GO DIJIP

Integrating Digital
Collaborative
Environments into
Joint Programmes

HANDBOOK and
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

PART 1

International and National context

of

*Joint Programmes and Digitally Enhanced
Learning and Teaching*

Glossary

Blended learning: A model combining face-to-face classroom teaching and the innovative use of ICT technologies. Experts often associate blended learning with the redesign of the educational environment and the learning experience, thus contributing to the creation of a "community of inquiry"[1].

Blended Mobility: combination of physical mobility with a virtual component, aimed at facilitating collaborative online learning and teamwork. The virtual component can be used to prepare students for physical mobility, or it can be used after physical mobility, to deepen cultural learning, or it can even take place during the physical mobility to directly enhance some aspects of it[2].

iOOCs: Interactive Open Online Courses, combining content presented in a similar format to MOOCs, with an interactive component which includes weekly synchronous discussion sessions in small groups with the support of a dialogue facilitator, to encourage intercultural communication[3].

Joint programme: the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes defines a 'joint programme' as 'an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions (HEIs) from EHEA countries, and leading to double/multiple degrees or a joint degree'. This is the most official definition of a joint programme, although clearly a joint programme can be offered by institutions from different countries, whether or not (some of) these institutions are located within or outside of the EHEA[4].

Joint degree: the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes defines a 'joint degree' as 'a single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme'.[5]

Double / multiple degrees: the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes defines 'double or multiple degrees' as 'separate degrees awarded by HEIs offering the joint programme attesting the successful completion of this programme (if two degrees are awarded by two institutions, this is a 'double degree')'.[6]

MOOC: MOOC stands for massive open online course. Massive, as there is generally no participation limit, thousands can enrol for the same course. Open, as it is accessible to a large audience of learners: the hosting institution usually does not require any formal entry requirement and the course is free of charge. The whole course is delivered online, including assessment and additional services (even though personal contact with other participants or tutors is a possibility).

Online degree programmes: A degree programme, which the student attends fully or predominantly online.

Virtual mobility: Educational practices that allow students from one educational institution to follow courses organised at a different institution (usually based in a different country) without having to leave home. The focus of Virtual Mobility is to provide subject knowledge by taking advantage

[1] Source: https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/digihe%20new%20version.pdf
[2] Source: https://frames-project.eu/outputs/toolkit/
[3] Source: https://frames-project.eu/outputs/toolkit/
[4] Source: https://impea.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Joint-Programmes-from-A-to-Z-Report-2020.pdf
[5] Source: https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/definitions/
[6] Source: https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/definitions/

ofcomplementary expertise, and does not require the student to interact with peers from the host institution[7].

Virtual exchange: Virtual Exchange (VE) is a practice that consists of sustained, technology-enabled, people-to-people online exchange sessions in which constructive communication and interaction take place with the support of educators or facilitators

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[7] Source: https://frames-project.eu/outputs/toolkit/

Joint programmes

Joint programmes in the European Higher Education Area

The creation and development of JPs (and joint degrees) have been encouraged by the **Bologna Process** as a key element in supporting internationalisation of HEIs. After more than 20 years, JPs continue to be extremely relevant in addressing Bologna objectives: the development of JPs automatically leads to increased collaboration not only in joint curriculum development, but also in supporting student mobility, automatic credit transfer, and collaboration in quality assurance and recognition. JPs also aim at developing innovative and quality oriented approaches in teaching and research, improving students' employability and making the educational offer more attractive for international students.

Over the years, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) education ministers have worked to support the development of JPs and the successive implementation of the [European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes](#), developed to enable the external quality assurance of these programmes and facilitate integrated approaches to quality assurance of joint programmes, which genuinely reflect and mirror their joint character.

In parallel, several **funding programmes** have been supported by the European Commission in order to stimulate the development of JPs. Among the most renowned is certainly the [Erasmus Mundus Programme](#), launched back in 2004.

All this has led JPs to become established formats (albeit limited in number) for European and international exchange and collaboration, giving a competitive advantage to Europe and European HEIs, with great benefits for the students and staff involved[9].

