

STUDY CASE: ERASMUS MUNDUS MASTERS IN QUATERNARY AND PREHISTORY

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ABSTRACT

Erasmus Mundus Masters are successful results of the Erasmus Mundus Programme and have been well evaluated according to the European Commission reports and the different Consortia reports.

Through a Portuguese approach we analysed the application of the Bologna lines and tools to our Erasmus Mundus Master in Quaternary and Pre-History and consulted the various publics involved in it, trying to determine the weaknesses and also the measures to correct them.

The major problems detected were, not the application of the Bologna tools, but the consequences of different national actors, acting within the Programme and dealing with national policies, on subjects that countries do not want to abdicate. Due to this, the mobility schema, mandatory in the programme, is, many times delayed, complex and bureaucratic.

Some suggestions have been made in order to achieve a better performance within the Programme.

1. THE ERASMUS MUNDUS MASTERS IN QUATERNARY AND PREHISTORY

The International Masters in Quaternary and Prehistory (IMQP)¹ was approved by the European Commission as Erasmus Mundus Masters to take place during the 2004-2008 period; the financing being analysed annually with basis on the coordinator reports and monitoring by the Executive Agency for Education,

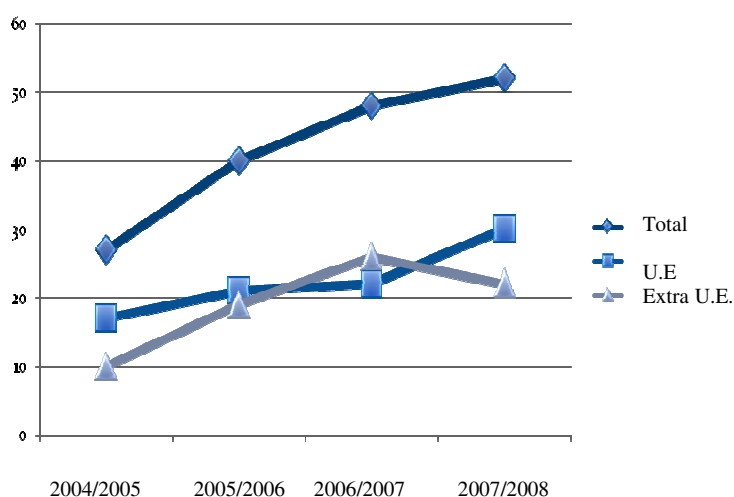
Audiovisual and Culture (EACEA) of the E.U. It started its fourth edition in the 2007/08 academic year.

The partnership includes five higher education institutions: Rovira i Virgili University (Spain), National Museum of Natural History of Paris (France), Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro University and Polytechnic of Tomar (Portugal) coordinated by Università degli Studi di Ferrara (Italy).

The IMQP lasts two years and grants 120 credits. It includes various subject areas such as prehistory, palaeoantropology, methods and techniques applied to research in quaternary archaeology, geology and palaeontology, heritage conservation and preservation.

Annual tuition fees are one thousand euros.

The IMQP has been attractive to students from Europe and third countries as it can be observed in Figure 1; student numbers having doubled between the first and the fourth edition.



Source: IMQP Coordination

Figure 1. Evolution of student numbers for IMQP

Students admitted to the Masters are automatically enrolled in every higher education partner institutions, thus ensuring recognition of their training periods and relevant diplomas.

Curricular modules or units are expressed in ECTS and also automatically recognised in every higher education partner institution.

Assessment, agreed between the partners and using common standards and procedures, takes place at the end of each module upon conclusion of each study cycle and is expressed in a quantitative scale. In order to facilitate

comparison of grading systems among the various partner institutions, a marking conversion table has been established for each partnership.

