Transnational collaboration and mobility in higher education:

Looking back - looking forward

Jo Angouri

The Guild
of European Research-Intensive Universities

Creative Commons License

Table of Contents

About the author

Jo Angouri is Professor in Sociolinguistics and the University-level Academic Director for Education and Internationalisation at the University of Warwick; Visiting Distinguished Professor at Aalto University, School of Business, Finland; Visiting Professor (Affiliate) at Monash University, Australia; Research Associate at the University of Wellington (New Zealand). Jo also holds the Lonnoy Chair for multilingualism at Vrije Universiteit Brussel. She has published extensively on Multilingualism, Innovative Pedagogies, Identity, Decision Making, Leadership as well as Research Methodology. Jo is the author of Culture, Discourse, and the Workplace (Routledge) and has co-edited The Routledge Handbook of Language, Gender, and Sexuality (Routledge), Negotiating Boundaries at Work (EUP) and the forthcoming Language, Migration and In/exclusion in the Workplace (Multilingual Matters). She is Subject Chair for Linguistics, Language, Communication and Media on the Scopus board.

Jo is a National Teaching Fellow (UK), Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and committed to pedagogic innovation and education for global citizenship. She has significant experience in research-led education, multidisciplinary curriculum design and undergraduate and postgraduate programme leadership. At the University of Warwick, she leads on the development and growth of existing and new international education projects with the University's strategic partners. She is on the EUTOPIA University Alliance Education Team and is co-leading on the Learning Communities and Curriculum Development for the network. Her vision for student empowerment focuses on creating the conditions and support for students to take ownership of their learning and to develop a clear voice and a global outlook through their higher education journey.

Acknowledgements

Executive summary

Transnational educational collaboration is currently foregrounded in the discourse of national and international policy makers as a way for research-intensive universities to produce the knowledge necessary to address society's wicked problems; create infrastructural capability and capacity for the future and to enhance their pedagogic offering which is associated with quality and personal growth, societal development and competitiveness. The exact ways, and value added of international collaboration in delivering these high-level ambitions, however, are often assumed rather than clearly articulated.

Further on this, transnational collaboration is associated with specific designs and modalities, namely joint study programmes and study abroad mobility (a current push towards short term and virtual activities not withstanding). In the discussion of the 'why', there is a tendency towards 'macro' level benefits while there is less reference to a) the conditions and processes that need to be in place for those designs to return value on the investment necessary for designing and approving intertwined programmes or b) how opportunity can be scalable and offered to the majority of students in an institution given that both participation to joint programmes and to study abroad only concerns a proportionally small fraction of any university.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this insight paper is to look into the triptych of transnational collaboration, innovation and policy implications. We provide an insight into the current dominant discourse on transnational collaboration as enacted in the current policy documents, reflect on current mobility models with reference to study abroad and joint study programmes and provide a framework for going beyond traditional tools. We draw on evidence from research and examples of programme activities from the experience of our network.

Our position is that different designs need to continue to be supported to achieve scalability of opportunity. Also, a conceptual shift to mobility is needed. One that moves away from a 'singular' individual experience and 'state of being' to a process by which opportunity for international learning, short and longer term are embedded in the curricular and co-curricular offering of an institution and which enables regional, national and international connectivity. Different learning experiences are needed to meet the diverse profile of our students and the changing nature of needs and expectations.

In this insight paper, we make the following recommendations:

- The sector needs a nuanced and diverse set of learning activities involving multiple mobilities and corresponding policy tools, drawing on an internationalisation approach that is based on educational model synchronised with the complexity of real-world problems.

- Scalability of connected/agile/alternative designs is a challenge for the sustainability of innovation and for ensuring that the programmes are inclusive.

- Policy priorities (such as the European degree) should build on existing good practices and have a clear and added value for institutions and academics to secure the sector's buy-in. Academic commitment and openness to internationalisation needs to be recognised and incentivised.

- Universities need to be supported to invest in sustainable pedagogic innovation. The support needs to address short- and long-term growth needs and to show trust in financial and regulatory autonomy. Member States and universities need to rethink how they prioritize and invest in pedagogic innovation adapting and extending regulatory and funding mechanisms.

- Universities need to lead on changing the practice and narrative for innovation in internationalisation of education. Research should be used for evidence-based policy recommendations.

1. The context

The complexity of problems faced by modern society requires universities, as generators of new knowledge and educators of the future global citizens, to find ways to transcend national, discipline and linguistic borders in research, innovation, teaching and learning. The changing population demographics, skills gap agenda and geopolitical changes also necessitate a rethink of the types of education and the modalities of the offering that should be available to the citizens of the future.

In this context, transnational educational collaboration is currently foregrounded in the discourse of national and international policy makers as a) a way for universities to produce the knowledge necessary to address society's wicked problems (cf The Guild's third insight paper), b) to create infrastructural capability and capacity for the future and c) diversify the pedagogic offering which is associated with quality and personal growth, societal development and competitiveness. The exact ways, and value added of international collaboration in delivering these high-level ambitions, however, are often assumed rather than clearly articulated, particularly when it comes to collaboration in teaching and learning.

Further on this, international collaboration in research has been supported by well-established funding schemes (e.g., Framework Programmes) and national research councils foregrounded a close relationship between universities providing an international research environment and the quality and level of research production. Simply put, bringing together researchers from diverse national, disciplinary and linguistic backgrounds has been proven to correlate with the potential for theoretical, methodological and societal innovation and is being incentivised. In its turn, this creates the conditions for international collaboration to be a priority for researchers and deeply embedded in university strategies. Note that citation levels of researchers that are mobile and collaborate internationally are far above than those who do not.

This is less the case for teaching and learning. Universities cannot be understood separately from their national context, i.e. the degree of autonomy from or dependency on political and administrative bodies defining the legal framework, the mode of cooperation, the accreditation of study programs. Individual teachers in this context have little room or incentive for international collaboration.

In Europe, the Bologna Process provided us with the vision for a connected European education, a commitment to common goals and comparability of our students' learning experiences, and a policy frame and language to work on translating those into practice. In many ways, this process has been successful if we consider the depth and breadth of its priorities with the comparability of degrees, a pan-European system of credits, student/ staff mobility, cooperation and alignment in internal and external quality assurance systems, student-centred learning and commitment to inclusion and lifelong learning. By the same

token, it has revealed limitations, as it is still challenging to collaborate across borders. It remains an open question whether the 'Europeanness' of higher education, as aspired to by the Bologna Process can be fully achieved through structural change. Similarly, it remains the case that current quality assurance models need to stretch further to enable smooth and scalable collaboration and this needs to involve universities, national and international policy makers. Attempting to move beyond linear designs and parallel structures, such as study abroad designs or double degrees formats, in embedding curricula components and integrating credit, is a long process which necessitates the involvement of multiple stakeholders. This applies to academic and professional services background staff. In its turn, the complexity has significant resource and capacity implications and creates both pedagogic and administrative constraints. All this points to the fact that the pedagogic priorities of universities, the priorities of national regulators, quality assurance mechanisms, and the priorities of international policy makers need to align in order to achieve deep cultural and systemic change.

The current EU policy environment strongly encourages universities to identify areas and ways to go beyond the limitations of current policy and administrative tools; this is certainly visible in the European University Alliances (Alliances). There is a widespread discourse of the ambition to go 'beyond red tape' and create flexibility. What this means exactly, however, needs to be explored in relation to specific practices and activities. To be sure, as we discussed in our earlier work (The Guild's third insight paper), collaboration cannot do without standardisation processes that need to provide reassurance and common/compatible structures. But a key challenge for the future lies in how this need for standardisation can avoid the current bureaucratic procedures that are time-consuming, indicate a lack of trust for and within the sector and cannot move beyond what we already know and do in modalities and designs of transnational collaboration, and more broadly.

On this, collaboration at the European level is by and large associated with mobility of students and staff and is supported by Erasmus +. This has led to a 'bottom-up' rich mosaic of collaborations built on individual agency of academics or departments in identifying like-minded counterparts. And while undoubtedly Erasmus has benefited around 13 million people since its inception in 1987, data indicate that: groups of students from less privileged backgrounds remain underrepresented, students from the so-called 'stable' economies of Europe are more mobile and the students' curricular experience is diverse depending on the students' own agency as well as the different landscape and quality assurance mechanisms across institutions. This complex situation has led policy makers to set priorities and ambitious goals for increasing participation to mobility schemes by all student groups and to shift the focus on short, agile forms of mobility and the need to diversify existing offerings. The way to get there, however, is still not clear and needs to be determined. New schemes such as Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs), answer to this demand, but leave many questions open such as long-term sustainability and quality assurance.

It is expected that at least 50% of the students within the Alliance benefit from mobility, be it physical, virtual or blended. At the same time, within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), members of the Bologna Process agreed on a 20% outgoing mobility target. It refers

to a) physical mobility in all three cycles, and it covers b) periods spent abroad in the context of studies of at least three months or equivalent to 15 ECTS as well as c) stays that result in a full degree being granted abroad. The EHEA Implementation Report (2020) concluded that the target of 20% of graduates experiencing mobility by 2020 has not been met with the overall weighted average for the EHEA standing at 9.4%. It is noteworthy that if only ISCED levels 7 and 8 (master and doctoral level) were considered, the EHEA as a whole would now be close to the 20% target. The key challenge remains, therefore, the undergraduate degree lifecycle. These figures are also reflected in the European Commission's (EC) public consultation on the future of learning mobility where it is reported that only 15% of young people have undertaken studies, training or apprenticeships in another EU country.

