Before a consideration of the experience of international joint double degrees is undertaken, it is necessary to consider both the frameworks and policy debates that have surrounded the development of such programmes of study in more detail. The significance of international joint double degrees is considered in this chapter as a cornerstone of European higher education policy. The growth in such degrees has been encouraged as a result of both the Bologna Process and the Bologna Process Follow-Up Group and yet, as Palermo et al. (2018) acknowledge, they remain marginal in student numbers and income generated. This is despite the strategic benefits of rebalancing geopolitical educational relationships, sharing of resources and raising of international profiles and internationalising the curriculum. We see the Leuven Communiqué promoting international joint double degrees as a cornerstone of harmonising activity in Europe and a locus for the development of cultural fluencies and global labour market training. It is argued that the skills needed to operate—and gain employment advantage—in a global environment are seen as an outcome of such education programmes. The Institute of International Education’s (IIE’s) support for the growth in international joint double degree programmes is based on findings of a survey of 180
higher education institutions (Kuder and Obst 2009), as they are a way to offer students international experiences which have the potential to prepare students for successful international careers. The degrees that are the focus for this work are within the field of business education and differences in approach and emphasis may vary in different subject fields. However, whilst it is important to understand differences in subject delivery and institutional interactions framed around the nature of the subject taught, research has indicated that the link between pedagogy and culture and the importance of understanding cultural interactions in the classroom vary little with the subject that is being taught (Bamford et al. 2014): the principles and findings discussed therefore have some relevance across all subjects. The discussion in this chapter offers a contextualisation to this argument of applicability of the rewards and challenges of such programmes through an exploration of the landscape within which international joint double degrees are developed and offered. This contextualisation is framed initially by a discussion of the definitional challenges and then further by the macro and meso policy debates relating to student mobility and consideration of the current climate for international joint degrees.

However, according to Kuder and Obst (2009), institutions offering international joint double degrees appear to be polarised in a small number of countries such as France, Germany, the UK, Spain and the USA. The claim is that they promote diverse language and ‘cultural fluencies’, which will prepare students for successful careers. The possibility of students gaining transferable skills required by the global job market and obtaining certificates which evidence qualifications in more than one country’s higher education system appears to make such programmes of study attractive to both institutions and students. Culver et al. (2012), when looking into the added value that such programmes offer graduates, verified this to be the case and highlighted that further study of these types of programmes needed to be undertaken. Their added value is given some further consideration in the next chapter. The aim of this chapter, however, is to focus on the policy and institutional context for such programmes of study. Data was gathered through 12 in-depth interviews with practitioners and managerial, teaching and administrative staff involved in international joint double degree programmes. Participant
observations were also undertaken alongside an analysis of the UK’s Quality Assurance Agency’s reports on institutional collaborative provision.

The intention here is to consider the challenges of offering international joint double degrees focusing on the key themes arising from the literature and the data. These are the policy context, quality assurance, the international competitive environment for higher education, the development of a relationship between staff, international branding and the motivations for engaging in such collaborative programmes. However, before exploring the contextual and structural challenges for international joint double degrees, we need to examine definitional challenges as there is not only a considerable amount of confusion and lack of clarity around terminology but also a need to understand the structures and the chosen titles of the programmes.

The Use of the Term International Joint Double Degree

As highlighted in Chap. 1, there are challenges around terminology and what is understood by the term international joint double degree. The three terms of ‘double diploma’, ‘dual award’ and ‘joint degree’ are used in common higher education parlance to mean both the same or different things, depending on those using the terms and the country in which they are used. The challenges around meaning and terminology continue, with Palermo et al. (2018) choosing to use the term of international dual degree (IDD).

In this work the term international joint double degree is used to denote a course where two degree titles are achieved on successful completion of a course that is jointly delivered by two partners. There are variations in the usage of this term which is often used interchangeably with the terms joint awards, dual awards and double diplomas. The difference in usage of the terms in France and the UK is an example of how institutions both interpret and operate differently within a national context.
An example of the usage in France is that the term double diploma is common parlance for referring to the French institutions’ overseas activities. For example, for many French business schools, a double diploma can be achieved by their students with partner institutions through simple articulation agreements. This is the case in many French business schools and a cursory glance at their websites confirms this common usage. The French institution that was partnered for the international joint double degrees examined in this case listed some 40 double diploma opportunities with overseas partners. These double diplomas were not joint programmes of study as the curriculum was not agreed by both partners, with the opportunities primarily being offered as a study abroad opportunity. The study abroad students obtain a potential partners’ degree through the recognition and transfer of the home institutions’ equivalent European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credits without any need for the development of a joint curriculum of study. The benefit is the increased international student mobility opportunities for the host institutions’ students. The effect of this is that students are sent to an overseas partner with which there is a recognised credit agreement between institutions and cohorts of students take one or two years of an established degree programme. The partners have a collaborative agreement which ensures that there is a matching of the degree credit on the partner’s courses, or for dedicated top-up one-year degrees at undergraduate level. Students will then return to their home institution to receive an award as well as qualifying for the partner institution’s award. Those students engaging in this collaborative articulated type of agreement achieve a double diploma. This is a very simple model for international higher education and extremely effective for the home institution and often financially lucrative for the partner institution as it is often not Erasmus based. UK institutions appear to have infrequently developed this form of outward student mobility. For the institutions involved in such arrangements, whilst some costs are incurred in terms of servicing the students and visits to partners, it does not involve the same commitment to collaboration as with the full international joint double award, nor indeed is there a need for transparency and awareness of teaching methods. In other words, a so-called double diploma may actually only involve a year-long study opportunity abroad rather than a full
collaboration of curriculum, with all that implies. The joint curriculum model necessarily presents more challenges and requires more transparency and communication between the institutions.

