

JoC-HTA – issues paper

1. Over arching issues

a. The need for enhanced Flexibility in module design

In certain cases modules with the same title but different content have been taught for many years by different institutions. In such cases we should accept such variations as long as the modules reach an acceptable agreed level of quality and content (e.g. John and my different introductory health economic modules).

b. Crediting student learning

Different countries have different expectations about the nature and intensity of student activity which results in defined number of credits. Many countries focus entirely on 'contact hours' as the sole or primary basis on which to allocate credit to a module. In the UK we focus more on 'hours of learning' irrespective of whether such learning is undertaken on a private or supervised basis. We also allocate a high degree of credit for the summer dissertation (usually one third of the final assessment-60 out of 180 credits) but do not tend to allocate credit merely for attendance. However with a degree of flexibility (that crucial concept again) we should be able to find an acceptable compromise that is acceptable for all.

c. Mobility

This concept is crucial to Erasmus but how will it work in practice?. Obviously to minimise travel costs students will have to have a minimum time in any chosen country but what length of time should this be? Should each university provide 'packages' of modules which are combined and must be taken together for one term to prevent excessive need to travel. Should the academics travel so as to

minimise the needs for students to travel and widen the number of modules that can be offered in each participating university?.

d. Marketability

What is our Unique Selling Point? Is it that we are focussing our course on the situation in CEE or that we are combining a large amount of established expertise (our 'aces') in a single course. How can we best identify and access our 'customer base' and do we even know who they are? Are we looking to simply access students who have just finished their undergraduate courses or to provide the course to health professionals from both the public and private sector who are mid-career? Do we need to generate marketing materials /website design/targeted promotional materials and if so who is going to do this ?

e. Sustainability

If we see mid-career health professionals as being a significant part of our customer base we will inevitably have to develop a blending learning version of our modules to fit around the career pathway of such individuals. They should be given the opportunity to take up to 6 years to complete the Masters course by taking 1 module per year and fitting their involvement with our courses around their job.

f. Innovation

Related to marketability what can we claim is 'innovative' about our course design and content? Obviously our focus on meeting the training and educational needs in the growing market of CEE from a base which is largely within CEE is one aspect but perhaps we need more. A number of us have designed and piloted a range of 'innovative' teaching methods (in our case the HTA

simulation exercise in breast cancer) but how can we optimise this aspect of our offering?

g. Language

It is planned that all courses are undertaken in English wherever possible to broaden our market and appeal as far as possible. However it is important to make the language used as accessible as possible and, wherever possible to avoid language which is overly formal or technical. The use of 'plain English' wherever possible would help reduce misunderstandings and add value to the course..

2. Effectively addressing such issues/ Potential solutions

a. Developing a common approach and vision

A common and agreed Information package should be developed and used by each country involved in the consortium to acknowledge and emphasize that we are a united and coherent course rather than simply a group of individual universities working together.across cse using programme

b. Developing a common programme specification

The programme should aim to be 'seamless' with students having access to common 'rules and regulations' irrespective of the country in which they are currently studying.

3. More immediate issues - Problems with programme specifications

- a. Some programme specifications appear to be missing or at least not immediately apparent.
- b. Some programme specifications appear to be incomplete
- c. The interpretation and comparability of some specifications appears to be complicated by variations in credit accrual and stages
 - i. On what basis should we value each module within the programme specification?
 - ii. Can individual modules/courses be bundled together to generate more even credits across modules?
 - iii. From the UK perspective we may need to vary credit options for certain of our modules which currently appear to be 'undervalued' by extending the nature or intensity of the course content or through enhancing assignments to add credits or – as the partners have – awarding credits for attendance which we do not currently do!

4. Student pathways

- a. Can we identify a typical pathway which students will take through the integrated programme specification? In practice, how will it work and how will the students programme be planned integrated and combined in practice?
- b. Who will take overall responsibility for administering student pathways? Can we identify the range of

pathways that students are likely to take in practice and what practical steps are needed to make them work?

5. Scheduling

- a. How can we best arrange the scheduling of modules so as to minimise the additional work required in each university (scheduling courses at times when these courses are currently being run to avoid the need to duplicate local provision) and to effectively co-ordinate and sequence the range of courses offered by each university?
- b. Effective sequencing requires a unified approach to ensure that courses that are prerequisites for other courses precede them and that courses classified as being fundamental/core precede courses identified as being advanced.
- c. What is the difference between fundamental and core courses? Would it be better to combine these and have 'introductory courses and advanced courses which would make the scheduling easier?
- d. Some courses with different names appear to contain overlapping content which may cause problems when the course is evaluated by external assessors. Whilst a certain degree of 'reinforcement' may be useful we need to ensure that each module adds independent thought and value to the overall course specification.

6. Accreditation and mutual recognition

- a. At the very start of our collaboration I addressed the issue of mutual recognition with senior administrators at the university and was astounded at the range of

impediments that they wishes to place in the way-were the teaching facilities adequate in collaborating universities (they are certainly better than ours) does the quality of the modules developed by collaborating students come up to 'our' standards (no they exceed them) and so on and so forth!!

- b. There is a need to take an objective peer review of each module to ensure that they meet generally accepted standards that would make them acceptable to all collaborating universities. For example....
 - i. Certain courses currently assessed at 5 ECTS (equivalent to 10 UK QAA) appear to only require a total of 80 hours student activity. This would appear to be a much lower level of activity for a course of this level than we would expect in the U.K. (although no revision or reading hours were listed which if added would be expected to substantially increase the level of student workload. As in this case the problem may largely be resolved through altering the presentation of the course rather than making substantial changes to its' content.
 - ii. There is also a need to resolve the issue related to apparently incomplete and inconsistent course information packages. In particular some courses do not appear to coincide with the stated requirement for them to conform to an eight ten or twelve ECTS value that is outlined in the 'course list' table. In such circumstances the courses need to be enhanced altered or combined in some manner to enable them to meet this requirement.

- iii. A crucial issue in a collaboration of this nature is the requirement for each partnering institution to ensure that mutual respect and recognition is in place in recognising the quality of the modules and the contributions made by each of the collaborating universities. In the case of Liverpool university this may require a lengthy process!.