

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Seminar on “Integrated curricula – Implications and Prospects”

Mantova, 11th and 12th April 2003

FINAL REPORT

1. Preamble

The European summit of education ministers held in Prague on 19 May 2001 drew attention to joint programmes and degrees. The final communiqué expressly calls upon the higher education sector “to increase the development of modules, courses and curricula at all levels with ‘European’ content, orientation or organisation. This concerns particularly modules, courses and curricula offered in partnership by institutions from different countries and leading to a recognised joint degree”.

This commitment had already been highlighted in the Bologna Declaration which explicitly set as an objective the “promotion of the necessary European dimension in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research”.

Nevertheless, still today restrictive national legislations make joint degrees impossible to award and recognise in most European countries.

2. Main features of joint study programmes

Co-operation between HE institutions of different countries in specific disciplines has generated common education and training activities, generally under the heading of joint study programmes, which are characterised by a common assumption of responsibility by the participating institutions as regards:

- the definition of the objectives of the programme
- the design of the curriculum;
- the organisation of the studies;
- the type of qualifications awarded.

2.1. Objectives of the programme

The objectives of a programme are jointly defined by partner institutions with a view to giving graduates an added value when they enter the European/international job market. This requires the identification of professional profiles that will be needed, as well as a search for coherence between the objectives pursued and the curriculum developed.

2.2. Design of the Curriculum

Cooperation in curriculum design means drawing up of a common study path aimed at reaching the educational goals that have been jointly defined.

In these schemes the partners offer specific segments which complement the overall curriculum designed, thus making it necessary for students to spend time at each or several of the participating institutions. In some instances, joint programmes based on the combination of segments identify some existing components of each participating institutions' study programmes - be they basic parts of the curriculum or specialist areas - and then proceed to put together a programme which utilises those components to the maximum. In other cases, new segments are developed by the institutions involved. Overall, it is the organic combination of diverse approaches, in terms of contents, conceptualisation and teaching methods, that should form the key feature of an integrated curriculum. Accordingly, in this context student mobility is seen not only as a cross-cultural experience - that has a value in itself - but also as a means of acquiring knowledge and skills not available at the home institution and which complement and integrate the activities carried out at the home institution.

2.3. Organisation of Studies

The organisation or management of studies mainly concerns decisions on logistical and financial aspects of the programme, the selection of students and the choosing of the teaching staff. In joint programmes there are different approaches to these organisational issues. Students from various institutions may, for example, rotate systematically among different institutions or be able to choose the partner institution where certain modules can be taken. They may be subject to the same selection procedures or be selected by each institution in accordance with different criteria. The contributions of teachers from partner institutions may be organised in different ways.

2.4. Type of Qualifications Awarded

The type of qualifications awarded by partners depends on the characteristics of the programme in terms of curriculum design and programme organisation. A programme that is jointly designed and implemented, on the basis of bilateral or multilateral agreements also including a common definition of the required learning outcomes, should naturally lead to a single qualification awarded jointly by all participating institutions. At present, however, in many cases national legal constraints make it impossible, to award fully recognised joint degrees. Very often, therefore, two national degrees have been awarded instead, even when they do not reflect/represent accurately the joint design and implementation of the programme.

3. Contributions already made on joint study programmes and joint degrees

3.1. The Stockholm conclusions

The seminar on the development of joint degrees, that took place in Stockholm in May 2002 within the framework of the Bologna process, explored the theme mainly from a legal point of view. In the conclusions and recommendations of the seminar *the following criteria have been identified as common denominators for European joint degrees:*

- two or more participating institutions in two or more countries;
- the duration of study outside the home institution should be substantial and continuous (e.g., one year at bachelor level);
- joint degrees should require a joint study programme established by cooperation, confirmed in a written agreement, between institutions;

- joint degrees should be based on bilateral or multilateral agreements on jointly arranged and approved programmes, with no restrictions concerning study fields or subjects;
- full use should be made of the Diploma Supplement and ECTS in order to ensure comparability of qualifications;
- a joint degree should preferably be documented in a single document issued by the participating institutions in accordance with national regulations;
- joint degrees and study programmes should require student and staff/teacher mobility;
- linguistic diversity in a European perspective should be ensured;
- joint study programmes should have a European dimension, whether physical mobility or intercultural competence in the curriculum.

3. 2. The EUA Survey on Master and Joint Degrees in Europe

The survey, presented in September 2002, was commissioned by the European University Association (EUA) with the support of the European Commission. It is an attempt to describe and analyse the state of the art with reference to master level programmes and joint degrees offered across Europe. The analysis of joint degrees in the European Higher Education Area was undertaken by Andrejs Rauhvargers .

