrees. There are therefore **challenges to be overcome regarding national legislation about degrees and in Institutional policies**. On 23rd January 2008, the NOHA universities finalised **an agreement which will meet all the requirements of the different national legislations and agreed the format of the joint degree diploma and joint diploma supplement**. Three out of the seven countries, where the NOHA universities are located, have now issued legislation on joint degrees. Both the German and the Irish leave this to the universities (University College Dublin degrees are joint at the national level). Sweden and the Netherlands do not have, for the time being, legislation that allows joint degrees. The consortium decided to prepare both the Agreement and the format that allows flexibility for those that have already joined and everything is ready for the other two institutions to join in as soon as possible.

MERIT therefore uses a **double degree agreement framework**. This is a pragmatic response to the challenges and timescales involved in agreeing single degree protocols across institutions. Even this was challenging, because double degrees are not well integrated into university procedures. MERIT is designed as a double-degree scheme, in such a way that **two different national degrees are awarded independently by the two institutions** by which the student was registered. At present there is not specific coordination between the different national examining boards and this could lead to having two diplomas with different final marks for the same student, but this is indicative again of the significant challenges faced by consortia when building an Erasmus Mundus Course.

Some institutions cannot award degrees themselves, but can achieve this through partnerships with other universities. TROPED KIT (The Royal Tropical Institute) does not deliver degrees and it is through the partnership link with VRI (Free University of Amsterdam) that the Masters is awarded.

Lastly, students requested that the Master Degree Certificate be available, with a **full transcript of courses, grades, and achievement** in a **global English translation**, even if the Certificate and transcript are provided in the national language of the awarding institution.