

**5th EM-iDEA Conference,
Valencia, Spain, 8th March 2013**

Summary of the parallel sessions on the EM Concilium

Abstract: During the past few months a group of EM-iDEA project members has been working on creating a business plan for the Concilium. They met on several occasions with external experts in order to get specialist and objective advice on this subject. This work resulted in the drafting of the Executive Summary, which was posted on the project website prior to the Conference. This document gives the project members' view on the Concilium. The idea was to take advantage of the Conference to gain some feedback on this document from the EM Community at large, before proceeding to finalize the business plan ahead of the launch of the EM Concilium at the Bordeaux Conference in July this year. Following the feedback and suggestions received, a modified version of the Executive Summary will soon be posted on the project site.

General summary: Session 1 was lead by Professor Boas Erez, EM-iDEA project coordinator, along with Ms. Aimee Haley, Chair of the Course Quality Advisory Board of the Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association. Ms. Haley was invited to represent the EMA, as an already well-established association operating in the field of Higher Education. The aim of this session was to focus on both the themes the Concilium should deal with and on the kinds of activities it could carry out.

Prof. Erez gave a brief presentation to begin with, which demonstrated the evolution in the EM-iDEA member's view of what the Concilium should be, since the project began. In terms of membership, the goal is no longer to get as many paying members as possible to sustain the association financially, but rather to focus on quality and real sustainability by having active participants who are willing to contribute their time, rather than simply money. The discussion over types of members is no longer about individuals and/or institutions, but rather "practitioners" or "actors", which would leave room for institutions and consortia in addition to individuals. Non-EU members would also be welcome, reflecting a shift in our view on the organisation of the association too, moving from being centered on EU programmes, to being forward looking and global. The idea here is that the Concilium should seek to engage with new global initiatives on the one hand, while also looking ahead to what international Higher Education programmes will be set up on the foundations of Erasmus Mundus by the EU, in the context of its new financial framework for 2014-2020.

Participants wished to have more details on such activities as proposed in the Executive Summary, as well as on what kind of commitment we expect from members (when we talk about 'active' members who are willing to commit some of their time). It is recalled that the activities put forward were: Organisation of **training** on the aforementioned themes; **Consultancy** to individuals and institutions; Drafting of **position papers** addressing key points on the agenda of internalisation of HE; Facilitating **networking**, in and outside the Concilium; and gathering and **offering structured**

information, e.g. on tools and services relevant to the organisation of joint programmes (updated website). Indeed these activities will be made even more concrete in the updated version of the Executive Summary.

In terms of networking, it was asked that we do not lose sight of the idea of having an online 'platform' or 'forum' available to allow coordinators and other practitioners to communicate between themselves on specific themes and topics.

A further suggestion was for an external component; a kind of 'pool of evaluators' who would help the Concilium to ensure the quality of its work and services. The EM-iDEA project as is currently has an 'Advisory Board', and would therefore be willing to create a similar organism specifically for the Concilium. Ms. Haley suggested that it would probably be better for the Concilium to establish itself before considering the creation of such an advisory organism.

Further to this and parallel to developing guidelines on 'best practice', survey results could also be exploited to give examples of 'bad practice' from which we could learn.

It was emphasized that the drafting of position papers has good potential to be used as a communication tool between the EM Community and the European Parliament. Suggestions for future position paper topics included the issue of visas and the difference in Joint Doctoral candidates' salaries according to country.

In terms of legitimacy and sustainability, the intention was already to seek endorsement from the likes of University networks and the EU, as well as to develop strategic partnerships with other associations like the EMA and the EUA, with whom we have either already collaborated or plan to collaborate with. To this it was added that we should develop links with the Bologna secretariat and the Tuning Process, and that the Concilium could play a similar role in developing guidelines for the running of Joint Programmes and could help Consortia with quality assurance. Collaboration with the ENQA and the JOQAR project would almost certainly prove useful in this area.

Finally it was proposed that the Concilium could also help to facilitate student initiatives, for example annual symposiums set up for EM Master Course students studying certain subjects or networking events between current students and those who have found employment. It was noted that these proposals were similar to initiatives already set up by the EMA.

Session 2 intended to focus more on the form that the Concilium will take, looking at the Governance and the Structure. This session was led by Professor Vicente Martinez-Tur, an EM-iDEA project member who has been central to the work of Needs Analysis activity. It became clear quite quickly that participants preferred to have more concrete proposals in front of them, which they could then 'vote' on, for example. Other than this, much of the discussion focused on fees, and in particular on the formula of having annual membership fees. It did not seem to be clear to everyone that the idea is now that membership is open to "practitioners" or "actors", which can include individuals, institutions and consortia. One question which will have to be taken into consideration is over

memberships for Consortia: This idea seemed to be generally accepted, but if there are to be annual membership fees, however minimal, then would there be a global fee, or a fee per member of the Consortium? This also raised another question over membership for Consortia: What if one (or more) institution (s) in a Consortium disapproved of joining the Concilium?

Observations: In terms of funding, as outlined in the Executive Summary, the two main sources will be sponsorship and (annual) membership fees, although the latter will be kept to a necessary minimum, in line with the preference for members who are willing to be active and to give up some of their time for the association. Finally the costs of organizing meetings and training session would be paid for directly with participation fees. The Concilium could also advertise its member's activities.

It has always been clear that getting funding from sponsors is not something to be taken for granted; the idea behind this is that of a joint venture between the Concilium and institutions/enterprises who would gain something by associating themselves with the Concilium. Given the repeated breakdowns in initial discussions on the issue of funding of such an association through membership fees, this is something that has to be considered. Also in terms of sustainability it is obviously preferable to have as wide a range of income sources as possible.

The need and the desire to have an association representing 'practitioners' in International Higher Education has been implicit yet clear to the project. It has been implicit in that we do not have actual statistics or figures to show it, but it has come through the various project activities carried out since its beginning, including the Needs Analysis" activity, the "Survey of Available Tools and Services" activity, Conference participants' contributions and the reaction to the publication of the position paper advocating the retention of the Erasmus Mundus brand name.

Outcomes: The various suggestions made above were all taken into account and included in a recapitulative presentation given quickly during the closing plenary session. The next steps will be to post an updated version of the Executive Summary following these sessions, then to draft and circulate a work plan, a version of the Concilium statutes and a declaration of interest for becoming a founding member. Such a declaration would cover individual, institutional and consortia memberships. After this, the statutes should be finalized on the basis of the declarations of interest received, ahead of the First General Assembly of the association, which will take place in Bordeaux on the 12th July 2013.