Overall, the legacy of the Bologna Process and experience from Erasmus+ provide a strong foundation to build a new vision and strategy for the sector. The policy environment has created a unique space to discuss pedagogy across borders and reap the benefits of this. Alliances present a new opportunity for (cross)institutional capacity-building through encouraging collaboration towards sustained – and sustainable – networks, aided not just by a more long-term funding prospects, but also through the aspiration for a reduction in red tape at the national and regional levels. In order to achieve this vision however, a different model is necessary. One that builds on the experience of the sector, without remaining limited in what we have already known and experienced.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this paper is to look into the triptych of transnational collaboration, innovation and policy implications. We provide an insight into the current dominant discourse on transnational collaboration as enacted in the current policy documents, reflect on current mobility models with reference to study abroad and joint study programmes and provide a framework for going beyond traditional tools. We draw on evidence from research and examples of programme activities from the experience of The Guild network.

2. Reframing transnational collaboration

Despite the wide reference to educational collaboration, the exact activities, practices and the process by which transnational collaboration carries value added for the participating institutions, typically remain implicit.

We draw on a detailed analysis of relevant literature and of a corpus of policy documents undertook under The Guild's ongoing 'Future of Education' project[1].

Our findings indicate that there is little systematic work on the benefits of transnational strategic partnerships for the sector in both policy discourse and scholarship. The benefits are reported often on anecdotal evidence and include:

    I.   improved internationalization
    II. improved student skills,
    III. improved and diversified educational offerings,
    IV. increased mobility of students and staff,
    V.   improved students' employability,
    VI. increased numbers of foreign students.
    VII. increased level of scientific excellence,
    VIII. more interdisciplinary research,
    IX. improved capacity of teaching staff, and
    X.   improved research skills.

(European Commission et al., 2018: 9; Fehrenbach and Huisman, 2022)

Although this list is 'intuitively comprehensive', the exact meaning of each element, as well as how and why international collaboration is the way to achieve them is left open. A closer reading of the literature[2] indicates that scholarly attention converges in some of the above areas associated with collaboration across institutions.

Figure 1 represents the pattern with the darker shading indicating citation frequency and agreement in the position taken by scholars.

---

1 A summary of the methodology we followed for the corpus analysis is provided in Annex 1 and a list of the documents that fed into the analysis is provided in Annex 2

2 The literature review was conducted via database keyword search covering the fields of International Education; Higher Education Policy; Sociology of Work; and Research Policy. Special attention was paid to 'European degree employability', 'transnational cooperation European universities', 'European University Alliance employability', and 'employability European transnational cooperation'.
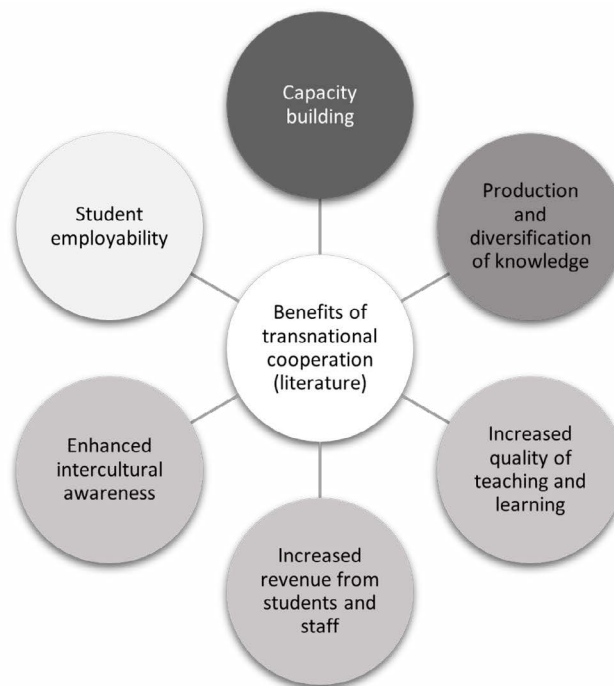
Figure 1: The benefits of transnational collaboration (literature)

Capacity building is the most commonly mentioned benefit of transnational cooperation. This typically translates to the building of infrastructure and/or strengthening the research profile and record of scholars outside the centres where funding and global talent tends to concentrate. Capacity is also connected with the production and diversification of (new) knowledge as a separate category. The activities mentioned commonly include academic research collaborations as well as joint study programmes. In their turn, these constitute capital for the institutions involved and are associated with prestige, reputation, enhanced competitiveness, and diversification of its faculty and staff.

Zooming in on teaching and learning, joint study programmes (as a process) and degrees (as the outcome) is the main pedagogic product, alongside study abroad (student mobility), that is cited in relevant studies. For students, joint study programmes are associated with improvement of intercultural skills (Yarosh et al., 2018), personal growth (Culver et al., 2012), and leadership (Asgary & Robert, 2010). For institutions, benefits include improving quality of education as well as prestige and, where relevant, income from international students. Those dimensions of collaboration are often grouped together as indicators of quality; however, evidence of pedagogical added value (or even the pedagogical implications) is often missing.

Joint study programmes and joint degrees occupy a privileged position in the current policy context. We return to specific pedagogic designs in the light of selected examples later on (Section 5). Suffice to say here, that a (joint) degree is the outcome and the product of a process that needs and should build on educational relationships of mutual benefit for the students, staff and institutions involved.

Beyond joint degrees as potential outcome of joint programmes, potential benefits for students include enhanced intercultural awareness, leadership skills and improved language ability. Those claims are based on the assumption that working with students from diverse backgrounds (in a joint programme), participating in mobility and immersing oneself beyond the home institution create skills and competences that otherwise would not be possible.

Developing intercultural skills and, more importantly, mindset requires reflexivity drawing on analytical skills and the opportunity to apply to practice theory, skills and knowledge. It is problematic to associate culture and intercultural understanding with an 'automatic' development of skills when being in a different university, national or international context. Study abroad is often transformational, but a lot depends on the students' own agency and the environment they find themselves in. In case where partners have invested in creating 'international classrooms' in which application of theory to practice and reflexivity is part of the learning outcomes of the activities available to students, intercultural learning is facilitated. Empowering students to work with difference and go beyond their comfort zone, implies a design and architecture that goes beyond participation or linear mobility from 'here' to 'there'. It requires application of theory to practice, reflexivity and ability to develop meta critical competence. Nevertheless, the attempt to connect the ideal of 'global citizen' with intercultural, linguistic and leadership skills is certainly naturally connected to internationalisation initiatives and research can look closer into the processes that can provide transformational learning activities for the students.

A contested benefit of transnational cooperation is on improved employability skills for students. While there is the widespread belief supported by self-reported accounts that participating in international programmes or activities increases students' employment prospects, this is reported in some studies (e.g., Di Pietro 2012; 2015) and contested by others (e.g., Juknytė-Petreikienė and Žydžiūnaitė 2017; Culver et al. 2012) who indicate that participation does not necessarily lead to competences or a different mindset per se.

In summary then, and in relation to teaching and learning that is the main concern of this paper: collaboration is associated with specific designs and modalities, namely joint programmes and study abroad mobility, (a current push towards short term and virtual activities not withstanding). In the discussion of the 'why', there is a tendency towards 'macro' level benefits while there is less or no reference to a) the conditions that need to be in place for those designs to return value on the investment necessary for designing and approving intertwined programmes or b) how opportunity can be scalable and offered to the majority of students in an institution given that both participation to joint programmes and to study abroad typically concerns a proportionally small fraction of any university. Consider for instance that against policy targets of 20% to 50% participation in mobility, current figures do not exceed 10 or 15% in most cases.

Against the analysis of the literature, we looked into a corpus of policy documents produced between 2017 and the time of writing in 2023. The Commission's Communication on the European Education Area and the Digital Education Action Plan put forward a vision for supporting transnational delivery of education and efficient use of physical and digital

resource to share curriculum and infrastructure. The purpose is to support universities to deepen collaboration in teaching and learning, increase participation in established schemes (Erasmus +) and provide policy tools to go beyond the barriers of the past. While this is valuable and very much welcomed by the sector, a closer look at current policy documents indicates a gap in translating the vision to implementation and connecting it with the sector's established realities.

Our data show that policy documents echo the dimensions in Figure 1 with an, expected, emphasis on European values and identities for higher education. The tendency towards 'macro' reference is, even more, pronounced too. A summary of transnational cooperation benefits, according to the Commission documents, follows (Annex 2 for the documents).

Transnational education cooperation:

    I.   Increases global competitiveness,
    II.   Contributes/Creates a European dimension of higher education,
    III.   Strengthens European identity, democracy, and belonging,
    IV.   Helps to tackle global challenges, especially green and digital transitions,
    V.   Transforms higher education through capabilities and capacity building,
    VI.   Nurtures equality.

