

Joint Degrees – A Hallmark of the European Higher Education Area ? Official Bologna Seminar, Berlin, 21 – 22 September 2006

Under the auspices of the German Rectors Conference (HRK) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and co-financed by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, an official Bologna seminar on questions and strategies related to the awarding of “Joint Degrees” in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was held on September 21-22, 2006 in Berlin.

Background

The ministers responsible for higher education of the 45 Bologna member states gave the following mandate for this Bologna seminar in their Bergen Communiqué¹ under chapter IV which is entitled “Taking stock on progress for 2007”.

In this chapter they said:

“..In particular, we shall look for progress in:

..- the awarding and recognition of joint degrees, including at the doctorate level.”

There is already a “joint” history of endeavours to clarify what joint degrees are and how they could best be put into practice. This history has to be taken into account.

This concerns primarily the Stockholm Conclusions of May 31, 2002², the final report on the Mantova seminar of April 11-12, 2003³ and the Stockholm seminar “Joint Degrees – Further Development” of May 6-7, 2004⁴.

The Stockholm 2002 Conclusions make explicit reference to the Lisbon Recognition Convention of 1997⁵ on the recognition of degrees and study phases in higher education with a proposed amendment to include joint degrees dating from 2004⁶.

In the Bergen Communiqué under the chapter entitled “Recognition of degrees and study periods” the ministers state:

“...We express support for the subsidiary texts to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and call upon all national authorities and other stakeholders to recognise joint degrees awarded in two or more countries in the EHEA.”

The Stockholm 2002 Conclusions also contain a list of 9 criteria which could be useful as common denominators for the design of joint (or integrated) study programmes (this list is very much compatible with the criteria that TAUCH and RAUHVARGERS listed in their survey on master degrees and joint degrees⁷).

Three of these nine criteria should be mentioned here again, namely:

- the duration of study outside the home institution should be substantial, e.g. 1 year at bachelor level
- joint study programmes require to be settled on by cooperation, confirmed in a written agreement, between institutions
- full use should be made of the Diploma Supplement (DS).

¹ „The European Higher Education Area – Achieving the Goals“, Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen (Norway), 19-20 May 2005 (www.bologna-bergen2005.no)

² Ministry of Education and Science, Stockholm, Sweden: "The Stockholm Conclusions – Conclusions and recommendations of the Seminar on Joint Degrees within the framework of the Bologna Process", Regeringskansliet, Stockholm, 31 May 2002

³ Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca: Seminar on "Integrated Curricula – Implications and Prospects", Final Report, Mantova, 11-12 April 2003

⁴ Ministry of Education and Science, Sweden: "Bologna Follow-up Seminar Joint Degrees – Further Development", Stockholm, May 6-7, 2004

⁵ "Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region", Lisbon, April 11, 1997

⁶ The Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region: „Recommendations on the Recognition of Joint Degrees“, adopted on 9 June 2004

⁷ Tauch C. / Rauhvargers A. (2002). Survey on Master Degrees and Joint Degrees in Europe. Genf: European University Association. Siehe: http://www.unige.ch/eua/En/Publications/Survey_Master_Joint_degrees.pdf

From the Mantova Final Report 2003, two statements might be worth being highlighted:

“..Joint degree programmes based on integrated curricula are one of the major priorities for the building of a European identity” (including cultural, linguistic and social aspects) *and*

“..Joint doctoral programmes educating for research professions in Europe are a cornerstone for greater co-operation between the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA). Synergy between the two areas is viewed as an essential prerequisite for the creation of a Europe of Knowledge.”

The Stockholm 2004 Report and Conclusions⁸ stress the need to map the experience of higher education institutions and students and to anchor the possibility of awarding joint degrees in the national legislation on higher education.

Summary of the Berlin Seminar

The discussions and contributions at the Berlin seminar made clear that all over Europe there are various models of joint study programmes with different types of degrees in place (integrated programmes with double, multiple or joint degrees). Irrespective of the type of the final degree, in all models of joint programmes students have to spend a substantial part of their study programme at a host university abroad.

The seminar participants agreed that it might be useful to distinguish more precisely between joint or integrated study *programmes* as a procedural work on the one hand and the awarding of a *degree* that recognises and reflects the new contents and the added European value on the other hand.

There are already some definitions of what a joint degree is or within what framework it can be defined. We have definitions of this kind on the Bologna-Bergen homepage, provided by the Council of Europe (CoE) and UNESCO within the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and by ESIB (these definitions are wider) and one by the ERASMUS Mundus programme (which is narrower and closer to a “true” joint degree of the *one certificate or – diploma type*).

These definitions are partly contradictory, even though all of them were officially agreed upon at different points in time. Since there are obviously concerns in some countries of too narrow definitions of joint degrees being integrated in their national legislation, it could be advisable to start with a wider and more liberal definition of the Lisbon/UNESCO/ CoE type.