Table 1. Marking conversion table for IMQP

Countries	Fail	Pass	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Italy	<18 (respinto)	21 (sufficiente)	25 (abbastanza buono)	27 (buono)	28-30	30 (e lode)
France	8-9 (insufficiente)	10-11 (moyen)	12-13 (assez bien)	14-15 (bien)	16 (très bien)	17-20 (excellent)
Spain	<5 (supenso)	5 (aprobado)	6 (suficiente- apto)	7-8 (notable)	9 (sobresaliente)	10 (sobresaliente y matricula de honor)
Portugal	8-9	10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17	18-20 (19-20 théorique)

Source: IMQP Coordination

Final exam consists of oral defence of a dissertation; the final draft having to be submitted at least 15 days in advance. The supervising team must incorporate at least two members from the partner institutions and two members from the student host institution.

Diploma awarded to students upon successful conclusion of the degree is a Joint Diploma for Erasmus Mundus Masters in Quaternary and Prehistory and must be duly signed by legal representatives of all partner institutions and issued by Ferrara University. Issuing of the Joint Diploma takes three to six months. Therefore, students can require a temporary Diploma, which will be issued within fifteen days, and also a Certificate in the host institution. The Diploma is recognised and allows access to third-cycle studies.

IMQP students will also receive the Diploma Supplement free of charge; a common structure being used by all partner institutions in accordance with the European Union guidelines.

Mobility, a compulsory requirement, varies from four to six months and each student should visit at least one of the partner institutions. Selection of the partner institution for mobility is made with basis on the student's research field of interest.

2. THE REVIEW OF IMQP

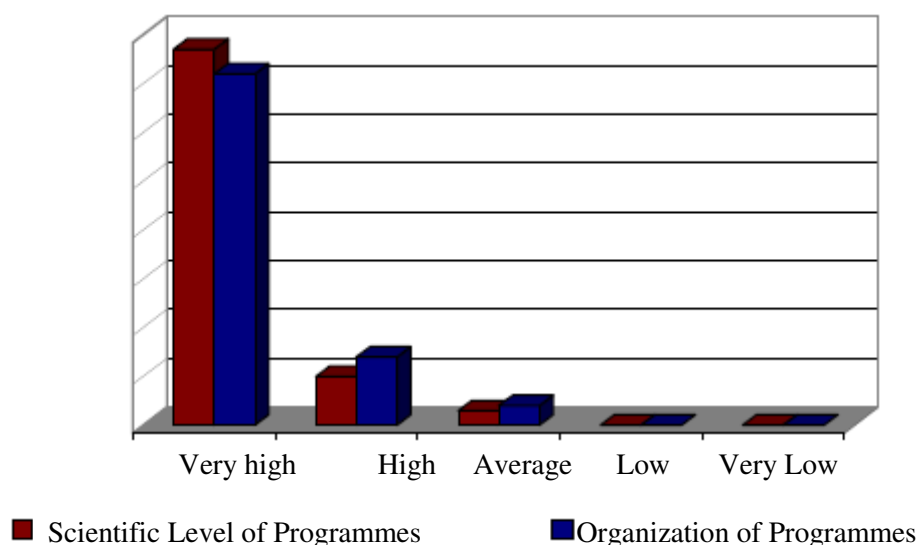
The IMQP makes use of Bologna's instruments.

The Erasmus Mundus programme is completely in line with the Lisbon Agenda in that it seeks to attract excellence students to study in Europe according to the Bologna models and to open education and training to internationalization and seize the opportunities offered by the globalization of educational markets.

The E.C. has been monitoring the implementation of the Programme together with the partnerships involved in Erasmus Mundus actions. According to

the reports by the European Commission, the global evaluation of the Erasmus Mundus Programme is rather positive².

The evaluation of the IMQP itself has also been globally positive³. In the student enquiries reported to the E.C. in 2006 the following distribution has been obtained in answers regarding the scientific level and organization of the degrees:



Source: IMQP Coordination
Figure 2. IMQP evaluation

We can, therefore, consider that it is a quality Masters and a successful European Programme.

However, the partnership has revealed some difficulties according to feedback from the different parts involved (Table II).