This list is, yet again, intuitively in line with the vision of a global, border free international education. But, meanings and processes remain at high level and therefore need operationalisation in order to be distilled the activities, processes and structures that are necessary to get there.

To provide a closer insight, we used a corpus-assisted methodology for a detailed reading of the documents. Table one provides a summary and overview (organised against attributes identified in the literature).

Benefits for institutions (literature)	• Strengthen research collaborations -academic outputs • Diversify knowledge • Capacity building • Enhance prestige • Enhance revenue • Increase international student population • Enhance educational offer through joint degrees • Share resources (infrastructure)
Benefits for students (literature)	• Enhance cultural awareness • Language ability • Leadership skills • International education • Possible access to joint degree • Acquisition of new knowledge • Employability • Increased mobility
Benefits for Europe (policy documents)	• Global competitiveness / create European dimension of higher education • Shared European way of life / strengthening European belonging / identities • Strengthens democracy • Helps to tackle global challenges
Benefits for institutions (policy documents)	• Strengthens higher education institutions / transforms higher education • Nurtures equality • Builds long-lasting institutional relationships to advance knowledge • Enables (staff and student) mobility • Makes institutions more attractive to international students
Benefits for students (policy documents)	• European joint degrees • Digital or blended activities • European Student Card Initiative/Staff mobility • Challenge-based learning

Table 1: A summary of the perceived/suggested benefits and activities associated with transnational collaboration

Transnational collaboration is associated with opportunities for all involved, from the society as an abstract whole to all the immediate stakeholders. For instance, outside higher education institutions (HEIs), it is said to 'bring important spill-over benefits for sustainable communities, innovation ecosystems, businesses, and civil society'; transnational cooperation is positioned as a social good and a kind of international, diplomacy bridge between people, cultures and nationals of Europe. The other end of the spectrum involves specific initiatives such as the European Student Card. The rift between these two ends of the spectrum is, amongst others, a reflection of the current landscape in education policy and the role of international and national regulators. To move beyond, there is a need for Member States to translate the conditions for creating connectedness and identify pathways for accessing initiatives at national as well as international level.

Overall, the polyphonic mix of high-level priorities (macro) and specific activities (micro) which are associated with transnational collaboration indicates the need for further study to look into: a) the ideological assumptions that underpin the particular conceptualisation of collaboration (macro), and to b) provide a framework and systematic landscaping of the process (meso) in implementing into practice (micro). This should draw on systematic evidence which will support both the why and the how vision can be implemented using tools that can transfer beyond a specific case, programme and institutional experience.

An exception in robustness of evidence is connected to mobility which is the most common and well-studied indicator of the success (or lack of) of transnational educational collaboration. Consistent positive impact is reported in scholarship in relation to academic, personal and professional development. This is echoed in policy documents for those participating in study abroad programmes. It is, therefore, useful to take a closer look to ideological positions and assumptions associated with mobility frameworks and approaches.

3. Mobility: conceptual framing and approach

Mobility of students, and to a lesser extent staff, is one of the core ingredients and main indicator of internationalisation and transnational educational collaboration. The current policy targets of 20 up to 50% are indicative of the current attention in mobility designs.

Although it is often assumed to mean the same thing across higher education, mobility in a university context is highly diverse. Variability is noted in societal embeddedness and cultural specificities of institutions that influence the meanings and practices of collaboration and mobility. As we are discussing these issues in the context of research-based, research-intense or research-strong, we are immediately led to a model, to an institutional self-description of universities disregarding the multiple manifestations. We cannot ignore the fact that the modern university is deeply associated with the rise of the nation-state and that this tension between a universal perspective and local, legal, organizational and cultural framings sets the frame for common endeavours. Since there always has been a strong compatibility between the overall orientation of universities and student mobility; after all, having spent time abroad at a different university has been part of the ideal educational journey of students not only in the Middle Ages, but also under the novel conditions of the nation state since the nineteenth century. Hence, collaboration and mobility per se are not the issue; universities would not exist without these points of reference. What needs to be discussed is rather the how and wherefore of these major references.

Having pointed out that embedding universities in a nation-state context, provokes the question of the "before" and "next" with relation to the role of mobility. For centuries, mobility was a hallmark of the European university with Latin as lingua franca making as much for easy transition, as did low degrees of formalisation and regulation not to forget low numbers of students, staff and subjects. The model was close to itinerant apprentices learning with masters of the trade. Fast forward: the association of the modern university with the nation state came together with a historically unique expansion of the system worldwide in the second half of the twentieth century. Since Erasmus + models of mobility became more complex, but mobility until recently was not designed for significant number of students. It had more to do with self-cultivation, and formation, going abroad as an educative experience in the broadest sense. Contrast these easily identifiable basic models against the complexities of today where national and local regulations need to be aligned with large-scale mobilisations addressing thousands of students.

Here it is that two major distinctions come to play. Finding one's niche, is a major incentive when it comes to making mobility decisions. Mobility in this sense is major point of "(self) positioning" (cf Masschelein & Simmons, 2009). Masschelein and Simmons are not the only

but without question very prominent authors who have pointed out tensions between the managerial orientation of the entrepreneurial university which looks at all sectors of the university under a resource perspective that needs to be effectively developed in order to meet the global measurement standards and the human rights-oriented perspective of civic engagement and civic responsibility. The latter aspect also being a key value in the European context. This tension also affects how we shape mobility frameworks, both with regards to content: targeted qualification versus open and critical exchange of universities offerings as democratic fora. In this context the earlier discussion of how we frame transnational collaboration, how we measure 'benefits' and what evidence needs to inform future designs becomes central.

In the last decade and in the post Covid-19 context and beyond, a push towards agile, short term and blended mobility designs are noted. Despite the widely understood traditional, semester-based mobility models, shorter term mobility designs show a steady increase in the sector over the last decade. Mobility recommendations have also been calling for increasing blended mobility and flexible opportunities for all learners, offering a portfolio including all types of mobility designs, short, long, physical and virtual. The Covid-19 disruption prompted a shift towards flexibility and wider use of technology, as well as increase in virtual mobility formats. This has been necessary for delivering curriculum teaching and for providing alternatives to embodied mobility due to the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic that has made international travel difficult or limited. Emergency interventions, however, are exactly that, short term and responding to an immediate pressure. This should be distinguished from long term learning design, be it online or face-to-face. If our aim is to capitalise on the Covid-19 experience and learn from the disruption as an unanticipated laboratory of change and its qualitative impact/consequences, we need to revisit our vision for higher education in the digital age and the principles that will guide the shift from face-to-face to a blended learning environment as the main modus operandi. That poses challenges and creates fundamental opportunities as to how we must rethink mobility within this general transformation towards a blended learning environment.

At the EU level, the move to an open and flexible learning ecosystem supported by technology is well aligned with current education designs. The conceptualisation of the European universities of the future draws heavily on the ideal of openness and flexibility, including multiple forms of mobility to be an integral part of the student journey. This responds to the vision of new mobility schemes, including a new Erasmus + providing a fuller and more enhanced portfolio of mobility options. The time is right, then, to broaden the discussion on the rationale, designs and ways to create pathways between curricula and co-curricular mobility opportunities.

Accordingly, we argue that we need a holistic approach to mobility moving beyond physical presence/absence and enable students and staff to exercise more choice. We suggest a conceptual shift *from mobility from a 'singular' individual experience and 'state of being' to a process by which opportunity for international learning, short and longer term are embedded in the curricular and co-curricular offering of an institution and which enables regional, national and international connectivity.*

This approach goes to the heart of what embedded programme-level connectedness could achieve. By extension a European degree could be precisely a way of embedding multiple forms of experiences and pathways to our /pedagogical products.

We discuss this further against relevant literature and current policy initiatives, particularly through examples of programme activities from our network.

A. RETHINKING MOBILITIES AS PRACTICE AND AS A CONCEPT

'Mobility' in relation to education has attracted significant interest over the years and a 'mobilities turn' as a new paradigm has been noted in relevant research (Cresswell, 2010; Sheller and Urry, 2006). This work emphasises relationality and the multiple layers of im/mobilities relevant to student experience. One of the prominent concerns is to do away with ideas of fixed spatiality; instead, multiple relations come into view. It is the interplay of mobilities and emplacement that is highlighted; not only in education studies but also in human geography which has increasingly discovered education as a study domain. In a relevant piece for the discussion here Waters (2017) is concerned with the interplay between fixity (emplacement) and flexibility (mobility). The lecture hall and the library, the specificity of the campus, carry significant meaning in the lived experience of the students. This does not mean the learning is fixed; on the contrary spaces are becoming more and more porous. The mobility discussion in education, has not only highlighted the mobility of people, students, staff, scholars and scientists and their families, but also of educational policies and of educational institutions (transnational and off-shore campuses), and last but not least, the mobilities of ideas and pedagogy (Waters, 2017, p. 284).