Some further elaboration of the meaning is therefore necessary. Palermo et al. (2018) define an international dual award as:

those TNE experiences where two (or more) HE institutions collaborate to offer to prospective students the participation in two separate programmes in different countries and the possibility to achieve two distinct award qualifications at an equivalent level upon completion. (2018: 47)

Palermo et al. (2018) expand on this succinct definition with the following clarification:

IDD programmes differ from simple dual awards as in these a student can obtain two separate degrees in two distinct subjects within the same institution (Michael and Balraj 2003; Kuder and Obst 2009). IDD programmes also differ from joint degrees as in these two international institutions collaborate to share the delivery of one programme in a process of TNE and the student is awarded one single title upon completion. (2018: 47)

However, when compared with the collaborative articulation model above, this clarification has the potential for additional confusion and needs further discussion. The inclusion of a notion of separatedness of the programmes distinguishes the IDD from the international joint double degree programme as well as from the Erasmus Mundus model where one title is awarded, as suggested in the last sentence of the quote above. In addition, the linking with TNE might also present some confusion in understanding the form of delivery because of the associations with TNE of purely overseas delivery.

Schule (2006) deals with the definition of joint and double degrees separately in as much as they are separate phenomena for him. He defines the terms in the following ways:

**Joint degree**: a single diploma issued by two or more institutions offering an integrated study programme. The single diploma (bachelor, Master,
Double degree: two nationally recognised diplomas issued separately by the universities involved in the integrated study programme. (2006: 3)

If a programme has an integrated programme of study, it is important to acknowledge the joint nature of the curricula as this will reflect on the experience of the modes of teaching (modus docendi) and the modes of learning (modus discendi), as discussed in Chap. 6. Schule (2006) makes the comment that the legal environment in Europe has prevented the truly joint degree programme, in the sense that one institution has to be responsible for the final award. This position appears to be strongly influenced by the Erasmus Mundus model. He therefore considers a full joint degree to be a form of programme operating outside national regulatory frameworks, since the latter govern the award of a Masters title. Schule’s view of an integrated curriculum is that students undertake modules in the host institution that are part of other existing courses. This was the case with the courses that students, who are the focus of this study, experienced: Palermo et al. (2018) appear to have employed a similar approach. This proves to be a challenge for the student experience and results in misaligned expectations to the extent that institutions embarking on such programmes of study need to be aware of the mismatch, as outlined by Palermo et al. (2018). Throughout much of his paper, Schule makes reference to joint double degrees (JDDs). Davies (2009) defines joint Masters as being ‘a Masters delivered by two or more HEIs awarding single or multiple diplomas’ (2009: 12). Although this latter definition is more accessible, Schule’s definition is more precise. For the purposes of this work, an international joint double degree is an international programme of study offering an integrated curriculum. It is delivered jointly in more than one institution and across national borders, awarding single or multiple diplomas. It is important to include the use of the word ‘international’ in the definition in recognition of the link with this type of educational programme as a driver of international higher education which, in turn, is inexorably linked to global flows in economies and communication.
Globalisation in Relation to Student Mobility and International Joint Double Degrees

Increased international mobility might be seen as an inevitable side effect of increased trans-border information flows that result from global communication networks (Castells 2000). The plethora of literature on internationalisation evidences that the contemporary higher education environment has become focused on the ‘international’ dimension and part of this dimension is the increased mobility of students across borders. The European University Association’s (EUA’s) Trends 15 report confirms the continued growth in internationalisation strategies for higher education institutions and that joint programmes can be seen as a hallmark of European higher education and a way of capitalising on European culture, linguistic and academic diversity (Sursock 2015: 43). The Trends 15 findings show that institutions in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and Turkey are most active in international joint programmes and that 70% of these courses are at Masters level.

There are however different types of student mobility. The mobility of students across borders can be divided into two broad categories: those students who are mobile across borders as individuals and as a consequence of their own motivations for studying abroad and those students who are required to do so as part of their course or who are taking advantage of their institutions’ partnership arrangements. This study encompasses both types of student mobility. There is evidence that the influence of the European Union (EU) and Bologna Process (BP) is creating a climate for furthering internationalisation in higher education, with a particular emphasis on mobility. This influence cannot be underestimated. It links the two types of student mobility outlined above and is the driver for both. In highlighting the post-Bologna situation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), Dale (2010) reinforces the EU contribution to the harmonisation of higher education with its outward-looking positioning in educational terms under the auspices of Bologna and the EU in promoting a Europe of Knowledge to the rest of the world. Having witnessed the success of Bologna at policy level, countries outside the EHEA (e.g. the USA) have expressed an interest in Bologna (Dale
2010; Guttenplan 2011). The fact that countries outside the EU wish to engage in harmonising higher education underlines that Bologna implies more than regionalisation. Joint degree collaborations and student mobility are central to this. A press report in the *New York Times* (Guttenplan, 28 March 2011) illustrates that joint and dual degrees are of interest to institutions in the USA and more widely. For the EU the development of cultural fluencies is important to the development of future graduates’ skills for employment in a global job market and offers a motivating factor for students to engage in cross-border mobility.

Papatsiba (2006) echoes this view of the Bologna Process as furthering internationalisation. She argues that it represents a paradigmatic shift of internationalisation policies in higher education and is a response by higher education to the requirements and challenges of ‘the globalisation of societies, economies and labour markets’ (2006: 96, citing Kalvemark and van der Wende). Altbach and Teichler (2001: 10) reinforce this perspective, commenting that ‘higher education is increasingly seen as a central element in the economic future’. The Lisbon Agenda’s call for a Europe of Knowledge (Dale 2010) and the promotion in Bologna have inexorably linked economic concepts to the higher education environment in all member states.

**The Importance of Mobility and Policy Initiatives in International Higher Education**

As we have seen from the of the policy context in Chap. 1, the European Council of Ministers has promoted student mobility as part of the Bologna Process, with the Leuven Communiqué (2009) representing the entrenchment of facilitators for that mobility at institutional level. Altbach and Teichler (2001) comment:

> It is more and more difficult to coordinate policy and programs in a context of expanding initiatives from an increasing number of institutions. Yet, there has never been a time when coordination and research relating to exchange and internationalization are more important precisely because of
their importance and centrality to the higher education enterprise world-wide. (2001: 8)

Their call for research into mobility and exchanges is therefore entirely in keeping with this research project and provides a rationale for the project being carried out. The need for a focus on the experience of international joint double degrees is further supported by Knight’s (2006) findings. Her survey for UNESCO provides a statistical perspective of the internationalisation activities of higher education institutions around the world. The results from the survey show that 82% of the respondent institutions have an internationalisation policy in place: this represented a 19% increase on the 2003 survey. The findings identified that the top three common forms of institutional policy were outgoing mobility opportunities for students, international institutional agreements and international research collaborations. The outgoing mobility opportunities were ranked as the number one growth area for European higher education institutions (HEIs). Again, this is relevant to the present research. Knight (2006) comments:

It is interesting to see that double degree programs seem to be the most promising new form of collaboration and are even ranked higher than visiting scholars and recruitment of non-fee paying international students. (2006: 126)

The perception is that student mobility is currently the most popular and well-supported internationalisation activity for higher education institutions. Davies (2009), in a comprehensive survey on Masters programmes in the European Higher Education Area, argues that institutions are most likely to target the second cycle (of Masters-level courses) for joint degree collaborations. This underlines the importance of this research in its examination of the student experience of international joint double degree programmes.
The Success of Student Mobility Under Bologna

Despite its regional reach, the European Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)\(^1\) (and the EHEA) is aimed at the encouragement of a globally mobile workforce or, at least, a mobile workforce within the EU. The Trends V (Crosier et al. 2007) report provides some useful statistical analysis of the success of mobility initiatives together with recommendations for future action within the EU. This includes the development of more joint postgraduate programmes that will encourage student mobility. The Trends discussion also underlines the rationale for research on the experience of such programmes. Sursock and Smidt’s (2010) report presents a picture of the achievement of the Bologna action lines and the harmonisation activities within the EHEA. However, one might observe that the language and claims of the Trends reports, couched as they are in the successes and achievements of the BP, require further consideration, particularly at the experience level. The evidence points to a need to understand more about the experience and value of student mobility. The growth in international joint double degrees can be viewed as inextricably linked to the BP, as they would be difficult to manage without the alignment of credits for which BP is responsible.

In contrast to the positive view presented by the Trends reports, for example, Papatsiba (2006) writes that although the BP policy discourse suggests a convergence, this does not appear in practice. Recent research points towards transparency as opposed to the harmonisation of educational structures, although transparency is an important development. Certainly, transparency is imperative for the experience of international joint double degrees. We can observe that a comparison of education systems reveals differences between educational systems. Although Bologna has attempted to harmonise those systems, there has been no real convergence (Papatsiba 2006) across national boundaries. This is particularly true in the case of the UK which has maintained a ‘three plus one’ structure compared to a ‘three plus two’ structure for Bachelors and

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\(^1\)The LLP is the EU Lifelong Learning Programme and Erasmus mobility falls within this programme.
Masters. There are also differences in France and Germany with their 'three plus two model'. And in Holland there is a model of 240 ECTS for a Bachelors and only 60 ECTS for a Masters, thus demonstrating yet another variation.

One must also not forget that the difficulties are more far-reaching than simply norms of behaviour and cultural practice. For example, another issue is the place of higher education in the legal framework of the EU, as Dale (2010) highlights. The field of education is subject to the principle of subsidiarity, and deference has to be made to national frameworks of operation. The British legal framework is very different to that of continental Europe; thus an example of the complexities involved for the harmonisation process is offered by the UK approach to Bologna and the interpretation on credit transfer.

It is acknowledged that there is a need for more transparency as promoted by Altbach and Teichler (2001) in their call for the ethical dimensions of international education to be given more consideration. The focus on the experiences of students facilitates an understanding of the need for a more transparent educational process; the recognition of their voice, together with a consideration of international education through a construct of mutuality, allows for an ethical perspective to be given further attention.

**International Joint Double Degree Programmes and the Policy Context**

An underpinning concept for both the development and promulgation of international joint double degrees from the European perspective is the development of a Europe of Knowledge. International joint double degrees represent the call by the EU for higher education institutions in Europe to create opportunities for students’ mobility which would help to reinforce a sense of European identity and citizenship. Dale (2010) offers us some insight into the development of a Europe of Knowledge. This mobility drive is evidenced in policy documents such as the Prague and Berlin Communiqués, 2000 and 2003, respectively, as well as
through EU initiatives such as Erasmus Mundus which have influenced higher education institutions’ international activities. The continuing importance of the policy agenda and institutional engagement with this agenda within the European Higher Education Area is further evidenced in the Leuven Communiqué (2009). Leuven set a target of mobility of 20% of graduates within Europe by 2020 (the 20/20 target). It required that institutions establish partners in another country within the European Higher Education Area in order to facilitate the mobility of higher education students. One way to achieve this was through the establishment of international joint double degrees with a partner institution. However, this may be considered to be one of the most ambitious modes of collaboration because of the expectations of a ‘joint’ curriculum delivered across institutions and across national borders.

The implementation and discussion of this policy is evidenced by the Trends reports, commissioned by the European University Association. Crosier et al. (2007) in Trends V indicated that many institutions in Europe have experimented with the development of joint programmes or that they were still intending to do so. They found that the majority of joint programmes were in the second cycle (i.e. Masters level). Their report underlines the importance of joint degrees for the Bologna Process and the need for the analysis of the joint degree experience at Masters level. Crosier et al. state that:

At this stage, it would seem reasonable to suggest that joint programmes are playing a significant role in constructing the European Higher Education Area, by giving institutions opportunities to work together and learn from each other. (Crosier et al. 2007: 31)

With the launch of the EHEA in 2010 and the recognition of internationalisation as an important driver of change in the context of the Bologna Process, Sursock and Smidt (Trends 2010) comment that joint degree programmes can be seen as encouraging inter-university collaborations.

Reports produced by the Institute of International Education (2011) on joint double degree programmes, together with the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB 2011) on
internationalisation, highlight the importance of such programmes as a focus for future institutional international approaches to student education. From a UK perspective, Sweeney (2010: 11) refers to the need to develop a ‘culture of mobility’, which arises as a consequence of the BP. He states that this mobility culture should encompass the setting up of joint degrees with partner institutions outside the UK. Furthermore, a flexible and innovative approach to the curriculum is required when considering the need for the development of opportunities for mobility. It is certainly the case that curriculum development which relies not just on cross-institutional collaboration but also cross-country collaboration is underscored by the need for both innovation and flexibility at both an institutional and individual level.

