



## Mission Report

Type of mission	Study Visit
Subject	Joint degrees: strategic and operational implementation: one size does not fit all
Location	Coimbra
Date	2-3 October 2018
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### General Context

*(Bullets)*

- M. Oueidat and C. Mokbel, two Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs) from Lebanon participated in the study visit organised by SPHERE in University of Coimbra, Portugal, on October 2-3, 2018 about joint degrees, their strategic meanings, their implementations and the contextual dependence.
- The choice of the University of Coimbra is very good. It is one of the oldest universities. It has developed joint degrees based on a strategic vision. It has a rich experience in developing joint and double degrees.
- The timing of this study visit is very convenient. Actually, the Lebanese HEREs have decided to conduct a study on joint degrees. Mr. Mohamad Oueidat has developed a questionnaire in order to start drawing the local picture in this domain. A first draft of the questionnaire has been placed online. However, it has been decided to revisit it after the study visit in order to explore several critical points identified during the visit. Moreover, joint degrees are being seen as a major component of internationalisation, which in turn is a key point on the reform agenda of the Lebanese Higher Education as identified during the last meeting entitled “Rethinking the Lebanese Higher Education”.
- The experience of the University of Coimbra in this domain is rich and diverse. The two HEREs have measured up the strategic dimension of internationalisation and in particular joint degrees. The achievements at the structure, processes and academic activities levels were also very visible offering a rich set of good practices and pitfalls to avoid.

## Discussions

*(Bullets)*

- The organisation of the study visit was well thought of. The first day was reserved to explaining the strategic vision into which joint degrees are integrated and the supporting units, tools and documents. The second day was dedicated to the presentation of practical cases and the feedbacks of the main stakeholders.
- The study visit was interactive and good time was reserved to questions and answers. There has been good interactions that permitted to clarify several points.

## My contribution

*(Bullets)*

- The HEREs have actively participated in the discussions that took place in nearly all the sessions
- The HEREs have also participated to the social activities and have profited to reinforce their networking

## Lessons learned

*(Bullets)*

The major take home ideas relevant, according to the authors, to the Lebanese HE:

- **System level**: A strategic vision is needed at the system level and an understanding of the importance of internationalisation in general and joint degrees in particular is a must. Rules and regulations need to facilitate the establishment and management of joint degrees. Differences in the regulations exist but shall not form an obstacle that impedes the development of joint degrees. Moreover, increasing awareness about the regulations and the differences that might exist and how it is possible to cope with those differences is crucial to avoid embarking in a process that might not lead to the targeted objectives.
- **Institutional level**:
  - It is better when the institution has a strategic vision that incorporates internationalisation and joint degrees. This facilitates the process of developing joint degrees which is not straightforward.
  - If templates for developing joint degrees are to be edited, they need to be flexible taking into consideration the different constraints that might appear when dealing with institutions from other systems.
  - The HERES have witnessed during the study visit the importance of the guide (edited by the University of Coimbra) that facilitates embarking in the development of joint degrees. This is a good practice that can serve directly in different institutions.

- Another good practice well identified during the study visit is the proactive role of the Office of International Relations (importance of team-building) at the University of Coimbra that plays a determinant role in supporting the development of joint degrees.
- **Programme level:**
  - The history of cooperation between colleagues from different institutions seems to have a significant impact in the development of joint degrees. A joint degree may result from a continuous cooperation between professors, researchers or teams. This history can include the development of double degree. It might appear as a good practice to first develop a double degree before turning it into a joint degree.
  - Joint degrees clearly invite to compare and evolve pedagogical methods. This offers the students enrolling in such programmes a wider experience in learning.
  - Improve the teaching and learning practices at the university and bring in high quality standards (novel learning and teaching methods, Adaptive methods to deal with new problems with new tools): a successful joint degree conducts to real successful for all degree in the institution; higher quality standards for the teachers conducts also for higher salaries.
- **Student level:** There is no doubt that enrolling in joint degrees offer the students with enriched experience in their disciplines but also beyond. The multicultural competences, including the linguistic ones, were visible in the presentations that have been kindly provided to the HEREs during the visit. Moreover, students can benefit from the diversification of resources (laboratories, libraries, etc.) and, in terms of employability, this program ensures them further competitiveness at the labour market.

## Ideas for exploitation

*(Bullets)*

- Explore the possible development of a flexible template or the adaptation of the one described
- Explore the possible usage of the development of a guide for joint degrees
- Invite the academic community to hold an in-depth discussion about the possible strategic choices in internationalization
- Update the questionnaire relative to the study conducted on joint degrees taking into consideration the outcomes of the study visit

More details about the conference (presentations, ...) can be found at:  
<http://supporthere.org/coimbra2018>

It is also possible to discuss specific points with any of the two HEREs by sending an email to:

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