In comparative education this is discussed as travelling policies and concepts. In fact, the virtual mobility concept (e.g., Dondi et al., 2009), emphasises the mobility of knowledge as a hallmark of the knowledge society. Mobility, agency, flows indicate fluidity and flexibility, emplacement, structures, indicate fixity. This is particularly relevant to understanding im/mobilities in our diverse student body. One distinction is between movers and non-movers. At least in some of our universities, economic self-reliance and strong local ties are a characteristic for a significant part of our students, who might continue to live with their parents and families instead of moving out. In the words of Holdsworth (2009, p. 1861):

"… in celebrating students' mobility we are valorising a particular model of transition to adulthood which focuses on separation, self-reliance, and responsibility for the self, rather than one based on interdependencies, mutual support and responsibility for others".

Mobility in the sense of physical travel presupposes particular ideologies of engagement and participation in activities that rely on the modality of physical travel. The recent disruption of the pandemic has brought to the fore the significance of diversity of designs for learning also from the perspective of mental health and resilience for the wellbeing of our students and staff.

Further, fixity and fluidity were redefined during Covid-19 when academia became simultaneously mobile and immobile as well as digital not by choice. Arguably, the relationship had reversed from a physical position that was, in principle, mobile but digitally immobile. This immediate reversal provided multiple opportunities for curricular and co-curricular connectivity. The preliminary data in the sector, and in our own institutions, indicate patterns of engagement for students who do not typically engage with traditional forms of mobility. Transnational collaboration and virtual designs provided new opportunities and lessons can be learned for long term pedagogic development.

The model (Figure 2) we propose illustrates the case we make for moving on from thinking of mobility as a 'one-off' to a portfolio of learning opportunities combining virtual, short/longer term, physical/embodied and blended designs as part of a coherent whole. Different learning experiences are needed to meet the diverse profile of our students and the changing nature of needs and expectations.
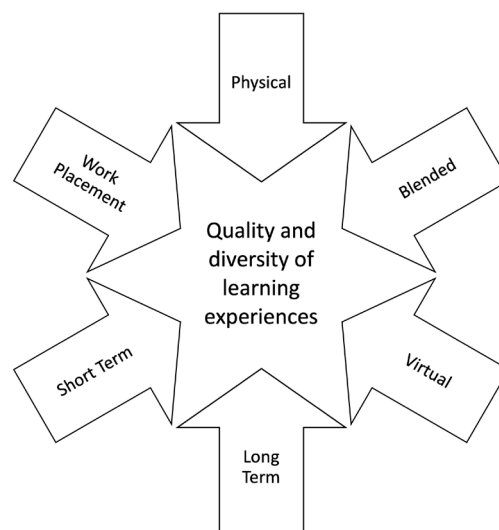
Figure 2: From mobility to mobilities for a diverse portfolio of learning opportunities

Accordingly, our vision is for European universities where students and staff benefit from a portfolio of internationalisation experiences (including: beyond mobility), face to face and virtual; where multiple mobility options are organically integrated in the pedagogic offering transgressing linear mobility schemes where provision is organised on a binary between 'here' or 'there'. To achieve this, however, there is a need for a clear policy design that supports institutions and national bodies to enable the academy to move towards a different system of design and offer teaching and learning alongside the necessary resource to embed and implement innovation. In its turn, this environment can mobilise institutions to be more creative but also risk averse and invest in the development of pedagogic products that can consolidate international partnerships.

Alliances are a possible tool towards this direction, which, as with all pilots, needs to encourage different conceptual models to grow, translate to concrete and pragmatic activity types and be properly supported by national regulators and university leadership in order to move from a periphery to the mainstream. The now 44 Alliances are actively encouraged to design structures for joining provision and enhancing their overall offering, moving beyond regulatory differences in the European educational framework and enable staff and students to participate in joint learning both physically and virtually. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the emphasis on joint degrees in the policy documents (see Table 1), special attention is currently paid to the development of new programmes and mobility of students within the context of joint study programmes.

4. Join/ing programmes and the European University Alliances: barriers and enablers from the experience of The Guild universities

Identifying ways to connect the pedagogic offering of different institutions and providers has been an ambition and an ideal since the early days of the sector and certainly part of the vision of the higher education policy associated with a globally competitive European university already from early days of the European Union. However, recognition of effort and accreditation, despite the best efforts and intentions, are still issues impacting mobility and credit transfer. There is an opportunity and a moment to move beyond current tools and thinking with the Alliances which have been oriented towards 'educational innovation'[1] and a 'quest for excellence' from the start.

Building on the legacy of Bologna and the maturity of policy tools tried and tested over the decades, and the global race for competitiveness with proportionally shrinking resource, Alliances come with a positive outlook for success. Moving beyond bilateral partnerships towards networks allows to transcend national, political and financial barriers and incentivise participation and commitment of resource. In this context, known tools such as the joint study programme are expected to find fertile ground for growth, alongside credit mobility. However, connecting programmes cannot and should not be a 'one size fits all' nor should they be contrasted in an 'either or' framing. Joint degrees have a long history in the sector and the advantages, as well as challenges, are well documented.

We argue that the time is right to revisit the process by which connectedness becomes the main target of the activity instead of focusing on any one pedagogic product. Joint study programmes are then approached from a developmental angle which will enable universities to create the conditions necessary for (new) programmes, when necessary, to grow sustainably.

---

3 In this paper we use the term educational innovation holistically including what is normatively associated with pedagogic theory, theory/learning practice and organisational/structural innovations.

In more detail, joint study programmes are widely associated with providing students with access to interdisciplinary, globally relevant and competitive education and with the assumption that they contribute to the students' employment prospects. Literature has questioned this direct link arguing that employers have no visibility of joint (or double) degrees, as outcomes of joint programmes, or perceiving graduates of joint programmes with, automatically, having enhanced skills and competences (see earlier discussion on employability). Nevertheless, there is consensus that joint degrees, and their policy spotlight, will continue to intensify and will constitute a stable priority in the internationalisation of higher education. We argue, therefore, that a more nuanced conversation on joint programmes, based on the evidence of current experience is necessary for enabling this type of educational partnership across institutions and in Alliance designs.

A systematic analysis of examples from a sample of The Guild's member universities provides a useful overview of challenges and opportunities which echoes relevant literature we summarise here. We also draw on the rich experience of member universities- Ghent, Glasgow and Groningen, are among the top ten coordinating institutions in Erasmus Mundus programmes (Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degrees 2014-2020). Table 2 presents a summary of our findings and a more detailed account is also provided through the case studies that follow.

Strenghts	• Student experience/s –rather than staff benefits
	• Positive conceptualisations of the relationships between institutions rather than focusing on any tensions
	• Subject-area specific partnerships, possibly closely connected to research collaborations
	• Structured mobility schemes directly related to programme content
Challenges	• Different 'levels' of bureaucracy ('university level', 'European level', 'national level')
	• Rigidity of rules and regulations
	• Cost of living in Europe
	• Some institutions or systems remain reluctant to sign off a degree to students who haven't attended the university
	• Funding for the administrative costs in running the programme

Table 2: Characteristics of joint study programmes

Critical factors for the success (or otherwise of the programmes	- The impact of national regulations - The role of resource in attracting students - Complementarity as partners - European accreditation - The programme itself "Street credibility" - Students' motivation for studying at a particular university - External partnerships/societal/non-academic

Table 2.a Contextual factors impacting on the offering

Collaboration in teaching and learning has potential for looking into the local relevance of global problems in a kaleidoscopic way which can improve curricular and co-curricular quality of experience. At the same time, educational collaboration, at new programme level, requires the alignment of multiple stakeholders (academics, administrators, professional services colleagues etc.); this comes with the, known and recorded, challenges of long incubation time and need for resource to overcome the existing systems and policies.

Higher education has a responsibility to ensure that programmes meet quality criteria and provide structural (and legal) stability. This involves the control mechanisms of national regulators as well as the internal regulation in each institution, which, however, are rigid and not designed for agility and diversification; the sector is highly (internally and externally) regulated. Established practices and limitations do not negate the potential of the current moment and the opportunity to create a different structure in order to achieve the level of connectedness which is assumed in the vision. It does, however, indicate the disconnect between the educational times of the policy vision for change and the lived experience in the sector. Indicative to note that programme level changes take, on average, anything from 2 to 5 years for the necessary administrative mechanisms of universities.

We argue that innovation should be usefully based on a combined analysis of the experience of the sector, 'what works' and lessons learned so far from the work of Alliances. In the tables below we provide an overview of barriers and enablers associated with different designs and modalities as emerged through the experience of some of The Guild universities.

5. Opportunities and challenges in transnational education collaboration: Case studies

The case studies reflect some of the experience from our network on five axes:

I. The main arguments for establishing connected programmes (joint or other),
II. The main obstacles during compiling and opening connected programmes,
III. The main benefits of participating in connected learning experiences, both planned and unplanned ones,
IV. The main obstacles in running and growing the programmes,
V. The (perceived) expectations from policy makers.

A digest is presented in Table 3; it is organised with reference to the most common designs and includes a summary of barriers and enablers associated with the activity.

The examples in this section illustrate programme activities which show different scopes and sizes of connected programmes as well as the significant benefits of internationalisation. They show degrees of density of connectedness from parallel to embedded activities. The cases are not meant to be exhaustive or representative of the institutions; all programme types are found in all universities. These examples illustrate the diversity of offering and speaks to the significant experience of the sector which can constitute a springboard for further developments.