Table II. The main problems reported by the parties involved⁴

Students	Teachers	Management Staff
Lack of equity as regards to scholarships for European and third-country students.	Lack of equity as regards to scholarships for European and third-country teachers.	Under-funding of the programme management and organization
A posteriori funding in a programme that involves travelling and consequent advance by the students of great sums of money.	A posteriori funding in a programme that involves travelling and consequent advance by the teachers of great sums of money.	Severe communication difficulties with the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MNE) and with Portuguese embassies and consulates abroad.

Very bureaucratic procedures for requiring and obtaining visas.	Very bureaucratic procedures for requiring and obtaining visas.	Severe communication difficulties with the Border and Immigration Services in Portugal (SEF).
Long trips for obtaining the first visa when there are no external representations of the E.U.		Extinction of the national support framework for Erasmus – the GRICES - generating a temporary void with all the consequent communicative difficulties
Total unawareness of the programme by external representatives of the Member-States		Lack of articulation among the National Support Framework for Erasmus, the Ministry of Education and the Border and Immigration Services
Processes for granting and renewing residence visas too slow and bureaucratic		Processes for visa granting and renewal too slow and bureaucratic
Processes for granting visas for intraeuropean mobility of third-country students extremely slow.		Extremely slow, bureaucratic and inconsistent documental procedures for granting visas for intraeuropean mobility, which frequently impedes the mobility itself.
Lack of information about legal procedures regarding visas and travelling in some air companies.		Difficult management of scholarships by students in spite of their reasonability.
Lack of information on health and social security agreements; agreements vary according to the country of origin; Lack of information about insurance procedures. Insurance requiring a posteriori payment.		Lack of maturity of some students: when faced with bureaucratic procedures, meeting the deadlines recommended by the services is regarded as unnecessary.

3. CONCLUSIONS

We have confronted with the theoretical models of Bologna and its practical applicability in that which we consider the most complete European Programme.

Table III presents a comparison between our study of the Bologna models and the study on the implementation of IMQP.

Table III. Bologna guidelines versus IMQP

Bologna Guidelines and Instruments	Implementation in IMQP
Create a degree system which is easily	Masters structured according Bologna

understandable and comparable.	Use of the Diploma Supplement
Create a three-cycle system.	Second-cycle education; recognition of the first cycle as admission level; free access to the third cycle
Encourage mobility of students, teachers and researchers	Compulsory mobility Use of ECTS Study Agreements
Create a system for credit accumulation and transfer and lifelong learning.	Use of ECTS.
Cooperation in terms of quality assurance.	Creation of processes for monitoring the Masters
Promote the European dimension of higher education and research	Attractive scholarships for third-country students and teachers.
Encourage joint degrees and diplomas	Award a Joint Diploma automatically recognised by all the partners

We therefore believe that in the whole the Bologna Guidelines are being implemented in IMQP. However, some difficulties have been encountered, which are described in Table II. Most of the negative aspects revealed by the different parties involved result, not from issues connected with the management and implementation of the programme, but from the fact that it deals with several E.U. policies, particularly those involving issues related to the sovereignty of the Member-States, which is a sensitive topic. From the analysis performed on the impact of IMQP some recommendations can be devised to correct the negative aspects.

TABLE IV. Inconsistencies versus corrective strategies

Negative Aspects	Actors involved	Corrective Measures (<i>Corr</i>) /Comments (<i>Com</i>)
Shortage or lack of scholarships for European Students	Students E.C. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)	<i>Corr1</i> : Creation of guaranteed/compulsory scholarships for European Mobility Students supported by the Programme
A posteriori funding	Students Teachers E.C. HEIs	<i>Com1</i> : This will always be a problem since neither the HEIs or the E.C. will be able to advance funding without any sort of guaranty that mobility of a particular student or teacher to Europe will in fact take place
Ignorance about the programme	Embassies Consulates Ministry of Foreign Affairs Member-States	<i>Corr2</i> : Promotion and dissemination campaign coordinated among the several bodies involved in the issuing of visas by the member-states and the E.C.
Initial Visas	Students Teachers E.C.	<i>Com2</i> : The E.C. has harmonized the procedures through guidelines to help