The Current Environment for International Joint Double Degrees

The focus for much of the curriculum collaboration between institutions in Europe seems to be at the postgraduate rather than the undergraduate or doctoral levels. This is highlighted by the Bologna Trends reports and an AACSB (2011) report. Davies’ (2009) findings on Masters programmes in Europe chime with these findings that joint programmes of study are more likely to be offered at Masters level and are likely to grow in popularity because of the demands of the market. His findings indicate that a large majority of higher education institutions surveyed were planning to develop more joint degrees. This is also noted in the AACSB (2011) report. Palermo et al. (2018) note that this anticipated growth has yet to be achieved.

The drivers for institutions engaging in this type of activity appear to be largely centred around globalising initiatives but there is some indication of variations in primary drivers. Schule (2006) acknowledges that certain types of institution in Europe, such as the Institutut Superieurs de Commerce—also known as Grandes Écoles (Blanchard 2009)—have used double degrees in order to increase their competitiveness (2006: 4). Schule states that institutional profiles need to be given careful
consideration since, for example, the differences between a professional and a theoretical approach to education could prove significant. The competitive, branding and market environments when these international joint Masters were developed, by schools of business in France, were quite different to the UK environment for post-92 institutions.

At the start of the collaboration, the differences were acknowledged by the partners: they were considered to be a strength, offering each institution the potential to benefit from attributes that they could not offer, such as location (Forte and Bamford 2008). One of the key areas of concern for the suite of programmes that were the focus for the research was the application of ECTS credits, established by the Bologna Process. An example of this challenge is the possible difficulty in measuring and equating credits for differing workloads in institutions. This concern, which was a constant consideration, arose during the original negotiations but also during the formal quality approval of the courses and seemingly during the administration of the courses. Schule states that the issue of equating credits can become a ‘major obstacle to international mobility unless the participating universities show a flexibility not built into the ECTS system’ (2006: 28). Whilst acknowledging that joint Masters are not problem-free, Davies (2009) observes that national frameworks compound the challenges in regard to a lack of clarity of information and clear understanding of the challenges, together with the difficulties posed by variable entry points, credit weighting, workloads and learning outcomes. This can result in ‘ad hoc compromise and approximation’ (2009: 54).

One of the challenges witnessed and referred to by interviewees was in relation to ECTS credits and the differences in achievement expectations at each institution. For the programmes in this study, there were a different number of subjects being (offered?) studied at each institution, and there was an apparent difficulty in the translation of grades from one system to another. In London assessments were marked out of 100 and in France they were awarded marks out of 20. On the surface this does not seem problematic but it became apparent that very few of the students achieved an overall Distinction from the London institution—for example, over three courses in one year, only three students achieved an overall Distinction in their Masters from a sample of 98 students. The evidence
suggests that students did not receive a Distinction for a 15/20 grading and yet this is equivalent to 75% in the UK, where 70% would receive a Distinction classification. The aggregation of grades across a number of modules between the two institutions meant that students simply did not achieve the higher band of grades. The institutions thus had to renegotiate grade equivalences as more flexibility between the two institutions was required in the translation and of their marking standards.

This seems to evidence the approximations referred to by Davies (2009). It reinforces the need for a careful consideration of the difficulties in working across national education systems as there is an impact on the student experience. Both institutions learnt the importance of the need for transparency. These differences and difficulties were commented on by tutors in interviews as a frustrating aspect of the programmes and were a source of continual compromise.

In terms of the future it is natural to assume that the British withdrawal from the European Union (i.e. Brexit) may have an impact on the development of international joint double degrees with European partners. However, the UK will continue to be a signatory to Bologna so the credit structures that facilitate the development of such programmes of study will remain unaffected. Potentially, Brexit could see an increase in the development of such programmes within UK institutions seeking to maintain their European links and remain competitive. The current COVID-19 crisis is also likely to impact on the international higher education landscape, again potentially increasing the demand for such programmes of study where the need for physical mobility has been reduced following the development and reliance on online delivery by education institutions across the globe.

The Quality Assurance Position

Quality assurance—both in terms of planning and in terms of the delivery of the programmes—is raised by Culver et al. (2013) and Palermo et al. (2018) as a challenging aspect of international joint double degrees for the participating institutions. There are two focal points for the quality assurance discussion: the first being the operational challenges of
integrating quality assurance across transnational borders and the second being a more philosophical challenge. This latter aspect of quality assurance is commented on by Schule (2006) with regard to the issue of two awards being given for one programme of study. He cites the Coimbra Group's position of concern at not being able ‘to catch two fishes with one hook’. There is certainly a question of ethics to consider with regard to the issue of an award of two Masters diplomas for the same work. However, this conflicts somewhat with how such courses are situated within the ‘market’ where the promotion of such courses relies on the possibility of students gaining a double diploma. Observation of both institutions’ marketing activity demonstrated that emphasis was placed on this achievement and thus it became a marketing tool. This raises a question with regard to the demand of the market taking precedence over ethical concerns in this sort of collaborative activity. Certainly, this particular aspect of such programmes of study raises questions with regard to issues of quality which may ultimately undermine the credibility of the joint double Masters awards. Schule’s (2006) solution to the problem of the possibility of wilful misrepresentation on the part of students with regard to their qualifications is that the diploma and diploma supplement should clearly state that the award is part of a double diploma.

The responsibility for ensuring quality as far as UK institutions are concerned is expressed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in their Code of Practice on Collaborative Provision:

Degree awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively. (QAA Code of Practice on Collaborative Provision 2018: 9)

The current QAA Code of Practice on Collaborative Provision (2018) appears somewhat more flexible than previous Codes in that specific

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2 A network of 40 European universities formed in 1985 consisting of some of the most prestigious and oldest universities in Europe.