DOUBLE DEGREE SCHEMES:

One of the most common forms of transnational collaboration involving two programmes running concurrently, as a step-up from (structured) credit exchange. Double degrees lead to two awards (one by institution) and maintain the legal and regulatory framework of the individual partners. Double degrees are common and a desired solution in cases where there are substantial differences in general administrative and fee structures. Double degrees can be seen as administrative structures which enhance student choice more than pedagogic connectedness per se at programme level- although congruency in the respective programme-level learning outcomes is commonly a prerequisite for their establishment.

CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK - DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (PAIS)

Background

PAIS has a history in offering double Master's degrees to enhance the learning opportunities provided to students. At the time of writing, seven programmes are operational with a diverse partnership base. The department's experience draws on long-term bilateral partnerships as well as newer developments which draw on the university's strategic multilateral alliances, such as the EUTOPIA university alliance.

Advantages and opportunities

- Providing students with more opportunities to study abroad
- Master's level collaboration is a, comparatively, simpler process and therefore less resource intensive and therefore the department has built both expertise and a strong provision over the years
- Creates the conditions for interdepartmental relationship development, research collaboration and trust that leads to further research (and education developments)
- Provides a pathway to students to transition from Master's to PhD
- A strong collaboration with partner institutions contributes to the departments footprint, reach and reputation

Challenges

- Costs for the students- lack of scholarships
- Legislation and Brexit
- Admin burden for running the programme
- Need for dedicated resource for supporting students abroad
- Institutional/approval processes: internal and external red tape
- Recognition for the work of staff dedication time to pedagogic development, innovation and student experience

Despite their relatively/comparatively straightforward structure, the issues associated with offering double degrees already introduce the core challenges associated with transcending institutional boundaries for educational collaboration. This is a challenge particularly visible at BA level (instead of MA/MSc) because the degree of national regulation is significantly greater.

This is more clearly visible in the case of joint programmes.

JOINT PROGRAMMES, LEADING TO JOINT DEGREES:

The aspired target of collaboration leading to one single award by all participating institutions. The main principle of joint programmes is to have a shared curriculum diet which meets the requirements of all participating institutions, based on jointly defined programme-level learning outcomes, joint selection and joint decision-taking on the awarding. Given their complexity, joint degrees are more common at postgraduate level. Often they lead to double or multiple degrees, if joint degrees cannot be awarded due to administrative constraints.

CASE STUDY: GHENT UNIVERSITY - MSc IN FIRE SAFETY ENGINEERING

Background

As one of 15 joint programmes currently on offer, the [MSc in Fire Safety Engineering](#) is an established Erasmus Mundus programme which offers structured student mobility, takes joint decisions on the programme design, student selection and degree awarding, and delivers a joint degree (one single certificate).

Advantages and opportunities

- Capacity building/critical mass: academic staff particularly in niche areas have the opportunity to work with colleagues in larger teams and share resources as well as bring those resources, for the student benefit, in one programme
- Associated with the above, expertise development and expanding the capabilities of all partners, which was and is highly relevant for the development of the multidisciplinary fire safety engineering field as a whole
- Providing students and staff the experience of diverse teaching cultures
- Opportunities for study abroad
- Adding to the department's/university's footprint/prestige
- Enhancing employability and PhD prospects for students in the field

Challenges

- Although tackled in this instance, lack of standardisation makes joint degrees difficult, thereby requiring catered solutions that may impact the academic rationale: the mobility scheme for the programme was designed in order to meet the condition of presence at one of the partner universities in order to enable the awarding of a joint degree certificate, including qualifications pertinent to the (national) systems of all partners

CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN - MASTER IN EUROPEAN STUDIES

Background

Euroculture is an established Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree in European Studies which has been recognised since 2006 as a Master of Excellence by the European Commission. It takes an interdisciplinary approach and provides students with the opportunity to combine courses from at least two partner European universities. The programme also includes opportunities for internships and hands-on skills training. A joint degree is offered by two consortium universities, based on mutual recognition of periods of studies at those institutions and often a third partner university. The final thesis is a shared responsibility of the two universities that award the joint degree.

Advantages and opportunities

- Contribution to the University's employability agenda
- Prestige and international network
- The selection procedure by the consortium is helpful to select motivated students, both EM and a substantial number of self-financed
- The joint programme is based on a common Teaching and Exam Regulation which has been approved by the EU consortium partners that award the joint degree
- Dynamic/ variety of challenges provides an opportunity to understand admin systems across Europe
- Administrative problems keep emerging but nevertheless the programme is well established and running smoothly

Challenges

- Administrative burden for academic coordinators and department administrators
- Different local regulations (e.g., the rule to issue a diploma in the national language)
- To overcome the variety of (interpretation of) legislation and regulations, the Consortium opted for the European accreditation, according to the European approach for quality assurance of joint programmes. However, at present, the European accreditation is not fully recognised by all countries involved
- Challenge to assist non-European students with visa applications; rules and regulations differ per consortium partner country

CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF BERN - CREOLE PROGRAMME

Background

CREOLE is a Master's in Cultural Differences and Transnational Processes. Every year 6 students are allowed to start the Master program CREOLE at the University of Bern. Students are at their Home University for the first year and visit a host University at the second year of their study. All students do meet at the "Intensive Program" between year one and two for about 10 days for lectures and discussions. The study at the Host University gets financed partly by the Swiss-European Mobility Programme SEMP (Swiss Programme for Erasmus+). The stay at the "Intensive Program (IP)" gets partly financed by the Institute of Social Anthropology, faculty and University of Bern.

Advantages and opportunities

- Mono Master exclusively taught in English helps to attract international students
- Different expertise for staff and students enriching the programme
- Different teaching cultures improving quality and capabilities

Challenges

- Administrative burden
- High cost of living in Switzerland
- Lack of funding for intensive programme
- Funding
- Lack of support/recognition of the effort

CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA - GEMMA PROGRAMME

Background

Students can enrol in one of the universities (University of Bologna, University of Granada, and Utrecht University). This is a triple-badged programme.

GEMMA is the first Erasmus Mundus Joint Master in Women's and Gender Studies in Europe, taught by a consortium formed by 7 European universities. It counts on an extensive network of associate partners, including 16 associate academic partners from North, Central and South America and Europe, and 29 industrial partners from different areas (women's studies research and promotion institutions, public administration organisms, companies and enterprise networks, feminist activist organizations and NGOs, academic and cultural networks and publishers). One of GEMMA's main missions is to train much needed gender experts who will be able to contribute to gender equality and equity, taking into account the intersections of ethnicity, race, class, age and sexuality and contributing to rethink the idea of citizenship.

Advantages and opportunities

- Brilliant and motivated students
- Developing capacity for innovation in teaching and learning
- Incubating research collaboration

Challenges

- Local and regional problems with joint degrees
- COVID-19 -pandemic emergency had a negative impact on global partnership and global mobility
- Administrative work

The convergence in views in both the core advantages and challenges, is evident. More needs to be done to address resilient barriers and, fundamentally, for scaling up opportunity for students through improving structural conditions for collaboration between HEIs.

The fact that internationalisation in education, particularly through integrated programme-level cooperation, benefits a proportionally small number of students of participating institution is a core societal challenge; one that underlines the limitations of current designs for equality of access and of opportunity.

In spite of the welcomed support through scholarships (e.g. Erasmus Mundus), generally the cost (in monetary and capacity terms) and the logistical challenges of double degree schemes and joint programmes exclude groups of students who do not have the resource or capabilities to participate. Issues of administrative burden are consistently cited and echo the findings of relevant studies over the years. The fact that joint international provision requires significant administrative effort is a symptom of the fact that higher education structures are not built for joint programmes. Collaborative education at degree level is, for the majority, an exception to the rule; instead, investing in a system that would allow the kind of flexibility these degrees require should be mainstreamed.

The table below provides a summary of the profile of the student who is able to benefit from current schemes.

The profile of a 'typical' mobile student (policy documents)	Mobility in European joint study programmes (The Guild's examples)
High(er)-income background students	High living costs in Europe plus lack of European financial support means more self-funded (non-EU) students are enabled to do joint degrees
Students who come from backgrounds not categorised as 'vulnerable, disadvantaged, or underrepresented'	The mobility of non-European students or between non-EU countries increases administrative work due to immigration/visa requirements
Students whose parents have a higher education degree	Some programmes are 'selective', requiring students to commit to project/subdiscipline areas from the beginning
	Students from 'own' institutions not interested/cannot afford a joint programme (in the time/cost ratio)

Table 3: The 'mobile student'

This summary provides a useful overview of distribution of opportunity and fully supports the Commission's emphasis in diversifying and increasing flexibility of designs for empowering a more diverse student body to engage. European students are often not the main group participating in joint programmes, especially in Erasmus Mundus, due to the prescription to diversify the student population on the basis of citizenship. High living costs in Europe plus limited European financial support means self-funded students are more frequent users. Although in and by itself this can be read in multiple ways, it raises significant matters on the access potential of home/European students, flags the risk of silos and divides between student cohorts against the emphasis on European values.

