

DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL JOINT DEGREES AND DOUBLE DEGREES: RECOMMENDATION OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Background

The development of *joint degrees* was set as an aim for the European Higher Education Area in the Prague Declaration in May 2001. In the Berlin Communiqué of 19 September 2001, the ministers responsible for higher education in the countries participating in the Bologna Process decided "to actively support the development and adequate quality assurance of integrated curricula leading to joint degrees".¹

The European Commission also supports integrated curricula leading to joint degrees: the Erasmus Mundus Master's programmes, to be launched in the academic year 2004-05, are intended to lead to a "joint degree, a double degree or several degrees"².

According to a survey concerning the joint degrees³, joint degree programmes have been established in several European countries. Overall, they are not very numerous as yet. Most programmes have been set up in business economics, law and administrative sciences. Most of these are bilateral Master's programmes. There seem to be differences both within and between countries as to how many degree certificates the graduate gets. Similarly, the awarding body seems to differ.

According to the survey, there is need to clarify the national and international procedures and statutes relating to joint degrees. Although lack of national legislation concerning joint degrees does not generally preclude the implementation of the programmes, it may lead to problems concerning the student's legal protection.⁴

In this memorandum, the Ministry of Education presents its view of the development of joint degrees in Finland. The recommendations concern international joint degrees in particular, but can also be applied to collaborative projects by Finnish higher education institutions (HEIs).

Definitions

In principle, the term *joint degree* means a degree programme developed and organised by two or several HEIs in collaboration which leads to one joint degree certificate. *Double degree* in turn means a degree programme developed and organised by two or several HEIs in collaboration which leads to two or more degree certificates, in practice to one in each partner HEI.

In the European discussion, the term *joint degree* often covers both types of collaboration. In this memorandum, the term *joint degree* refers to a joint programme, developed and organised by two or more HEIs, that leads to one or several degree certificates. Thus, the definition does not make a distinction between a joint degree and a double degree.

¹ "Realising the European Higher Education Area", Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Berlin on 19 September 2003
<http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Communique1.pdf>

² DECISION No 2317/2003/EC OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 5 December 2003 http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/prl/en/oj/dat/2003/l_345/l_34520031231en00010008.pdf

³ Andrejs Rauhvargers: "Joint Degree Study". In the report by Christian Tauch and Andrejs Rauhvargers: *Survey on Master Degrees and Joint Degrees in Europe*. European University Association, 9/2002.

⁴ Christian Tauch & Andrejs Rauhvargers: *Survey on Master Degrees and Joint Degrees in Europe*. European University Association, 9/2002.

The current situation in Finland

In Finland, there are few joint degree programmes to date. Some universities and polytechnics participate in international programmes, which in practice lead to several awards and thus are double degrees. Some programmes lead to only one degree certificate, describing the nature of the programme. HEIs are increasingly interested in developing international joint programmes.

As regards degree studies, the Finnish system of polytechnic funding only covers education leading to a Finnish polytechnic degree. Funding is thus available only for degree programmes of the normal extent.

Ministry of Education recommendations

In the opinion of the Ministry of Education, the development of joint degrees is an important part of the internationalisation of HEIs. The Ministry considers it important that Finnish HEIs actively develop joint degree programmes with officially recognised, high-quality HEIs abroad.

The status of joint degrees which do not belong to any country's official education system is still ambiguous and unestablished. This problem is only partly solved through the amendment of international legal instruments.⁵ The Ministry of Education sees that, in order to safeguard the student's legal protection, a joint degree should be arranged so that the degree obtained by the student belongs to at least one country's official degree system.

If the programme does not lead to an officially recognised degree, this should be clearly indicated in the advance material provided. If, on the completion of the programme, the student obtains an unofficial "diploma" or similar certificate, it should clearly indicate that it is not an official degree.

The Ministry of Education recommends that in developing joint programmes, HEIs see to the following matters:

- (1) The partner HEIs draw up detailed written agreements concerning the degree programmes. As a minimum, the agreements should lay down the extent of the programme, student admission, the student's status and related rights, the awarding of the degree, each partner institution's responsibilities and the financing of the programme.
- (2) The joint degree is based on careful curriculum design, done in close co-operation by the participating institutions.
- (3) All the HEIs participating in the joint degree programme are officially recognised or accredited by the competent authorities in their countries.
- (4) Quality assurance is ensured and the quality criteria have been agreed upon in writing between the partner HEIs.
- (5) The actual degree certificate clearly indicates that the student has participated in a joint degree programme. The study attainments should be clearly recorded in a diploma supplement.
- (6) The institution conferring the degree is responsible for assuring the quality of the degree and for ensuring that the degree fulfils all the criteria set for it.
- (7) All joint degree students complete a significant part of their degree studies at a foreign partner institution.
- (8) Studies completed at a foreign partner institution are fully recognised by the student's home institution.
- (9) Every participating Finnish HEI grants a degree to the students it has admitted as degree students.

⁵ Finland has ratified the Lisbon Treaty (Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European region, Council of Europe - UNESCO joint Convention) /Finnish Treaty Series 9-10/2004). The Convention is being amended to include the recognition of joint degrees.