3 British national higher education quality awarding body.
reference is made to joint degrees. The focus for concern is that institutions should recognise and manage the risks for the learners. This presents some synergy with the approach of the Bologna Follow-Up Group. The focus for delivery is placed firmly on the learners’ experience and this has now been reinforced and strengthened through the Paris Communiqué (2018). The weight of this responsibility for institutions is outlined in this excerpt from a QAA Institutional Audit Report:

The Code is based on the key principle that collaborative arrangements, whenever and however organised, should widen learning opportunities without prejudice either to the standard of the award or qualification or the quality of what is offered to the student. Further, the arrangements for assuring the quality and standards should be as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those for programmes provided wholly within the responsibility of a single institution. This remains the case even when the partner organisation is itself also an Awarding Institution, as with joint or dual awards. (1999: paragraph 7, 1999 QAA Code of Practice: cited in the QAA (2008: 4) Outcomes from Institutional Audit Report)

The tone of this 2008 report is explicit in expressing concern with regard to learners in collaborative partnerships and the need to ensure that quality standards are open to scrutiny. It is interesting to note that as far as the UK is concerned, the onus for the responsibility of quality assurance always remains with the UK institution. Any reliance on a partner’s quality processes and reputation appears to be insufficient from the perspective of managing quality assurance, and due diligence is required when learning opportunities are offered in another institution (QAA 2018: 19). The Trends 15 report acknowledges joint degrees have presented a challenge for QA agencies and that joint programmes can be subject to multiple QA procedures that perhaps fail to capture their ‘jointness’ and essence (2015: 45). One approach to this problem is to seek to work with a European Quality Assurance Register–listed (ENQA-listed) agency and approach the work on the basis of a commitment to agreed guidelines.

With regard to the joint curriculum aspect to joint degrees, the QAA’s position appears to place further burden on UK institutions’ ability to
accredit work done by students in an overseas partner institution without moderation of that work by the UK institution. An example of this can be seen in a QAA collaborative links report (QAA 2006) on one UK institution which failed to demonstrate that the quality concerns of the QAA had been met with regard to its postgraduate double Masters activity with a French partner.

The partnership audit report demonstrates that onus for quality assurance for international joint programmes lies with the UK institution rather than the overseas partner as far as the UK Quality Assurance Agency is concerned. The report outlines that crediting work undertaken in another institution, namely, the Masters dissertation, did not meet the expected transparency and quality assurance standards. The ownership of the dissertation appeared to be as an important aspect of maintaining the standards expected of postgraduate higher education in the UK. This appears to place an additional burden on UK institutions and it presents a potential further hurdle for the development of such programmes of study. The report goes further in underlining the importance of UK quality assurance. The report concluded:

"... in allowing the partners of dual awards to be considered as “equal partners”, taking full responsibility for assessment and the confirmation of marks but not requiring the independent scrutiny of student work, the University is failing to ensure the proper oversight of the standards of its awards. Accordingly it is essential for the University to assure the standards of all its awards in collaborative provision, with particular reference to external examiners’ oversight of dual award programmes. (QAA 2006: 27, paragraph 105)"

The tone of this excerpt illustrates and reinforces the theme of transparency and effective management of collaborative partnerships and that the monitoring of academic standards for British degrees must be maintained by British higher education institutions. It underlines the need for British institutions to continue to monitor standards with an emphasis on the necessity to consider the quality of the student experience at the partner:
Validation is for a specified time period of up to five years, followed by revalidation, which concentrates on the programme, not the partnership as a whole. The partnership is not, therefore, routinely subject to further scrutiny, and revalidation gives little explicit consideration to its developing nature or to partner institutions’ continuing suitability to deliver University programmes other than in a commercial sense. Given both the lack of formal risk assessment procedures at approval and the limitations of partner evaluation at revalidation, it is considered advisable for the University to implement such procedures at approval and revalidation as are necessary to ensure partner institutions’ initial and continuing capacity to maintain the quality of the student experience and appropriate academic standards. (QAA 2006: 25)

It is clear from the wording above that reliance on the Bologna-implemented ECTS credit scheme is potentially insufficient to meet the QAA criteria and, from a UK perspective, UK external examiners need to confirm that the standards of marking required of UK postgraduate education are being met. The tone of the report is reflected by Culver et al.’s (2013) conclusions on the difficulties in achieving quality assurance in multi-country degree programmes. Whilst Beerkens’ (2004) work aids in understanding the nature of collaborative networks of higher education institutions, the view that these networks have become so important that the nation-state is losing its grip on higher education institutions and that international benchmarks are necessary (2004: 19) has not yet been realised. The discussion above reflects the continued importance of nation-state frameworks for higher education. These rarely allow for only one diploma to be awarded jointly from different institutions. Schule (2006) and Guruz (2011) both comment on the difficulties with regard to this despite the introduction of the ENQR in 2008. The Trends 2015 report identifies that the top-rated response on a question with regard to what the somewhat challenging aspects of joint programmes are for institutions is the integration of programmes into the institution. Legislative constraints are listed as ninth from ten possible constraints so they appear to not have been a high priority. This supports the growth in the international joint double degrees as opposed to awards which seek to offer one joint diploma. Knight (2013) comments on legal and administration
barriers as likely to have made international joint double degrees more popular. So important is this aspect of these types of programmes that Palermo et al. (2018) discuss the need for a strategic position. The need to evaluate the quality processes as part of the framework for development and implementation of international joint double degrees is a key part of the WHEEL (Weigh the Partnership, Heed Practices and Customs, Evaluate Quality Assurance Processes, Establish Completion Requirements, Lay Down the Programme Management Plan) framework developed by Palermo et al. (2018).

The Need for Compatibility Between the Institutions

For an international joint double degree experience to be successful, there is a need for a strong level of cooperation between partner institutions. Thus some assessment at the start of the collaboration on the compatibility of partners is required. This should be considered in terms of both individual relationships, which might be likened to a marriage (Forte and Bamford 2008) with ups and downs, miscommunications and incidents as well as successes, and the need for compatibility between partners being a priority. The success of the partnership will depend on the strength of the relationship between individuals in the institutions involved in order to ensure the sustainability of the programme and the partnership. The way in which the institutions interact with each other is important in order to ensure a holistic international higher education experience for the participating students. The dimensions of difference in international higher education, highlighted in Chap. 1, have the potential for enhancing the experience and producing additional educational benefits. However, care needs to be taken with regard to the communication between the institutions, the transition of students and staff, the provision of support to aid in negotiating the different modus docendi (mode of teaching) of each institution and the cultural encounters that are part of the experience. Palermo et al. (2018) have commented in detail on the need for compatibility between the institutions and have proposed a
model for institutions that are considering embarking on such programmes to follow. Their model is based on an analysis of staff involved in the delivery of such programmes.