The Lisbon/ UNESCO /CoE-definition of a joint degree is:

“A joint degree should be understood as referring to a higher education qualification issued jointly by at least two or more higher education institutions or jointly by one or more higher education institutions and other awarding bodies, on the basis of a study programme developed and/or provided jointly by the higher education institutions, possibly also in cooperation with other institutions. A joint degree may be issued as

- *a joint diploma in addition to one or more national diplomas*
- *a joint diploma issued by the institutions offering the study programme in question without being accompanied by any national diploma,*
- *one or more national diplomas issued officially as the only attestation of joint qualification in question.”*

However, universities should be encouraged to implement “true” joint degrees (being understood as single certificates jointly awarded by more than one university) as recommended by the Mantova Bologna Seminar (2003) and implemented by many countries and universities in the framework of ERASMUS Mundus.

⁸ Pavel ZGAGA: „Bologna Follow-up Seminar Joint Degrees – Further Development. Report by the Rapporteur”, 7 pages, Stockholm/Ljubljana, May 2004 (www.bologna-bergen2005.no)

However, reality has proven e.g. in the ERASMUS Mundus programme that a real joint degree can be realised only as a single certificate jointly awarded by two or more universities.

In any case, it is important that ministers commit themselves to making the necessary legal steps to allow the awarding of joint degrees in their respective national legislation.

It might perhaps be helpful to compile the legal provisions for joint degrees of those countries which already have them and present them to all ministers, perhaps with a brief additional (legal) comment. This would be a task to be initiated by the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG).

In the Berlin seminar five working groups discussed specific aspects of joint degrees:

1. Recognition
2. Quality Assurance
3. Designing Legal Frameworks
4. Mobility
5. Financing and Funding

Some of the working groups' results are taken into consideration in the conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The seminar agreed on the following conclusions and recommendations.

- (1) There is already evidence that joint (integrated) programmes are a step forward to a truly bottom-up process in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and thus largely contribute to the establishment of a European identity of a specific, higher-education-related kind. They combine international experience, enhanced linguistic, cultural and social competence. If these contributions to the coherence of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) are in fact considered as valuable and appreciated, there must be some kind of specific funding for them, either on the national or on the European level or perhaps even as a combination of the two. This demand is justified because – at least in the initial phase – there are additional (overhead) costs that are specific to such programmes. On the other hand, there is an added value of these programmes and in the long run and with more experience gained, there could even result lower costs or greater capacity options by (international) pooling of resources.
- (2) Since there are still comparatively few joint degree programmes with a small number of students and there seems to be a recruitment problem in terms of attracting the “right” students, additional funding is needed to ensure the desperately needed enhanced marketing and information campaigns on the added benefit of joint degree programmes which are still virtually unknown.
- (3) Competent authorities at the national and the European level should be asked to compile a survey and describe existing double, multiple and joint degree programmes to better illustrate the benefit of these programmes and their European value both in terms of globally competitive academic education and employment perspectives. Such studies could be initiated simultaneously at national and European level.
- (4) There are different criteria proposed for the design and development of integrated European (joint) *programmes*. It is suggested to set up a final list of “good criteria” (or “golden rules”) that can be derived from the Stockholm, Mantova and Berlin seminars and other relevant documents in this connection. Such a list should then be published as a Bologna document of reference and relevance.

- (5) As regards the legal definition of a “true” joint degree there is no broad consensus and it may be difficult to achieve it with a formula that covers all aspects; it is probably not even necessary. All ministers whose countries have already ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention (currently amounting to 39) have at least in general agreed to the formulation chosen for the Lisbon Subsidiary Documents⁹ of UNESCO and the Council of Europe (which is broader in terms of the design and description of joint integrated programmes). Therefore, the ministers are asked to incorporate in their national legislation on higher education at least the written option for the awarding of joint degrees with a reference to the Lisbon Convention descriptions and make sure that they are quality-assured according to national standards and European principles and guidelines already agreed upon.
- In addition to legal provisions allowing for joint degrees it is also of utmost importance to make extensive use of a precise and informative Diploma Supplement. The single or multiple diploma document could also be combined with a joint diploma supplement in such a way that the different parts or sheets cannot be separated any more.
- In the meantime, the ministers should encourage institutions to continue and enhance their work for the preparation and design of integrated joint programmes.
- (6) Ministers should encourage institutions engaged in joint study programmes to make use of mutual tuition waivers for study periods spent at the foreign partner institution.
- (7) Ministers are asked to make sure that the procedures for obtaining visas and other necessary documents or permissions will not produce obstacles for the development of joint study programmes.
- (8) In terms of quality assurance, the implementation of the ENQA Standards and Guidelines passed in Bergen and the further development of a European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies facilitating mutual recognition of QA decisions in the Bologna signatory countries remain essential in order to make quality assurance of joint degrees easier and more transparent within the Bologna context and to avoid multiple QA procedures. Furthermore, specific criteria aiming at the assessment of the added value of joint degrees as opposed to national degrees need to be developed.

Prof. Hans R. Friedrich, Rapporteur General,
Berlin and Bonn, October 2006

⁹ Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region: „Recommendations on the Recognition of Joint Degrees“, adopted on 9 June 2004