

**BOLOGNA FOLLOW-UP SEMINAR  
JOINT DEGREES – FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

**Ministry of Education and Science, Sweden  
Stockholm, May 06 – 07, 2004**

**Report by the Rapporteur**

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(1) **General data.** The seminar on “*Joint Degrees – Further Development*” was organized by the Ministry of Education and Science of Sweden and took place in Stockholm, 06-07 May 2004; almost exactly two years after the first Bologna Follow-up seminar on the development of Joint Degrees and in the same city. The seminar – the first in the line of fourteen 2004-2005 Bologna Follow-up Seminars – focused along the *Bologna action line 6: Promotion of the European Dimension in Higher Education*, with a special focus on *Joint Master Degrees*.

The seminar was organized in two morning plenary sessions and in afternoon workshops. Seven presentations and case studies were given and discussed during the plenary session of the first day while in the afternoon, participants divided into four smaller working groups and took active part in discussions. Altogether, there were 51 participants from 20 “Bologna” countries as well representatives from European Commission, Council of Europe, EUA and ESIB at the seminar.

(2) **The point of departure.** The point of departure were the conclusions from the previous Stockholm seminar (May 2002) on joint degrees and the Mantova seminar (April 2003) on integrated curricula as well as surveys and publications which have appeared in the last two years, mostly as a result of the Bologna process.<sup>1</sup> A short overview of previous discussions and developments on this issue was given at the opening of the seminar by Ms. Kerstin Eliasson, State Secretary, and Ms Karin Röding, Director General for Higher Education, from the Swedish Ministry of Education and Science.

Joint Degrees were a rather obscure theme few years ago. The *Bologna Declaration* - in its sixth objective - briefly mentioned “integrated programmes of study, training and research” only. The *Prague Communiqué* went further and under a special paragraph on promotion of the European dimension in higher education “called upon the higher education sector to increase the development of modules, courses and curricula at all levels” and to offer them “in partnership by institutions from different countries and leading to a recognized joint degree”. Again two years later, ministers noted in the *Berlin Communiqué* that many new initiatives had been taken “to promote the development of integrated study programmes and joint degrees at first, second and third level” and agreed “to engage at the national level to remove legal obstacles to the establishment and recognition of such degrees and to actively support the development and adequate quality assurance of integrated curricula leading to joint degrees”. This has become one of most important issues to be discussed until Bergen conference; and the Stockholm Follow-up Seminar (2004) took it seriously.

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<sup>1</sup> See Bibliography at the end of the Report.

Parallel to the political development - reflected also in the main Bologna documents - a progress has been made also in understanding and promoting Joint Degrees. Before 2002, very little research on actual joint programmes and masters degrees in Europe has been made. After Prague, follow-up seminars in Stockholm in 2002 and in Mantova in 2003 produced important conclusions and recommendations; they also initiated systemic surveys and presentation of good practices. Last but not least, the Lisbon Recognition Convention has been also reflected in this progress. The EUA's *Survey on Master Degrees and Joint Degrees in Europe* (September 2002), followed by the ENIC and NARIC *Draft Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees* (May 2003) and the results of the 5<sup>th</sup> EUA Conference "*Joint Degrees: Institutions working together in Europe*" (October 2003) are probably most important steps on this way.

**(3) Today, we are at a stage when learning from pilot projects experience and from some national environment is already possible.** Final results of the EUA's pilot project (Joint Masters Project, March 2003-January 2004, presented by Ms. Kate Geddie from EUA) that has examined 11 established joint masters programmes, supported by the EC Socrates programme, *confirm their importance for inter-university and European cooperation* but also *show in more clear light than before the key unresolved issues*: definitions and structures need to be "tuned", funding seems to be a particularly important question (Joint Degrees exist among incompatible national funding frameworks and differing socio-economic contexts), legal recognition obstacles continue to exist, external quality assurance mechanisms are still designed to satisfy only one national system, etc.

On the other hand, two national case studies from Italy and Flanders (presented by Ms. Germana Verri from Italian Ministry for Education, University and Research, and Mr. Erwin Malfroy from the Ministry of the Flemish Community, Dept. of Education; Ms. Maria Stichi Damiani as the author of a third presentation was unfortunately absent) encourage and show that *changes in national legislation combined with deliberate political and financial incentives* aimed at autonomous higher education institutions bring productive results. This has been done in a particularly interesting way with the Italian internationalization programme; it is based on previously adopted legislative provision which made Joint Degrees legally possible. Recent changes in Flemish legislation as well as international agreement between Flanders and Netherlands and the newly established "transnationale Universiteit Limburg" prove again that important steps could be done in this area.

**(4) The next step to eliminating obstacles to the development of Joint Degrees and their recognition.** All discussions and surveys up to the present show that the main obstacle to the development of Joint Degrees is still *the question of their recognition*. It is far from being "a mere formal issue"; it should be noted again that the issue of recognition was the trigger – or at least one of them – which caused, in last instance, the very process of establishing a common European Higher Education Area.