More recently, the [European University Initiative](#) has provided new momentum, yet also new challenges, for JPs. In the European Commission's (EC) vision, European Universities are transnational alliances that will lead the way towards the universities of the future, promoting European values and identity, and revolutionising the quality and competitiveness of European higher education. To achieve this major step forward, European Universities alliances are called to offer, amongst others, "student-centred curricula jointly delivered across inter-university campuses, where diverse student bodies can build their own programmes and experience mobility at all levels of study" leading to the award of a **joint European Degree**, as well as "adopt a challenge-based approach according to which students, academics and external partners can cooperate in inter-disciplinary teams to tackle the biggest issues facing Europe today[10]".

Expanding the European Universities Initiative and establishing a joint European degree are concepts that are also at the heart of the [European Strategy for Universities](#) and of the recommendations for "building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation[11]", proposed by the EC in January 2022. Underpinning the entire proposal is the belief that universities are critical to leading the response to big societal and global challenges through effective transnational collaboration; and that the principle of inclusive excellence across all four missions of universities makes the EU's approach distinct compared to other parts of the world.

With specific reference to joint programmes, the strategy sets the path towards the award of a **European Degree Label** by 2024. As a first step, the EC launched the European Degree Label

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[9] For detailed information on the wide range of benefits associated to JP, you can refer to the *Joint Programmes from A to Z* Guide: https://impea.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Joint-Programmes-from-A-to-Z-Report-2020.pdf (p. 19-20)

[10] https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative

[11] https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/proposal-for-a-council-recommendation-on-building-bridges-for-effective-european-higher-education-cooperation

initiative, addressing alliances of HEIs and national authorities in order to examine, test and facilitate the delivery of a joint European degree label, based on common criteria. Later on, these alliances will be asked to design and deliver, at national, regional or institutional level, joint degrees based on these co-created European criteria.

National legislation around JPs

The legal power to set higher education policy and implement JP lies within the national or sub-national legislation. When developing a JP (be it with or without digital elements), it is thus important to check national regulations carefully first, especially considering the implications related to Qualification Frameworks, Accreditation, Quality Assurance, Fees and Funding, Student Admission, Legal regulations regarding the awarding of joint/double degrees. The following paragraph will outline the national legislation around JP (including key commitments to EHEA and European Approach status) in the GO-DIJIP universities partners' countries, i.e. Italy, Norway and France. For general information about current national legislation supporting JP in other EHEA countries, please refer to the [Joint Programmes from A to Z guide](#).

ITALY

National legislation: In the Italian context, joint degrees were mentioned for the first time in the [Ministerial Decree 509/1999](#), stating the possibility for universities to award joint degrees with other Italian or international universities on the basis of special agreements.

In the following years, international degrees became more and more common and the legislation on joint degrees was structured.

The [Director's Decree 2711/2021](#) «Operational guidelines for the accreditation of academic courses a.y. 2022/2023» identifies in Annex 1 three options for the accreditation of joint degrees:

- *Interateneo* courses with international universities, leading to a joint/double/multiple degree;
- Courses with structured international mobility – degree courses with one or more agreements for structured mobility leading to a double or multiple degree;
- Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters' courses, leading to a joint/double/multiple degree.

This implies that, in order to award a joint degree (and not a double/multiple degree), full accreditation of a new international programme (as *'interateneo'* course) is needed.

Key commitments to EHEA: Italy is still only partially aligned with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). A fully functioning quality assurance system is in operation nationwide but only some HEIs are subject to regular external quality assurance by an agency that has successfully demonstrated compliance with the ESG through registration on EQAR.

European Approach for Quality Assurance of JPs: is still not available to higher education institutions.

Main challenges:

- Italian HEIs cannot award joint degrees based on existing degree courses with structured international mobility, but necessarily need to accredit a new international degree course. This is considered by HEIs to be a strong hindrance to the agile development of JP in Italy.
- The non-availability of the European Approach to Italian institutions poses strong challenges for Italian HEIs, often implying double work in accrediting the programme: nationally, according

to Italian rules and at European Level if the other consortium partners follow the European Approach.

Main challenges: French HEIs cannot award joint degrees if the partner institution/s do not agree in using the French administration template and the French National Printing paper. As only French Institutions are allowed to use this paper, if French HEIs want to deliver a joint degree they must undertake the entire process of diplomas issuing.