What is clear as being fundamental to the success of transnational integrated programmes of study is the need to maintain strong communication between the institutions and a suitable transparent support network. Beerkens (2004) underlines the importance of the compatibility of the higher education institutions involved in a collaboration, to the extent that it is a precondition for the collaboration to succeed. With reference to the partnership relationship between institutions, a course leader made the following comments on the way in which the two institutions engaged in the collaboration:

A clear lead from the top has encouraged the development of the relationship. The lead is based on a personal friendship but also a recognition of the financial imperatives which characterise any joint initiative. Each director has helped the relationship by appointing a liaison person at each institution and although the personalities may have changed in the course of institutional reorganisation, the recognition of the value of the relationship remains as strong as ever. (Course leader, France)

The second excerpt from the same interview offers another example of the importance of the role of institutional liaison.

Hence the importance of the role of institutional liaison. I have described this role as the “catalytic converter” in the relationship as problems can occur in other parts of the relationship which have to be resolved post hoc. It is also becoming clear that the role has an internal development dimension—explaining why and how the relationship adds to the strength of both institutions. The education is delivered according to the rules determined by the host institution and mutual standards are accepted. (Course leader, France)

The QAA places a strong emphasis on the importance of the liaison tutor in ensuring the quality and equivalence of experience in educational terms of each institution. What is interesting to note here is the importance given to the ‘financial imperatives’ in the comments, thus
tending to confirm—albeit maybe only from the French perspective—the link to financial drivers for institutions engaging in international education. The QAA Code of Practice (2004: 11, paragraph A6) warns institutions against financial or other temptations that may compromise standards. In the quote from the course leader above, the financial basis for the relationship is underlined by the use of the words ‘financial imperative but reinforced with the use of the word ‘value’. Beerkens’ (2004) identification of the need for ‘chemistry’ between the actors would appear to be reflected in both the tone and the words of this interview and also in comments made by other staff. The cultural differences between each institution were observed on a number of levels and led to cultural learning at both institutions.

The Institutional Rationale for Embarking on International Joint Double Degrees

As Beerkens (2004: 2) succinctly underlines, universities are currently bound in their behaviour by their national limitations. Palermo et al. (2018) also acknowledge the challenges for institutions and participants involved in international higher education. The interviews that were carried out with practitioners and managerial, teaching and administrative staff from both institutions underlined these challenges and reinforced the need for planning, mapping and continual communication across all levels of operations.

Kuder et al. (2013), Knight (2013) and Palermo et al. (2018) all acknowledge that institutions engage in this type of internationalisation activity for a number of reasons ranging from financial to internationalising the curriculum or—for Erasmus Mundus programmes which are not the focus of this work—in order to promote a Europe of Knowledge. Both the French institution in the case study and many of the high-ranking Grandes Écoles have sought accreditation from the American AACSB and European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) in order to market themselves internationally. According to AACSB, seeking accreditation has a direct relationship with internationalisation activity,
and the engagement in delivery of an international joint double degree can also be seen to be part of this differentiation and market positioning for institutions. The position of AACSB and the branding of higher education institutions are considered in more detail in the next chapter.

The course leader from the French institution expressed the following views on international benchmarking with regard to both institutions:

The French institution is in the process of positioning itself as a quality destination for students in its national market using international accreditations (AACSB, EQUIS). Depending on various French student publication surveys the school appears between 11th and 18th position amongst the Grandes Écoles of which there are 39. Last year it appeared in the top 40 European management programmes in the FT classification. The London institution has a different profile and is considering accreditation with AMBA. It boasts a maximum rating of 24 in teaching quality excellence… (Course leader, France)

These comments in relation to international branding display that both league position and global branding were important to the French institution and that they expected their partners to reflect similar ambitions. The interview with the dean of the London institution also demonstrated the important role of the accrediting bodies on the operations of both institutions whilst acknowledging that the approach of the French had influenced his thinking in this area.

The motivational aspirations of the French school in offering international joint double degree programmes were echoed in the staff responses at the London institution. A number of the staff made reference to the internationalisation motivation as identified in the Trends reports (Culver et al. 2007; Sursock and Smidt 2010). However, the globalising influence of such programmes seemed to dominate their strategic thinking. This is illustrated in the response to a question to the decision maker at the London institution:

The French School is a business school of some standing in the European scene, and it has to be said that their reputation was significant in my

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4 The 24 is a reference to the 24/24 the London institution received from the QAA.
decision to progress this relationship. That being said, its genesis I think relates to the fact that I take the view that in the world in which we're currently living, globalisation being the way that you might describe that world, it's extremely important that students get exposed to alternative ways of looking at business and management practice. So the idea of a collaboration with the French School in the course area was attractive to me because I think it allowed those students to have that exposure to ways of looking at business and management practice. So I think that was the primary motivation for the collaboration, and we've attempted to develop similar models with other institutions in different parts of the world. (Manager in the London institution)

If we compare this response to that given by the French course leader, we can see issue of finance (funding?) is not given the same emphasis, perhaps reflecting the private funding model for the French Grandes Écoles. These elite schools charge in the region of 8000–16,000 euros per year as opposed to a similar cost for the whole course in the UK. The difference in these financial arrangements and costs (?) and the student profile were justified in the interviews in terms of the need for flexibility for change that the London institution had to show in order to continue with the partnership. The following comments illustrate this point:

In terms of the financial arrangements, for example, it became clear to me quite early on that the students that they were recruiting to the programme were different to the students that we were recruiting. They typically looked to recruit internally within the French school and the students that they recruit therefore bring less money to the pot than is the case for the students that we recruit who typically are international full cost students. And so we’ve had to be aware of the fact that it could look from their perspective as though we’re the people earning all the money and they’re the people doing all the work. So that’s a sensitivity and that’s had to be reflected in the financial arrangements. I think we’ve also learnt quite a lot about the differing approach they have to validation. They tend to be very focussed on a title and once that title has been agreed, what the professors get up to within the programme is rather more down to the professors than would be the case here where we have to go through a validation that specifies learning outcomes for the modules, for the course. And we have to deliver
A number of aspects to this excerpt are interesting, the first being the misunderstanding displayed in the excerpt that the French students pay a total amount for the whole course rather than a fixed fee each year, the former being the approach in the UK. There is a cultural difference that this manager has not reflected on. He has also misunderstood the amount of fees paid by the French students. The second striking aspect is the comment regarding the quality procedures and the admission that they (i.e. the French) may be doing all the work in terms of the contact hours and modules that are delivered in France. This discussion of the numbers of hours in a class (module?) is a theme that arose in the interviews with the students and is discussed in detail in Chap. 6. The number of hours was clearly a difference in the teaching and learning approach of the institutions which, for the English management, raised some financial concerns as, on the surface, the French appeared to offer more class contact time. There is also the issue of measurement of achievement. In the UK this is measured through meeting the learning outcomes, whereas the French institution had no such measure. It is more familiar to UK pedagogy parlance. This learning outcome parlance was referred to by other French staff as a difference which was difficult to overcome.

The interview data from the staff at the French institution illustrated a difference in approach to international collaboration and to international activity in general, as well as to the administration and promotion of such programmes and the motivational aspects of engaging in such activity.

So I think it is a good idea to have a joint degree, a double degree programme, because I want to send the students abroad because I want them to realise how we have to learn and they have to know how to be independent, which is not the case in France… (Course leader in France and tutor at other GE's)

There was a clear desire to provide the opportunity for engagement with ‘others’, as well as a reflection that the Grande École system does not allow for the development of independent learning. When asked about
their students’ views on difference, French tutors responded that there is a negative attitude amongst French students to different pedagogies and that an experience of an ‘independent study pedagogy’ would be beneficial to them.

A comment from an international director at a French school illustrates the different approach with regard to teaching and learning and most specifically of learning outcomes:

…the profs are the doyens, the knowledge base, espousing their own research and their own professional experiences to the students …And so the idea that you will have checks and balances in a curriculum that ascertains whether the learning outcomes have been met doesn’t exist. (International director of French GE)

The point about learning outcomes is important as it illustrates a fundamental difference in approach compared to British universities. Whilst the ENQR requires that institutions in Europe now frame their courses in a learning outcomes format, this comment underlines that there is a different approach within French institutions which creates a challenge. It is clear from the QAA report that the status (interpreted here to mean league table positioning) of an institution does not circumvent the requirement of UK quality processes. This quality assurance requirement reinforces the need for UK institutions to strictly adhere to the UK quality procedures, and it does not facilitate differences in approach to pedagogy, the curriculum and assessment. The Bologna position is one of harmonisation and therefore it does not aid with navigating difference. It therefore provides institutions with little guidance on how to address issues of difference. The comments made with regard to learning outcomes above are just one example of the differences which directly affect students and how they negotiate with the institutions.

**Institutional Culture**

When asked about the different cultures of each institution, a manager in the London institution made the following comments:
(Laughing) I don’t know whether culture has much to do with it. I think that reputation has something to do with it and I think that finances have something to do with it. I’ve already mentioned that we’ve had to modify our thinking on the financial side to reflect the financial realities as they impact on the French School. I think the French School are [sic] collaborating with us, largely because of our position or our location. They want to offer their students a London experience and that they think is attractive to those students. We want to offer an experience to our students which is international, perhaps rural France wouldn’t be the obvious location. But what we’re offering them is an experience of a business school which is accredited by EQUIS and by AACSB which has some cachet and some value to our students, I think. (Manager at the London institution)

The interesting aspect of this interview excerpt is the interviewee’s laughter in relation to the mention of culture, perhaps demonstrating that the issue of cultural interactions had not featured in the internationalisation strategy of the London institution despite the recognition of cultural difference between the British and the French at other times during the interview. In addition, the word ‘value’ at the end of the quote is used with regard to branding by international bodies which does not address the student experience. The importance of the location of London is also underlined here which is seen as balanced against the benefits of elite branding.

Some French staff’s response on the issues of culture was that the cultural difference between the institutions had an impact on students in terms of the rules and norms of behaviour. Much of this difference in their view was related to the fact that the cohort of students in France recruited to the dual awards came from the ESC⁵ programme and that MSc programme resided administratively under the ESC structure. This was despite its international students who were recruited by the London institution, underlining that the joint programme was integrated into an existing programme in France. The difference in the French students’ background and approach to their studies was a factor in some of the

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⁵The École Supérieure de Commerce (ESC) programme is normally three years following two years of classes préparatoire after the Baccalaureate. It is the main programme of study offered in all Grandes Écoles that are members of the Chapitre des Grandes Écoles.
administrative difficulties as students from France came from an integrated programme of study, whereas students joining in London were new to the course.

When specifically asked about the cultural differences between the institutions, the following response was elicited from one of the course leaders in France:

It would appear the university treats the business school as ‘another partner’: in some instances with little difference from a franchise college. My institution probably sees itself as ‘privileged’ and certainly an (?) equal partner for two reasons: the course has been very successful financially and the business school has invested heavily in raising its profile nationally and internationally. (Course leader, France)

Here a clear acknowledgement is made of the difference between the two institutions which creates a gap that needs to be bridged. There appears to be a criticism of the London institution’s approach, which again underlines the need for clear channels of communication and the development of transparency as referred to by Davies (2009). The comments also underline the difference in approach to the administration of the course at each institution. These differences in administrative approach require clear communication between partners in order to ensure the sustainability of international joint double degree programmes.