As a response to many of the matters above, the sector has seen a steep demand to more versatile mobility formats such as short-term mobility opportunities.

Short term/intensive mobility opportunities:

Short term mobility is growing to meet the needs of students who are excluded from traditional mobility designs such as study abroad but can also not participate in joint programmes due to the issues identified earlier. Summer schemes and schools are an established design in the sector, however credit bearing provision bringing together home/international students is growing more recently. Similarly, bursaries for short term mobility and support are growing in addressing summer provision costs which is also prohibitive for students from non-privileged backgrounds.

CASE STUDY: AARHUS UNIVERSITY - SUMMER SCHOOL PROGRAMME

Background

An extensive programme with over 100 fast courses offered every summer. This umbrella of courses is designed to empower and enhance mobility pathways and opportunities. The summer university is open to home students who can take the courses for credit; University's established mobility partners' students and also provides opportunities for other students to participate in Aarhus programmes. About 650 international students attend from all over the world. This provides internationalisation at home, for home students through offering mixed courses with students from the EU and other parts of the world.

Advantages and opportunities

- International perspectives/creating a European or global citizen

Challenges

- COVID-19 disrupted physical mobility
- Student fit for programme

Connected/ness redefined:

In order, however, to enable wider student populations to be mobile within structured programme-level cooperations, besides more funding, new, more flexible, educational models can be developed or older models can be revisited under new umbrellas. Promising programming is coming through Alliances where different pathways to connectedness are explored, ultimately in order to create the conditions for fully fledged programmes or different developments to grow. The challenge is the support for moving from periphery to mainstream and micro-level programming to programme-level structures.

CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF TARTU - COLLABORATIVE ONLINE INTERNATIONAL LEARNING (COIL)

Background

The University's vision is to increase international learning by establishing and expanding a catalogue of flexible mobility schemes, ranging from low-threshold intercultural internationalisation at home e.g. by means of physical/virtual teacher exchange or Collaborative Online International Learning and other forms of virtual mobility, through short- term mobility programmes, towards semester exchanges and eventually joint degree mobility.

Semi-joint curricula have been offered since 2012 building on successful bilateral mobility agreements. Currently relevant to 10 Master's level courses. The core principle is to connect independent curricula in similar topics in two or more universities and include a mobility component (semester/year of studies). One compulsory mobility track provides unique specialisation. So far UT has been hosting university in these semi-joint curricula.

Mobility growth is also facilitated by UT's participation in the ENLIGHT network that has a stepping-stone path as a frame for supporting mobility. The stepping-stone path will offer a low-hurdle entry point into the mobility, mostly via virtual mobility, and end up with an option to pursue a joint degree programme delivered by the ENLIGHT universities. The stepping-stone principle enables flexible mobility options fitting for a larger group of students based on their actual needs and opportunities.

Semi-joint programme example: UT's Computer Science master's programme in EIT Urban Mobility Master School leading to the specialisation in [Smart Mobility Data Science and Analytics](#).

Advantages and opportunities

- Student retention
- Building student confidence in becoming global citizens through benchmarking with peers from other institutions
- Building programme confidence and in-house expertise in co-teaching. Semi-joint programmes advance international visibility. Joint programme is very active form of collaborating which is beneficial for the university's international footprint

Challenges

- Economic barriers- living costs/travel
- National political support-financing
- Different legislations
- Academic goodwill necessary for planning and carrying out the activity needs to be sustained despite lack of incentives

CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF TÜBINGEN - CIVIS ALLIANCE

Background

The University offers international degree courses and the chance to integrate periods of study abroad into its own courses, strengthening the University's international teaching and research profile.

In addition, the University is committed to providing international, interdisciplinary education for all students in bachelor and to some extent to master' students and offers a range of courses with partners in the Global South (Southern and Latin America and Africa) alongside traditional collaborations with European institutions and through Strategic partners and networks: Matariki Network, the Guild, CIVIS. This is well illustrated in a [Transdisciplinary course programme (micro-programme)](#).

The scheme offers the opportunity to students to select stackable units that make their own full fledged micro-programme. A European alliance such as CIVIS is a natural testbed and incubator for agile developments of that type.

Advantages and opportunities

- Courses are taken by students across disciplines
- Flexibility in the offering and diversity of mobility designs
- Teaching innovation
- Overall educational experience for students and staff to be exposed to other ways of thinking, to other ways of being in the world

Challenges

- Multiple degrees are difficult to build and maintain
- Scalability of offering
- Increased energy costs impose constraints in growth
- European degree label causes challenges in managing the diversity of individual designs while also providing direction, growth and scalability
- Funding critical for sustainability
- Takes time for educational development (e.g., to build micro-programmes)

CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK - EUTOPIA ALLIANCE

Background

Internationalisation alongside student research and interdisciplinarity constitute core pillars of Warwick's Education Strategy. Mobility occupies a central role in the University's Education and Internationalisation strategies. This includes a portfolio of short/long term mobility schemes and partnerships. By developing a range of bilateral and multilateral partnerships, the university seeks to enhance the impact of its research and education and to provide more students with the opportunity to experience global education within their curricular experience and beyond.

Through EUTOPIA Warwick is participating in [Connected Learning Communities](). Connected Learning Communities are thematically coherent hubs that connect academic staff, societal partners and students across the EUTOPIA institutional campuses. Each CLC is led or co-led by one of the EUTOPIA institutions and their research and innovation capacity extends to a European scale network of challenge-driven students, like-minded academics, and external stakeholders.

Best practices in innovative learning from the participating universities are connected through learning communities involving students, staff and non-academic stakeholders. Through Connected Learning Communities participating Universities re-imagine mobility and open up credit bearing components from existing programmes without the need for creating disruption or relying on physical mobility of staff or students. Connected Learning Communities seek to provide international experience for all by using virtual and blended mobility schemes in the students' existing learning journey.
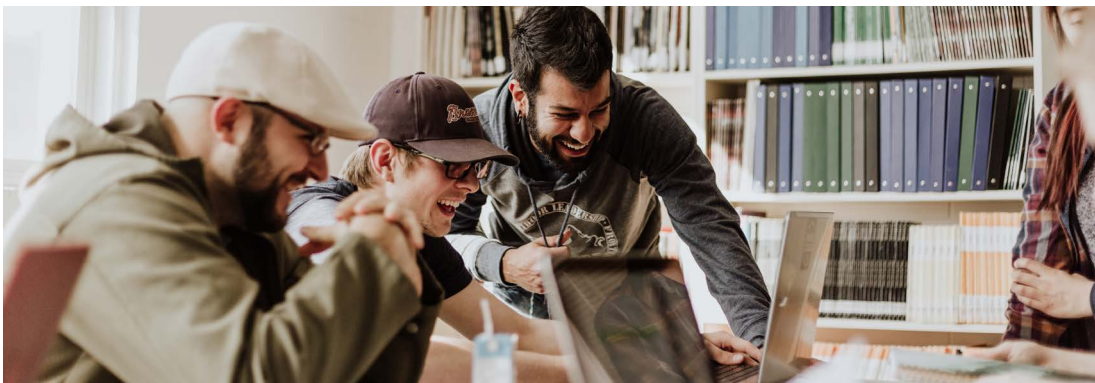
Advantages and opportunities

- Interdisciplinarity
- Project/Problem based learning experiences

Challenges

- Resource/recognition
- Necessary time for educational partnerships to mature
- Scalability of bottom-up initiatives

Traditional and new programming and international learning activities enhance universities' mobility strategies. The experience of working in international education provides tangible priorities for the structural issues that need to be addressed at local and international levels in order to achieve a (more) open, fluid and international experience for all students.

CASE STUDY: AARHUS UNIVERSITY - CIRCLE U.

Background

The University is committed to increased internationalisation and international collaboration. This involves innovation in international education as well as increasing mobility possibilities within education. The university is exploring innovative ways to collaborate within internationalisation of education. This involves embedded mobility in the curriculum, traditional semester mobility, joint or double programmes, extracurricular activities like competition or challenges. The work under Circle U. Collaboration Framework captures this priorities of the participating institutions. Alliances naturally constitute fertile ground and incubators for consolidating ongoing and testing new initiatives. National, regulatory issues and international, EU policy priorities need to align to support this work.

Advantages and opportunities

- International perspectives/creating a European or global citizen
- Embedded mobility

Challenges

- Blended intensive programmes not yet possible because of legal limitations to recognizing virtual opportunities
- COVID-19 disrupted physical mobility slowing down schemes on upward trajectories
- Boundaries impacting ongoing collaboration and integration between the students, universities participating in joint activities and in Alliances, and universities that are not members of Alliances

6. Looking back looking forward in transnational education collaboration: Key takeaways

As the sector moves to the post pandemic landscape, new challenges associated with geopolitical changes and the high living costs add further pressure on issues that impact on current designs of mobility. The future of internationalisation and international cooperation is in flux, with the green agenda, digital strategy and diverse population demographics requiring nuanced and diverse portfolio of international learning activities. In order to move forward we need to balance learnings from past/ongoing experience and a strategic plan for supporting programming that comes from the Alliances and brings potential to move beyond resilient barriers of the past. Maintaining and enhancing the quality of international collaboration and the inclusiveness, therefore scalability, of learning activities constitute core priorities.