Digitally enhanced learning and teaching (DELT)

DELT in the European Higher Education Area

Digitally enhanced learning and teaching is widely used across the EHEA, with general acceptance growing over the years and institutions widely acknowledging the benefits it brings to the student experience.

According to the EUA report "[Digitally Enhanced Learning and Teaching in European Higher Education Institutions](#)", in Europe today, practically every HEI uses DELT. With increased take-up and resulting practical experience gained over the recent years, the controversies on the matter have been less a question of whether or not, but rather to what extent, in what mode, and what the expected impacts and benefits are. Digital learning and teaching is not only considered to be a feasible endeavour, but also a highly valuable one and a powerful change driver. In the past years, digitalisation has contributed to a major transformation in learning and teaching methods and provision, collaboration with other HEIs at national and international level, collaboration with employers and industry, outreach and provision for international students and open learning opportunities. It has also played a key role in fostering internationalisation at home, including educational practices such as virtual mobility and Virtual Exchange (VE).

The **strategic focus** placed on digitally enhanced learning and teaching has increased, undoubtedly accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, and is **reflected in many national and European policies,** with the renewed [Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)](#) underlining "the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem" as a strategic priority. Digitalisation offers opportunities to foster international academic relations through digital technologies; digitally supported information, teaching-learning and cooperation formats; it connects teachers and learners as well as researchers across borders, institutions and disciplines. Digitalisation also has an important role to play in advancing policy commitments made at EHEA and EU level, such as the automatic recognition of qualifications and common standards in quality assurance – as mentioned in the [Rome Communiqué](#) (2020); and digitally transferability of student data through the interoperability of IT infrastructures.

With specific reference to EU policies to support digitalisation, in March 2021, the Commission laid out its vision for Europe's digital transformation by 2030 in its [Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade](#) Communication. In September 2021, the Commission put forward a [Path to the Digital Decade](#), a robust governance framework to reach these digital targets.

The European Strategy for Universities (Jan 2022) mentioned above also stresses the importance of empowering universities as actors of change in the twin green and digital transitions: "the digital transition gives universities a fundamental role in equipping students and researchers with the digital skills and competences needed in the new reality and in the promotion of innovation and new technologies".

Finally, the Commission proposed the [Declaration of Digital Rights and Principles](#) in January 2022. The Commission, Parliament and Council reached an [agreement on the Declaration](#) in November 2022. The Declaration adds to previous digital initiatives from Member States, such as the [Tallinn Declaration on eGovernment](#), the [Berlin Declaration on Digital Society and Value-based Digital Government](#), and the [Lisbon Declaration – Digital Democracy](#) with a purpose.

With the Declaration on digital rights and principles, the EU wants to secure European values by:

- Putting people at the centre of the digital transformation;
- Supporting solidarity and inclusion through connectivity, digital education, training and skills, fair and just working conditions and access to digital public services;
- Restating the importance of freedom of choice and a fair digital environment;
- Fostering participation in the digital public space;
- Increasing safety, security and empowerment in the digital environment, in particular for young people;
- Promoting sustainability.

Concretely, these rights and principles mean: affordable and high-speed digital connectivity everywhere and for everybody, well-equipped classrooms and digitally skilled teachers, seamless access to public services online, obtaining easy-to-understand information on the environmental impact of our digital products, control about how personal data is used and with whom it is shared.

National legislation around DELT

The following paragraph will outline the national legislation around DELT in JPs in GO-DIJIP partners' countries, i.e. Italy, Norway and France.

ITALY

The [Ministerial Decree n. 289/2021](#) in Annex 4, section A – "Conventional and distance learning courses" – stated that Italian Universities may establish, at the accreditation stage, the following types of degree programmes:

- Standard degree programmes: degree programmes mostly delivered in presence. The amount of educational activities (other than practical and laboratory activities) delivered online cannot exceed 10% of the total;
- Blended degree programmes: degree programmes mostly delivered online. The amount of educational activities (other than practical and laboratory activities) delivered online cannot exceed approx. 66% of the total;
- Online degree programmes: degree programmes entirely delivered online excluding exams and thesis defences.

In late 2021, the Conference of Italian University Rectors Foundation (CRUI) lobbied for wider flexibility in legislation, in particular requesting the Ministry of Higher Education (MUR) to allow standard degree programmes to extend the limit of educational activities delivered online from 10% to 33% "in the case of courses attended virtually at other national or international universities". The Ministry denied such an extension (ref. Note n. 5152 of 22.02.2022).