The Experience of Mobility in International Higher Education

As discussed in Chap. 1, the issue of mobility is at the heart of the European agenda and is integral to the experience of international higher education. Whatever the form of the mobility, the engagement in the activity of country mobility means all students participating in such activity are international students. The discourse on student mobility can be divided into two broad categories: firstly, mobility relating to notions of internationalisation in terms of higher education institutions recruiting international students who come to the UK, for example, for their
higher education, and secondly, mobility relating to study abroad sojourns taken within the context of the home institution programme of study. It is not necessarily the case, however, that these categories present different issues for the student experience: an analysis of the literature demonstrates that international mobility raises broadly the same issues regardless of the type of that mobility. A more pertinent question is perhaps the student’s length of stay as that has implications for transition and adjustment. A shorter stay will leave less time for an acculturation process (Berry and Sam 1997) to take place. The importance of acculturation for students in higher education is made reference to by Borg et al. (2010) in relation to international PhD students. O’Neill and Cullingford (2005) argue that the experience of overseas study promotes introspection. Time spent abroad can become a rite of passage so a personal reappraisal becomes central to the individual: the personal stress of such an experience that may be encountered can lead to positive outcomes such as greater self-knowledge. They state that ‘the crucial experience of being overseas is not cultural accretion but cultural self-knowledge’ (2005: 122). This link between mobility, reflection and self-knowledge was explored in the data. The focus on reflection and self-knowledge can be seen as fundamental to the higher education process and is echoed in Barnett and Coate’s (2005) work in their analysis of the key elements of the higher education curriculum. Reflection and self-knowledge are linked with cultural awareness and identity together with the ability to develop intercultural awareness as a consequence of the learning process in international higher education, thus giving the learning a heuristic aspect. The change of emphasis to education, being seen as learning awareness and communication with others, can be seen as the sort of shift in knowledge production in higher education to which Barnett and Di Napoli (2008) make reference. It incorporates a change in identity as part of the learning process.

An example of the experiential importance of mobility is offered by Jones’ (2005) discussion on learning from mobility. Her findings, and in particular the comments made by her students on overseas mobility with regard to ‘broadening of horizons’, are especially important as they offer a frame for the analysis of the learning that takes place from an experiential perspective. She argues strongly in favour of the benefits of the
experiential learning that students acquire from overseas mobility, for example, the ‘development of an awareness of difference and the encounter with/experience of being the “other”’ (Jones 2005: 72). These acknowledged benefits of mobility offer a different perspective to those who argue that the financial imperatives are at the root of internationalisation activity.

Enriching the Student Experience

The notion of enrichment for both staff and students helps us to present a context of mutuality between the student experience of joint programmes of study and institutions’ development of such programmes. It differs from the policy position where the tone is one of presumption with regard to both the importance and benefits of such programmes. This presumption is promulgated in policy documents such as the Leuven Communiqué (2009) in its call for higher education institutions to provide backing and support for mobility in the EHEA and the demands for the development of innovative curricula to respond to those calls for mobility; therefore, some reflection on the context for such curriculum development is appropriate. The curriculum cannot be considered in isolation: it is informed by the student experience as well as the student experience being informed by the international joint double degree curriculum. Thus, a notion of mutuality allows us to explore in greater depth what international higher education is and the implications of the promotion of a ‘culture of mobility’ through initiatives such as international joint double degrees. The link between the individualism of the experience and the universalism displayed in the policy context is achieved here through the vehicle of culture, in this context of mutuality, which bridges the economic, social, religious and political fields for individuals and is not necessarily bound by national parameters. The international joint double degree presents an opportunity to develop the interconnectedness that the policy makers perhaps had in mind and to develop an ‘ingroup’ mentality through the cultural encounters offered in the international classroom. The experience therefore allows us to develop some of the coherence from the multiplicity of conflicting narratives and practices
that Benhabib (2002) refers to, where we can be ‘attentive to the positioning and repositioning of the other and the self, of “us” and “them” in this complex dialogue’ (Benhabib 2002: 41). This leads us to the notion of an experiential approach as an aspect of the learning in higher education. As Triandis (2018) acknowledges, culture can be a layered prospect and is not necessarily bound by country identity—the international joint double degree presents an opportunity for a cultural ingroup through participation in the joint degree programme. As a consequence, it is important to consider the students’ being in higher education, as argued by Barnett and Coate (2005) and Barnett and Di Napoli (2008), as part of a more contemporary approach to curriculum development and identity in higher education. The arguments put forward here place an emphasis on being in higher education due to the emphasis on the students’ relationship with each other as being at the heart of the learning process in international higher education. To reinforce the importance of this, Barnett and Coate (2005) comment:

…as we have seen and as employers are increasingly noting, a changing world calls for certain kinds of human capacity and dispositions and for self-awareness and self-confidence. The self is implicated in a changing world. No longer can the wider norms and practices be endorsed: individuals have to work things out for themselves in their own situations. Individuals have to become selves, strong, open, resilient and critical selves. (Barnett and Coate 2005: 48)

Notions of students’ being in higher education are also alluded to by Montgomery (2010) in her discourse on understanding the international student experience of UK higher education. When we bring these ideas of being in international higher education to the fore, they underline how the development of an understanding of the student experience is inextricably linked to the policy context which has been promoted as a consequence of the Bologna Process.
Concluding Comments

The discussion in this chapter has attempted to explore the context within which international joint double degrees are offered with particular focus being given to the international landscape and institutional approaches to develop such programmes of study. The rewards, challenges and benefits for higher education institutions considering embarking on collaborations to develop such programmes of study have been given some attention and the concept of their educational value is given more attention in the next chapter. The claims made by the AACSB that joint degrees appear to represent the future for international higher education activity emphasise the importance of understanding the challenges that such programmes create as well as the potential benefits. Whilst the programmes extant in this work are focused on the delivery of business education, it remains the case that the discussion of the international landscape for institutions is relevant for all. The contextualisation presented through the themes explored in this chapter allows the reader to understand the ways in which these themes are echoed in the individuals’ experience of participation in such programmes of study. The themes explored in this chapter therefore reflect the key priorities for institutions in ensuring that full consideration is given to aspects of the partnerships that will impact on the student experience of the programmes.

The importance for transparency underlines all of these considerations as well as the need for an ethical context to the delivery of international higher education which requires further consideration both from institutions and from policy makers. There is certainly a tension with regard to the pull of market forces in the international higher education environment, and from a UK perspective, the warnings from the QAA with regard to the temptations of financial benefits need to be heeded. In this case it seems that financial benefits provided an incentive for the institutions to develop the international joint double degrees and thus appear to be an important driver in the development of such programmes.

The continued marketisation of higher education, the increased use of technology and the influence of Erasmus Mundus and EU policy and bodies such as AACSB will inevitably result in a rise in these types of
programmes where the education experience is a shared process between one or more higher education institutions and the students. If these courses are to be educationally useful, more work will need to be done to ensure greater integration in the design and delivery of the courses.

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