Transnational education collaboration, in the form of connected programmes in particular, is subject to institutional/national constraints and administrative rules vs trust, social capital, good relations which constitute the glue that makes the cooperation happen. Barring increased investments, the benefits associated with traditional designs reach less the student body as a whole, given that a proportionally small fraction of the student body of an institution participate in study abroad designs or in joint programmes. The same applies to the (national) employers; despite the widespread connection between internationalisation and employability, there is less tangible evidence on the link between student participation in joint study programmes and increased employment opportunities in different national markets. At the same time, the benefits for institutions in reputation and international reach are uncontested.

Financial longevity and sustainability of offering directly impact the size and shape of international educational collaboration and mobilities available to students. With the Alliance pilots, the ability to innovate and develop new structural connections provides a possibility for scalable new developments which warrants local, national and international support.

In order to achieve the vision of transnational collaboration, a holistic approach to educational innovation is necessary. This involves prioritisation of activities that can enhance and embed educational collaboration in the structure and life of institutions, invest in diversity of educational programming and in a portfolio of mobilities that is dynamic, synchronised with the world around us and is inclusive.

The current framework and funding are not conducive to sustainable educational innovation. International/EU funding cannot and should not be the only, or even the main, mechanisms for accessing resource (monetary and non- monetary). In order to address sustainability of support and resource, national regulators and national funding need to provide the local tools for enhancing transnational collaboration and connectedness at course and programme level.

A. THE SECTOR NEEDS A NUANCED AND DIVERSE SET OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES INVOLVING MULTIPLE MOBILITIES AND CORRESPONDING POLICY TOOLS, DRAWING ON AN INTERNATIONALISATION APPROACH THAT IS BASED ON AN EDUCATIONAL MODEL SYNCHRONISED WITH THE COMPLEXITY OF REAL-WORLD PROBLEMS

No pedagogic design or modality can, in and by itself, provide the sole answer to the complex issues identified earlier. Internationalisation in the form of joint programmes is, simultaneously, difficult in terms of administration, logistics and (national) legislation and beneficial for students and institutions as well as the sector in enhancing conditions that enable other types of cooperation.

Joint study programmes are part of a development process that should feed into an ecosystem of activities facilitating integrated programme-level cooperation. Current initiatives, such as the European degree label is oriented towards joint degrees in line with regulatory priorities and the aspiration to facilitate structural collaboration. Other types of collaboration should also be actively and tangibly recognised to be attractive to the variety of universities that make up the sector. This opens space for connecting with alternative forms of credit recognition (with particular emphasis to micro-credential types) and supports diversity of designs and innovation while providing a framework and structure for growth.

In this context, the EC and the sector should continue to promote a diversity of approaches to collaboration, including those models which do not lead, linearly, to a degree in the legal sense.

Experimentation and creativity should not be associated with any one design and/or product; the aim should be to increase multiple learning activities and mobilities in study programmes to achieve expanding opportunity for large cohorts of students. At the same time, diversity of micro-level programming is difficult to manage and govern. The sector needs strategic decisions to steer and implement large scale developments locally and ensure a sustainable balance between macro-scale programming and micro-scale experimentation for achieving programme level connectedness.

Alliances can become the conduit for doing things differently, addressing the challenge of interdisciplinarity in and through connecting the higher education pedagogic offering to research-led, active learning and problem-based pedagogies. Different disciplines come with different subject skill requirements and methodological orientations. However, challenge/ problem-based learning and research-led pedagogies provide students with analytical skills

and mindset that allows to connect theory to practice and learning to the complexity of the world around us. International education based on strong relationships and trust are the only way for partnerships to become more of the sum or their parts and dare to imagine a truly globally connected, locally relevant provision.

B. SCALABILITY OF CONNECTED/AGILE/ALTERNATIVE DESIGNS IS A CHALLENGE FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF INNOVATION AND FOR ENSURING THAT THE PROGRAMMES ARE INCLUSIVE

Current work in the Alliances aspires to make learning activities available to all participating institutions and to provide connectivity on scale to reach half of the student populations. Universities are supporting the vision but have limited tools to incentivise application using the current toolkit. Tools such as Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) and Erasmus + mobility contribute towards addressing the challenges, but more needs to be done at national, as well as European and global level, for long-term sustainability and quality assurance.

Despite the vision for all universities to be able to participate in new forms of European collaboration, this is still far from the sector's daily experiences. A question and issue already on the table should be about risks to create silos. Alliances themselves also need to be scalable and not become new silos. Deepening the potential of the partnerships and the structural viability of their products needs to create conditions for a sector wide paradigm shift. Alliances should disseminate and share good practice and products emerging from the pilot with the sector who should use specialised tools and existing funding mechanisms (Erasmus +) for embedding innovation in pedagogic designs.

To achieve scalability, it is necessary for institutions to be supported to offer interdisciplinary and international courses and create structures that will facilitate collaboration; hence reducing the administrative effort current systems require.

This is also related to piloting institutional models for teaching innovation and embedding structures that enable educators from different subjects to come together, as a normal part of the life of an institution, with a view to developing new interdisciplinary content, international programme-level connectedness and associated methods.

At the same time, EC performance indicators also need to take into consideration current experience of the sector. The ambition of 50% mobility target is far out from existing realities for the majority of institutions and has not been attained in most of the sector's lived experience. In order to be translatable and implementable for higher education, a trajectory towards

more inclusive forms of mobility/international learning activity is, therefore, necessary.

C. POLICY PRIORITIES (SUCH AS THE EUROPEAN DEGREE) SHOULD BUILD ON EXISTING GOOD PRACTICES AND HAVE A CLEAR AND ADDED VALUE FOR INSTITUTIONS AND ACADEMICS TO SECURE ACADEMIC BUY-IN. ACADEMIC COMMITMENT AND OPENNESS TO INTERNATIONALISATION NEEDS TO BE RECOGNISED AND INCENTIVISED.

The importance of academic goodwill and academic attitude to internationalisation is paramount for the success of any higher education initiative. The Bologna Process has shown that lack of support from the often called 'bottom up' hinders or stops implementation of 'top down' proposals. The 'top down' and 'bottom up' metaphor positions students and staff in a notional lower position to administration. This semantic representation is problematic and not intended by those who use the metaphor and where the focus of new developments is. However, it captures the need to articulate the relevance of initiatives for the community of staff/students/non-academic partners.

Academic buy-in is critical for ensuring the sustainability and success of educational innovation. This applies to simple study abroad where 'academic buy-in is persuasive when students are considering mobility' (Allinson, UUK report.: n.p.) all the way to leading and implementing larger scale innovation. Policy tools and new frameworks (such as the European degree) should build on existing good practices to secure academic buy-in. For this to happen, policy tools need to bring real added value for institutions and academics. Cutting red tape around existing quality assurance frameworks and working closely with Member States will certainly break important barriers and enhance all types of collaboration. At the same time, recognising different kinds of mobility also will bring needed innovation in curriculum development. These interconnected but also different outcomes will enable the sector to further diversify programme designs.

Looking towards European degrees, therefore, there is an opportunity to focus on what they can do that cannot be done by joint study programmes as they exist already. Recognition of a greater diversity of collaboration, national and local structures for moving promising pilots to mainstream and visibility of pedagogic products beyond academia constitute, undoubtedly, part of the priorities.

There is no doubt that it is extremely resource intense for academics to come together and create connected programmes. This is not about content or thematics or where the challenges are; this is straightforward and what the sector has been doing well. The whole

infrastructure and necessary documentation however, as well as the planning and advocating in the wider community for change is complicated and needs support.

D. UNIVERSITIES NEED TO BE SUPPORTED TO INVEST IN SUSTAINABLE PEDAGOGIC INNOVATION. THE SUPPORT NEEDS TO ADDRESS SHORT- AND LONG-TERM GROWTH NEEDS AND TO SHOW TRUST IN FINANCIAL AND REGULATORY AUTONOMY. MEMBER STATES AND UNIVERSITIES NEED TO RETHINK HOW THEY PRIORITIZE AND INVEST IN PEDAGOGIC INNOVATION ADAPTING AND EXTENDING REGULATORY AND FUNDING MECHANISMS.

The current EU policy framework provides the ambition and the language towards innovation and change. At the same time, it is clear that more diverse and multilevel/multifactorial support is needed – not just at the EU, but especially also at the national and institutional levels. This involves actual immediate mechanisms for increasing funding, taking a leading role in digital infrastructure and data analytics but also more broadly a different and holistic conceptualisation of academic careers, one that brings together recognition for research with recognition for teaching and learning.

The sector needs both access to the means to carry out internationalisation, as well as EC and national regulators to collaborate in the development of regulatory frameworks and tools for individual institutions and for Alliances. Funding should remain oriented towards a diversity of activity types and reflected in the priorities of the national funding of member states.