Currently, there is no regulation around online or blended teaching & learning specific to JPs in place, thus standard regulation applies. However, most Italian HEIs require at least 30 ECTS (1 semester or 6 months) of study abroad within JPs.

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NORWAY

It is a legislative requirement that students admitted to studies that are to be included in a JP, must be ensured a study stay of a certain extent at the partner institution(s). Hence the pre-pandemic regulations do not seem to allow for programmes where all teaching, learning and assessment take place online.

This situation may change, as digital transformation in higher education and research is high on the current political agenda. Digitalisation for flexible education is a strategic focus area including increased student mobility as a measure in the national action plan (2021 - 2025). For this purpose, opportunities to simplify and streamline processes and solutions for international student exchange are to be mapped.

FRANCE

The French Education Code states that **"The public service of higher education makes available to its users' digital educational services and resources."** (Article 123-4-1 du [code de l'éducation](#)). Above all, under the terms of article L. 611-8 (Introduced by [Law No. 2013-660 of July 22, 2013](#) on higher education and research), this same code specifies that "Higher education institutions shall make their teaching available in digital form [...]. This provision may replace the teaching provided in the presence of students in order to offer lifelong distance learning in higher education. [...] Training in the use of digital tools and resources and in understanding the issues associated with them, adapted to the specificities of the course followed by the student, is provided from the moment the student enters higher education, as a continuation of the training provided in secondary education. The classes made available in digital form by the institutions have a status equivalent to the classes given in presence [...]. At their request, teachers can attend a training course that allows them to acquire the skills necessary to make their teaching available in digital form and introduces them to innovative teaching methods involving the use of information and communication technologies".

Therefore, well before the COVID-19 pandemic, digital teaching was already an obligation of universities for courses that allowed it and the training of staff in DELT was already widely addressed by national regulations and institutional practices. Online courses could also replace face-to-face teaching to allow distance learning.

Concerning blended learning, there are no additional specific regulations, as this is considered a matter of academic and pedagogical freedom for teacher-researchers. Online and blended courses have equal status and recognition to face-to-face courses.

Currently, there is no regulation around online or blended teaching & learning specific to JPs in place, thus standard regulation applies.

Why digitalisation in joint programmes?

As demonstrated by the above developments, both the JP and DELT contexts in the EHEA are extremely dynamic and in continuous evolution.

JPs are both responses and drivers of key developments in higher education policy, thereby turning into a privileged laboratory for the testing of innovative forms of teaching, learning and international collaboration, including digital tools and methodologies. These might include: blended learning; virtual and blended mobility; Virtual Exchange; challenge-based learning to address problems in need of multinational solutions digitalised mobility administration; tools to support intercultural skills development; digital marketing; digital tools to support student engagement, etc.

The impact of Covid-19

The sudden shift to online teaching and learning due to the COVID-19 outbreak brought about various challenges for JP competences and pedagogies, teaching and learning tools, collaborative work and joint administration, as well as quality assurance. These challenges were, however, also key opportunities for JPs which, by their nature, aim to create innovative pathways and make the most of an international partnership of diverse and complementary institutions. JPs quickly tested new forms of management, welcoming international students, implementing joint teaching programmes, graduating students - showing their ability to adapt to the new situation.

Initially, all these tools were part of risk-mitigation measures and emergency-response. Slowly, however, while it became evident that digital solutions could not and should not fully replace physical activities, many of the tools and methodologies tested during the Covid-19 pandemic started to be sustainably embedded in JPs, opening up new scenarios for JP developments.

Moving beyond contingency planning: the potential of digitalisation in JP

The wave of progress in using digital technologies was forced upon HEIs by the pandemic. It will no doubt continue and intensify in the future. However, there will be choices to make and questions of cultural adaptation to address. For example, as the [Bologna Process Implementation Report 2020](#) suggests, HEIs are currently faced with key questions such as: what will be the appropriate role for digital technologies? How should the human learning and teaching environment relate to the digital environment? How can digital technologies support higher education policy objectives? Will campuses continue to exist as a main model for the organisation and delivery of higher education in a digital age? How will digital learning and teaching impact public and private funding, including student support?

