

D2.2

Academic Support System

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1. Introduction: JMPMB support to students

The deliverable **D2.2 Academic Support System** could be focused on:

EU-CONEXUS Joint Master Programme in Marine Biotechnology is a transnationally integrated multidisciplinary programme that provides high-quality academic education and professional competences for professionals working or intending to work in the area of marine biotechnology. It is delivered by six out of nine partner universities of EU-CONEXUS.

On EU-CONEXUS web page <https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/marine-biotechnology/> interested candidates can find all necessary information about JMPMB, such as course programme, duration of the course, partner institutions, course details and specialization, prerequisites, scholarships, tuition fees and teachers who participate in the delivery of the Master.

In order to facilitate orientation of students in EU-CONEXUS environment and in the study of Marine Biotechnology, each year a Student toolkit is prepared, with key information on the programme, mobility among partner universities and administrative procedures. Furthermore, it contains guidelines for preparation before arrival, including information on visas, accommodation and health insurance. It also gives guidance on enrolment process, student rights and support to students with special needs. The document contains also schedule of classes, grading rules, information on specialisation and master thesis preparation, as well as information on support given to students through Buddy programme and Student Board of EU-CONEXUS.

Every year for a new generation of students a Welcome Week is organised at UCV and at the beginning of the second semester, at La Rochelle. Furthermore, at the beginning of 3rd semester for students who go to physical mobility a welcome day is organised at host institution. At those events, students get information about the university, activities to be realised at that institution according to the study programme. They meet administrative and teaching staff, and get instructions about administrative procedures. Usually a short formal meeting is organised, providing students with additional information about the city and country in which they are going to study one semester.

Within the study programme a Blue Innovation Day (<https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/blue-innovation-day/>) is organised, bringing together main stakeholders from public and business sector as well as researchers and students in order to exchange knowledge and experience and to examine possibilities of collaboration in the field of Marine Biotechnology. Students have opportunity to make contacts and to connect with leading companies in blue biotechnology and facilitate further development of their career.

The Academic toolkit and Student toolkit available on JMBMB website are important parts of the student support system of the JMPMB as they give assistance and guidelines to students in all aspects of study experience (from application to graduation). Academic toolkit assists students to reach intended learning outcomes while Student toolkit (www.eu-conexus.eu/marinebiotech) helps them to get oriented at the EU-CONEXUS JMPMB intercampus.

Student support system includes various ways of **Academic support to future and existing students** of the JMPMB, such as

- the questions of completing previous education – to facilitate the access to study JMPMB to those who lack specialisation courses,
- academic support during study – to advance in studies - and

- possibilities of getting soft and transversal skills – to strengthen employability.

2. Courses to complete previous education (for future students)

The EU-CONEXUS Joint Master Programme in Marine Biotechnology is open to the holders of a first cycle higher education degree (Bachelor degree, or equivalent) in Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics (ISCED 05), Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction (ISCED 07), Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary (ISCED 08) and other similar fields of study as JMPMB from all countries. The qualification must give access to the Master studies and be recognised by the NARICs (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) of the Partners (see Article 4.1.). The minimum eligibility requirements to study joint Master programme in Marine Biotechnology are:

- University Bachelor's degree (min 180 ECTS) or equivalent providing the access to Master cycle,
- English language proficiency: at least CEFR B2, IELTS 6.5 (at least 6 in any skill overall speaking,
- writing, listening and reading) or equivalent), if English is not a native language or language of previous Bachelor or Master studies,
- Motivation.

According to the application procedure, the candidates **who at the moment of application do not have the needed credits to become a JMPMB students** are considered for entry to the JMPMB but will not receive an unconditional offer of a place on the programme until their final degree and/or English language test results are received. In such cases applicants may be offered a conditional admission on finishing Bachelor's degree at the required grade and/or obtaining the required English language test results.