	Embassies Consulates Ministry of Foreign Affairs National Structures	the higher education institutions, which has facilitated the process. <i>Com3:</i> Although representation of the E.U. countries is assumed by the Member-State represented in the third country, representation is not effected for all matters; <i>Corr3:</i> Coordination between the E.C. and the Member-States so that representation can be effected by any Member-State in terms of reception of documents required for visa issuing.
Renewal of Visas and Residence Visas	Boarder and Immigration Services (SEF) HEIs Students	<i>Com4:</i> A Guideline by the Council already exists (2004/114/CE, December 13), which regulates this issue but it took three years to be transposed into Portuguese Law and four months to be regulated. Because of this situation issuing or renewal of visas of third-country students during the period analysed has not been easy. <i>Corr4:</i> Application of Article 19° of the abovementioned Guideline which allows the establishment of an agreement between higher education institutions and the issuing body in order to speed up visa issuing procedures.
Intraeuropean mobility of third-country students	SEF	<i>Com5:</i> The abovementioned Guideline facilitates the mobility of third-country students with Erasmus Mundus scholarships. However, transposal into Portuguese Law reveals total unawareness of the goals of Erasmus Mundus because it only links this mobility with study visits involving teacher supervision.

		<i>Com5</i> : Change Articles 20° and 30° of Law n°23/2007
Communications HEIs-SEF and HEIs-ME	HEIs SEF ME	<i>Com6</i> : Both the BIS and the ME are not easily accessed, which can be changed if they change their service policies.
Extinction of GRICES	Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education (MCTES) GRICES	<i>Com7</i> : The national Erasmus Mundus agency has been extinct and no official substitute has been appointed for Erasmus Mundus Programme <i>Corr6</i> : Articulation between the MCTES services and creation of new agency for Erasmus Mundus
Medical Assistance/ Medical Services	Students HEIs Member-States	<i>Corr7</i> : Coordination by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of an easily accessible portal including information on agreements with third countries.
Assistance insurance – communication difficulties	E.C. Insurance Organization	<i>Corr8</i> : Greater visibility and accessibility to the insurance body for student scholarships which could be substantiated on a link in the E.C. portal for Erasmus Mundus.

¹ Cfr www.unife.it/progetti/erasmusmundus

² DIRECTORATE – GENERAL FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURE: *Interim Evaluation of Erasmus Mundus – Appendix E-Survey Results*. Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services LLP. Brussels. 41 pp, 2007

DIRECTORATE –GENERAL FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURE: *Interim Evaluation of Erasmus Mundus –Executive Summary*. Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services LLP. Brussels, 2007

DIRECTORATE –GENERAL FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURE: *Interim Evaluation of Erasmus Mundus –Final Report*. Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services LLP. Brussels, 143 pp, 2007

³ Annual Report sent to E.C. by the Consortium

⁴ Table II was drawn with basis on feedback from students, teachers and staff of the IMQP of the Polytechnic of Tomar

⁵ Cfr. Council Guideline 2004/114/CE dated 13 December 2004 (JOUE L375, 23/12.2004).

Consulted at <http://eur>

lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2004:375:0012:0018:PT:PDF, 22/02/2008

⁶ Cfr Law No.23/2007 dated 4 July (DR, 1^asérie-nº127-4 July 2007). Consulted at <http://www.sef.pt/documentos/56/NOVA%20LEI%20ESTRANGEIROS.pdf>, 22/02/2008 and
Cfr Decree-law No. 84/2007 dated 5 de November (DR, 1^a Série-Nº212-5, November 2007). Consulted at http://www.sef.pt/documentos/35/DR84_2007.pdf, 22/02/2008