The study offers a definition for joint degrees proposing that they should be awarded on completion of joint study programmes *that share at least some of the following characteristics*:

- curricula are developed or approved jointly by two or more institutions;
- students from each participating institution study parts of the programme at other partner institutions;
- the students' stays at the partner institutions are of comparable length;
- periods of study and exams passed at the partner institutions are recognised fully and automatically;
- professors of each participating institution also teach at the other partner institutions, work out the curricula jointly and form joint commissions to decide about admission and the awarding of the degrees;
- after completion of each individual programme, students are conferred the national degrees of each participating institution or just one degree jointly agreed upon by them all.

The survey confirmed the Stockholm conclusions.

4. The Mantova conclusions and recommendations

This seminar focused on the curricular component of joint degree programmes, on the assumption that curricular integration - intended as joint curriculum design and implementation – is a necessary condition for awarding joint degrees.

A report on “Joint Degrees: the Italian Experience in the European Context” – distributed to all participants – provided some background information on the Italian case. During the seminar the theme was approached at three levels, the country, the institutions and the learners/users. Special emphasis was placed on the institutional perspective, exploring why institutions might get engaged in developing integrated curricula, what methods they could use and what models they could adopt. The reflections presented by three panels of experienced speakers were discussed in the working groups. Both presentations and group discussions contributed first to the development of a shared vision and then to the formulation of a set of recommendations.

4. 1. Shared vision

- Joint degree programmes based on integrated curricula are one of the major priorities for the building of a European “identity” within the common European Higher Education Area, as they provide the learners in all cycles – including doctoral studies - with a coherent, recognisable and challenging experience of European diversity. This is also an obvious added value to national HE systems.
- Joint degree programmes based on integrated curricula are valuable instruments for developing European “citizenship” and “employability”. These terms are used in a broad sense and from the point of view of students and citizens. That is, “citizenship” means having the cultural, linguistic and social experience necessary to live knowledgeably and responsibly in the multinational/multilingual framework of the broader Europe; “employability” means not only being able to find employment or have the attributes that industry or other employers desire, but also having the knowledge and competences necessary to have a satisfactory and fulfilling professional life in a global society.
- Joint doctoral programmes educating for research professions in Europe are a cornerstone for greater co-operation between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. Synergy between the two areas is viewed as an essential prerequisite for the creation of a Europe of Knowledge.

4. 2. Recommendations to the education ministers meeting in Berlin

- Legal obstacles to the awarding and recognition of joint degrees should be removed in all countries.
- Additional funds should be provided to cover the higher costs of joint degree programmes, keeping in mind particularly the need to create equal opportunities for student participation. Besides national and regional governments, which will normally bear the costs, HE institutions - in the framework of their autonomy -, international bodies and other actors should be invited to provide special support for these programmes.
- Involvement of institutions in joint degree programmes should be encouraged and supported in all Bologna signatory countries, particularly in those which are not yet participating actively.
- Public awareness of the high value of joint degree programmes based on integrated curricula, in terms of European identity, citizenship and employability, should be increased, also by guaranteeing adequate visibility to existing examples of good practice.

4. 3. Recommendations to HE institutions

- The development of European joint degree programmes should be based on the criteria identified in the Stockholm conclusions. Moreover, a clear distinction should be made between joint and double degree programmes, in terms of their curricular objectives and organizational models, also with a view to protecting the learners/users. A complete glossary of terms should be drawn.
- Joint degree programmes based on integrated curricula should be developed to address identified needs of European and global society that cannot be adequately

addressed through national programmes, both in educating new professional figures and identifying new research areas.

- Students, graduates, employers and other relevant actors should be consulted about the areas in which the implementation of joint degree programmes would be most appropriate. However, it is recommended that HE institutions use to full potential their role as proactive planners for long range societal needs. Students should also be involved in planning and evaluation activities.
- Institutions that develop joint programmes should fully integrate and support them as a core function of their mission.
- Partners for a joint degree programme should be chosen on the basis of shared mission and commitment, as well as their capacity to develop and sustain such a programme in academic, organisational and financial terms. Thematic networks could provide experience for identifying suitable partners in any European country.
- Full consensus should be reached with partners regarding the model and the methodology to be used, as well as the elements of innovation and academic interest.
- Learning outcomes and competencies, as well as student workload described in ECTS credits, should be viewed as crucial elements in constructing any joint programme.
- Adequate quality assurance procedures should be jointly developed and activated by partners in a joint programme, and made explicit to learners/users.
- Proper provision for linguistic diversity and language learning should be ensured all through joint degree programmes. These programmes should also promote European identity, citizenship and employability.

May 12, 2003