In short, our position is that support needs to take different forms and involve efforts from institutions themselves, national governments and the EU as follows:

The EU should:

- Support for the digital infrastructure –take more responsibility for digital platforms,

- Strongly encourage and incentivise the removal of red tape across and between European countries, strengthen diversity of programme-level connectedness and disseminate pedagogic products that can offer mobility and exchange at all levels.

- Provide financial support / funding / scholarships for students in relation to issues of cost of life.

The institutions should:

- Lead and negotiate at national level ways to meet the vision and priorities for transnational collaboration, mobility and scalability of opportunity,

- Enhance resources that support academics in designing new initiatives- including the set-up and running costs for new initiatives,

- Invest in administrative structures enabling interdisciplinarity and international collaboration,

- Trust the quality assurance systems of peer institutions.

Member states should:

- Respond and engage in further dialogue with the EC and the sector in translating locally international vision and priorities,

- Reduce red tape and work with institutions on the basis of a model of trust to enhance structures and mechanisms for international collaboration,

- Incentivise/ enhance resources that support institutions in providing interdisciplinary, international courses,

- Recognise transnational pedagogic collaboration and provide financial support / funding / scholarships for students in relation to issues of cost of life.

E. UNIVERSITIES NEED TO LEAD ON CHANGING THE PRACTICE AND NARRATIVE FOR INNOVATION IN INTERNATIONALISATION OF EDUCATION. RESEARCH SHOULD BE USED FOR EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS.

'Universities' are not a homogenous category, and they play a unique role in their regional, national and international ecosystem. Accordingly, designs for global education need to be sensitive to diversity in the sector and the needs of our students and societies. Universities (need to) embrace the changing landscape and provide ways for global education which moves from separate sets of activities or programmes to embedding global connectedness in the universities' core business; teaching, research and innovation. University existing mechanisms for teaching, learning and research development and growth are necessary structures to consolidate and embed innovation. Universities should work with national regulators and the EC in identifying ways to steer and incentivise transnational collaboration particularly in priority (thematic/interdisciplinary) areas so that grass-route initiatives and institutional/national/international priorities can be supported to grow.

Moving forward, more data and better monitoring are necessary. In order to achieve the balance between individualised and scalable learning, disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning, locally embedded and globally competitive programmes, an international educational, collaborative approach is necessary. We need to understand and capture better what works for different strata of our student population orienting on learnings that foster pedagogical innovation. For this, the Member States, EC and universities should work together to establish monitoring and reporting processes that are dynamic and meet the principles of the educational experiences we aim to make available to our students. Reports should therefore be structured to prioritise dissemination of good practice.

Overall, participation of the sector in international education activities shows the current dynamic and buy-in. There is momentum for bringing cultural change through supporting what our universities do well and what we can meaningfully change for adding value. True international collaboration is achieved when it is deeply and fully embedded in the daily experience of students and staff. To build on momentum, we need to approach internationalisation with a new holistic approach which must cut across resourcing, careers, administrative/pedagogical support, and infrastructure. Member States, the EC and senior university leadership need to align in order to enable the sector to continue leading the way.

⌃ References and image credits

Allison, K. (2020) *Widening Participation in UK Outward Student Mobility: A picture of participation. Universities UK International Report.* https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/widening-participation-in-uk-outward-student-mobility.pdf.

Asgary, N., & Robert, M. (2010) *'A Cost-Benefit Analysis of an International Dual Degree Programme', Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 32(3), pp. 317-325. doi: 10.1080/13600801003743513.*

Angouri, J. (2021) *Reimagining Research-led Education in a Digital Age (The Guild Insight Paper No. 3). The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities and Bern Open*

Publishing. doi: 10.48350/156297.

Cresswell, T. (2010) *'Towards a Politics of Mobility', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 28(1), pp. 17–31. doi: 10.1068/d11407.*

Culver, S. M., Puri, I. K., Spinelli, G., DePauw, K. P. K., & Dooley, J. E. (2012) *'Collaborative dual-degree programs and value added for students: Lessons learned through the Evaluate-E project', Journal of Studies in International Education, 16(1), pp. 40–61.*

Di Pietro, G. (2012) *'Does studying abroad cause international labor mobility? Evidence from Italy. Economics Letters, 117(3), pp. 632-635.*

Di Pietro, G. (2015). *Do Study Abroad Programs Enhance the Employability of Graduates? Education, Finances and Policy, 10(2), pp. 223-243.*

Dondi, C., Aceto, S. and Proli, D. (2009) *'Learnovation Foresight Report' hal-00592999.*

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2020) *The European Higher Education Area in 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.*

European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Orosz, K., Craciun, D. (2018) *Benefits and costs of transnational collaborative partnerships in higher education. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.* https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/53660.

European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Erasmus+ Programme, *Statistical factsheets on the achievements of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (2014-2020), Publications Office, 2021,* https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/639462

Fehrenbach, H., & Huisman, J. (2022). *A Systematic Literature Review of Transnational Alliances in Higher Education: The Gaps in Strategic Perspectives. Journal of Studies in International Education, 10283153221137680.*

Holdsworth, C. (2009) *'"Going Away to Uni': Mobility, Modernity, and Independence of English Higher Education students', Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space, 41(8), pp. 1849–1864. doi: 10.1068/a41177.*

Juknytė-Petreikienė, I., & Žydžiūnaitė, V. (2017). Quality considerations in the internationalization of higher education: the international students' experiences within joint degree studies. Pedagogika, 127(3), pp. 205-218.

Masschelein, J., & Simons, M. (2009) 'From active citizenship to world citizenship: A proposal for a world university', European Educational Research Journal, 8(2), pp. 236-248.

Sheller, M. and Urry, J. (2006) 'The New Mobilities Paradigm', Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space, 38(2), pp. 207–226. doi: 10.1068/a37268.

Waters, J. L. (2017) 'Education unbound? Enlivening debates with a mobilities perspective on learning', Progress in Human Geography, 41(3), pp. 279–298. doi: 10.1177/0309132516637908.

Yarosh, M., Lukic, D., & Santibáñez-Gruber, R. (2018) 'Intercultural competence for students in international joint master programmes', International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 66, pp. 52-72.

⌃ Annexes

A.   ANNEX I METHODOLOGY AND CORPUS

The analysis of the policy documents draws on corpus-assisted discourse analysis tools.The documents were first uploaded to SketchEngine, creating a corpus of 136,516 words. Using the Wordlist tool, we examined the most frequent lexical words, disregarding grammatical words which are always the most frequent in a corpus. The most frequent lexical words were: education (2,085 instances), european (2,017), higher (1,465), joint (822), cooperation (645), universities (644), institutions (578), research (574), students (474) and degree (473). Using the Word Sketch tool, we examined the modifiers of cooperation and student* and the words modified by these nouns. We toggled the results to show frequency and LogDice score. We then took the modifier with the highest frequency and LogDice score for each word and examined the concordance lines. These were transnational cooperation and mobile student* respectively. We grouped the concordance lines for transnational cooperation according to the benefits of and values associated with transnational collaboration. We grouped the concordance lines for mobile student* according to who was (not) represented as a mobile student.

B.   ANNEX II POLICY DOCUMENTS ANALYSED FOR THE INSIGHT PAPER

European Commission. (2022). Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on building bridges for effective higher education cooperation. (Text with EEA relevance).

European Union (2022). European Universities Erasmus+.

Council of the European Union. (2021). Outcome of proceedings. Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European Higher education.

European Commission. (2022). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European strategy for universities.

Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe (2022): https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7936-2022-INIT/en/pdf

European Commission. (2022). Erasmus+ Programme (ERASMUS) Call for proposals.

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2022). Towards equity and inclusion in higher education in Europe. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission. European Universities Erasmus+. (Later edition).

European Union. (2021). Erasmus+ 2021-2027 Enriching lives, opening minds through the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Official Journal of the European Union. (2022). Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (Text with EEA relevance).

European Commission. (2022). Commission staff working document.

European Council meeting (14 December 2017) – Conclusions: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf (page 3 and 4)

Pilot call for the joint European degree label (call annex with European criteria for the joint transnational programmes): https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2022/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2022-pol-exp-he_en.pdf

Rue du Trône 98, 3rd floor
B - 1050 Brussels, Belgium

+32 (0)2 274 05 00
office@the-guild.eu
www.the-guild.eu

The Guild
of European Research-Intensive Universities

Guildeu
/company/the-guild-eu
bit.ly/TheGuildYouTube

AARHUS UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ-BOLYAI
BABEȘ-BOLYAI TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM
BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITÄT
TRADITIO ET EXCELLENTIA

u^b
UNIVERSITY OF BERN

ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

GHENT UNIVERSITY

University of Glasgow

GEORG-AUGUST-UNIVERSITÄT GÖTTINGEN IN PUBLICA COMMODA SEIT 1737

university of groningen

Univerza v Ljubljani

JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY IN KRAKÓW

KING'S College LONDON

UCLouvain

UiO : University of Oslo

Université Paris Cité

upf. Universitat Pompeu Fabra Barcelona

Radboud University

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

EBERHARD KARLS UNIVERSITÄT TÜBINGEN

UPPSALA UNIVERSITET

WARWICK THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Universität Wien