When it comes to JPs, additional questions arise, e.g.: what is the right balance between physical presence and virtual mobility? How can soft skills, which are so valued by JP graduates and their employers[12], be stimulated by digital teaching & learning? To what extent can digitalisation support JPs to become more inclusive and less elitist? And how can it help JPs reduce their carbon footprint?

While the topic of digitalisation in JPs is still new and little explored in existing literature, it is starting to emerge through bottom-up experiments and innovations triggered by JP coordinators and their institutions.

In the past two years of project implementation, the GO-DIJIP team gathered many experiences, feedback, and comments from staff and students involved in JPs proving that **digitalisation can be a strong added value to JPs**. What is most interesting, is that digital environments can be embedded

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[12] This has been widely explored by the REDEEM and REDEEM 2 projects: https://www.redeemproject.eu/documents/ ; https://www.redeem2.eu/

in so many ways and at different levels into JPs, enriching not only the academic offer but also students' services, intercultural competences, employability and impact.

A few examples of possible ways of integrating digital environments into JPs and related benefits are summarised below and will be described in detail in the next section of the Handbook.

- **Digital tools** can be integrated into "standard" courses or activities, allowing students to experience more interaction during classes (icebreaker activities, polls…) but also outside classes (group works, research activities etc…). Digital tools can also support assessment activities, transforming exams into learning experiences using virtual open book exams.
- **Virtual and Blended Mobility and Virtual Exchange** practices are increasingly common in JPs, because they can be co-designed permitting different grades of interaction between institutions, teachers and students. They can also be very flexible (synchronous live classes, asynchronous activities to engage students in their own time, hybrid as a combination of the above) and adapted to different contexts (see chapter [Develop & innovate your programme](#)).
- **Digital tools** can be used for **management** as well as **marketing** purposes – especially social media, but also online advertisements, webinars, virtual fairs, welcoming sessions -as they allow reaching prospective students worldwide.
- **Digital environments can improve network activities**, sense of belonging and students and alumni engagement.

There are still many challenges and legal barriers to the full implementation of digitalisation in JPs (see chapter [Key challenges](#)); however, recent policy statements and strategies at EU / EHEA level suggest the **relevance of such practices to address wider policy objectives**.

The **European University Initiative**, for example, has opened the floor to further experimentation in JPs, including innovative formats, virtual and blended teaching, entirely blended JPs, etc. The **European Degree Label** criteria include an optional criteria related to digitalisation: "in addition to physical mobility, the joint programme includes additional formats of transnational learning activities with partner HEIs (e.g. online or blended, in the format of regular or intensive courses, summer/winter schools)".

The **Bologna Implementation Report 2020** reminds us that "it is important to recognise and develop digitalisation not as an alternative to internationalisation, but rather as a facilitator of new forms of internationalisation and to simplify participation in mobility. International mobility in a digital age requires new approaches to blending different modes of learning, harnessing tools to ensure secure data exchange and developing new forms of civic engagement and identity. [….] Digital tools have a great deal of potential to reinforce both quality education and social inclusion. However, this will not happen automatically, and finding an appropriate role for digital technology will require broad thinking on a range of issues. There is an important role for strategic policy planning at both national and European levels".

In the long-term, it is hoped that digital settings can facilitate a more **equal and inclusive access to JPs**, providing the opportunity to attend a JP completely or partially online. This opportunity is particularly relevant in the context of JPs, which are still very niche programmes because of the high costs for travelling and leaving abroad and because of visa issues that may humper some students from attending the programme in presence.

Once again, JPs – and all the people working behind these programmes (from academics, to administrators, students and policy makers) – have a big role to play in advancing towards renewed Bologna objectives (ref. Rome Communiqué 2020) contributing to an **inclusive, innovative and interconnected higher education**. Digital tools, in its many declinations, can strongly support such

a process. At the same time, as the JPROV project[13] points out, they can help in responding to some major threats that JPs currently face, e.g. geo political turmoil; environmental concerns (travel); changes in tuition fee policies; legal obstacles, etc.

The next section of the Handbook will guide you to make the best use of digital tools in JP, based on your programme needs and expectations.

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[13] https://wpmu-bis.sys.kth.se/jprov/