Within EU-CONEXUS activities implemented in the field of Education some joint academic offers have been developed that can be offered to future students and enable them to complete a full first cycle of studies, and to get needed prerequisites for enrolment to the JMPMB. There are two joint extracurricular academic offers at Bachelor level:

1. Minor programmes: Blue Economy and Growth, and Coastal Development and Sustainable Maritime Tourism (<https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/minor-programmes/>)
2. Micro-credentials in SmUCS (<https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/micro-credentials/>)

After they have successfully finished a complete programme or selected courses/micro-credentials, the future students could get admission to JMPMB by use of recognition of previous learning, or of the learning outcomes for (1) admission purposes (under the responsibility of the Selection Committee).

3. Academic support during studies

The joint Master's programme in Marine Biotechnology is designed to ensure that students (1) get essential training in key subjects related to marine biotechnology, (2) have the opportunity to thematically specialise, (3) can tailor their study programme to their aspirations via individual professional practice (internship), individual research (academic research integration) and thesis work. JMPMB includes a wide range of mobility opportunities but also ensures integration in a group and a network in the best possible circumstances. By using multiple teaching approaches, it offers an open learning environment to a multicultural group of students.

For the existing students EU-CONEXUS joint programme universities also offer various forms of Academic support. A network of support consists of

- tutoring (Academic tutor and International tutor) and
- guidance in questions related to academic offer and administrative formalities.

International tutor gives support in questions related to migration procedures, arrivals and departure, integration, events for international students, buddy programme (and personal mentor).

Academic tutor is contacted for the questions regarding academic regulations, tutoring, timetables, professors, internships, suggestions and complaints about the study part.

As for the academic support during study, the JMPMB offers a variety of **optional courses**, mostly during the 3rd semester. On top of that, EU-CONEXUS Alliance has developed additional academic offers, to enable students to fill in gaps or to upskill. Students can enrol to complementary courses even from Bachelor level such as **Minor programmes** in Blue Economy and Growth, and Coastal Development and Sustainable Maritime Tourism as well as Micro-credentials.

At the moment EU-CONEXUS is developing **Micro-credentials at Master level**.

Furthermore, during their stay at each of the EU-CONEXUS universities, students are entitled to enrol for a **language course** its national language of up to 6 ECTS for free. If they want to take more classes or enrol for a course of any language other than the national language of the given country, it is possible upon an additional payment, at a rate of the host university. The language courses as well as all other extracurricular courses are included in student's Diploma Supplement.

Academic support refers also **to students with special needs**. The EU-CONEXUS partners aim at developing a disability-inclusive higher education environment in order to ensure that everyone is included in higher education and that their potential is realised. All our universities have a department or a specialist to assist the students with disabilities, providing a buddy, advising the university for their mobility within the Programme which is the best fit to their specific needs. The learning and exam framework is easy to adapt for blended (physical+virtual) learning.

4. Soft and transversal skills

The JMPMB offers various possibilities of developing soft and transversal skills within the study programme (Academic Research Integration) but also through extracurricular activities, such as

- complementary training through Minors and Micro-credentials, Summer schools
- participation in Student projects in SmUCS,
- Culture projects,
- EU-CONEXUS festival once a year,
- Innovation contest, etc.

The opportunities for students to develop these skills are communicated to the students via Moodle, also emails, social media and the website <https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/campus-life/>.

During Academic Research Integration courses in the 3rd semester, students are working together with some other classmates (in groups of 5-7) on a shared and transversal research project and they have opportunity to apply general academic, research and/or design skills in practice. At the same time, the transversal skills can be achieved through the collaboration between students from different specialisations and in different locations, adding up each student's work and thus running a truly multidisciplinary joint research project.

The practical, professional and soft skills that students gain from this experience helps them in carrying on other projects in companies or doing their Master thesis and PhD research.

Other forms of support in developing soft and transversal skills refer to career and academic support during internship, through EU-CONEXUS Smart Campus platforms and services, EU-CONEXUS University-industry platform, EU-CONEXUS Mentoring platform and through Career centre services at each university.

EU-CONEXUS in collaboration with students continues working in improving its services aiming to facilitate them in achieving academic and professional excellence.