Parties of the Lisbon Recognition Convention of 1997 agreed to recognize each others' national qualifications; however, it is difficult to say that Joint Degrees are covered in the Convention as "national qualifications". Therefore, the proposed

Council of Europe and Unesco *Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees* which is expected to be approved in June 2004 and amended to the Lisbon Recognition Convention will be another important push forward. The work on the Recommendation and the proposed solutions (presented by Prof. Andrejs Rauhvargers, the President of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee) were strongly supported in the discussion; however, the discussion also stressed that this document will not replace the need of amending national legislation in order to make Joint Degrees possible or, better to say, “recognized”. On the contrary, this is obviously one of main tasks to be fulfilled on the way towards Bergen.

**(5) The development of transnational degrees needs transnational support as well as transnational objectives.** The Lisbon Recognition Convention made clear that mutual recognition of various national qualifications is possible only with a help of transnational means - international law. If we wish to enjoy mutually the advantages and richness of our particular *national* environments, e.g. in higher education and research, we have to establish structures of *trans-national* support and agree on *trans-national* objectives. It is clear that Joint Degrees are the vulnerable point in national higher education systems which could not be reached if this principle is not taken into account seriously. It is also clear that the inner “anatomy” of Joint Degrees needs further consideration and careful definitions to eliminate potential ambiguity and to make Joint Degrees really important in the European Higher Education Area.

From this point, the contribution of the European Commission (presented by Mr. David Coyne from EC – DG Education and Culture) are as appreciated as inevitable. The ERASMUS support to the development and delivery of Joint Degrees in combination with the support to “tuning exercises” in various thematic networks, to quality as a transnational issue, etc. have positive effects in national developments of higher education. *The new incentive which can foster and speed up these processes very much - at the national and institutional level - is now presented through ERASMUS MUNDUS.*

**(6) Joint Degrees are made for students.** The development of Joint Degrees is an important mechanism of opening national higher education systems and adapting them to the internationalization, promoting quality assessment in a broader environment, developing European citizenship etc. However, Joint Degrees are not (only) tools of system modernization; they are made for students and students express high expectations in this regard (as presented by Mr. Predrag Lazetić from ESIB).

Certainly, Joint Degrees could bring many new chances to future graduates: gaining from different academic and research environments, learning different cultural paradigms, languages, developing professional and research ties in an international context, getting broader work experience and better chances on a global labour market. However, student organizations also call for attention not to forget the social dimension of the emerging Joint Degrees: there is a potential danger to remain elitist and not open to majority of students; they shouldn’t be developed only in a limited set of study fields; their recognition should be automatic and prior to enrolment of candidates. In particular, problems caused by different study financing systems should find proper solutions.

**(7) Discussions in workshops proved that at this stage Integrated Curricula and Joint Degrees need a broader reflection in order to make further steps.** Only now when the first concrete steps have been made it became really clear how important it is to use *precise definitions*. Many problems seem to be simply a result of inaccurate (everyday) language. Mobility of students and staff is extremely precious, it even promotes “joint activities” – but as such it shouldn’t be mixed with *genuine joint programmes or degrees*. Similarly, the two terms Double Degrees and Joint Degrees sometimes make problems even to those who are familiar with higher education. There is a clear need for a “joint action” in the terminology.

Joint Degrees also shouldn’t be mixed with joint study programmes; better to say, discussions should not focus only on the issue of degrees. The real process of establishing Joint Degrees starts from *curriculum design*: this is the point where institutions can distinguish best between academic advantages and/or potentialities (e.g. specialization through co-operation) of their co-operation from a mere popular wish “to develop a Joint Degrees also with us”.

Many dilemmas are connected to these issues. Often, they provoke discussions on the foundations of Joint Degrees.

**(8) Why Joint Degrees – views from an institutional angle.** Joint Degrees should be regarded as *a systemic possibility* on the national scale and as *an option* for institutions and students. Developing Joint Degrees “for any price”, to a broad extent, massively, would be absurd and counterproductive.

Students’ point of view was briefly presented above (see 6); now, we try to list some possible – and diverse – answers to the question: *Why Joint Degrees – from the institutional point of view*:

- to better position our institution in an internationalised higher education;
- to foster specialization and to promote academic division of labour;
- to attract (more) international students;
- to get additional value of the existing international co-operation;
- to promote a particular (new) study area in (inter)national context;
- for “degree laundry” purposes at some institutions that might not have the right to award a certain degree or might not be a recognized institution;
- no reason; the institution continues with its own provision.

It is clear: arguments could be very different, even disputable; therefore, they should be a matter of broad discussion in institutional bodies and deliberate institutional decision.

**(9) Why Joint Degrees – views from a national angle.** In a similar way, we have also to ask *why to support developing Joint Degrees – from the national point of view*. Again, different positions and arguments could be possible:

- to better position national higher education in an internationalised context;
- to promote special disciplines taken as a national priority or national pride;
- to promote national economy and culture abroad (e.g. international students);
- to develop new disciplines important for the future of a country;
- to give new incentives to cross-border and/or regional cooperation;
- to support home institutions to compete successfully for EC grants;

- not to lag behind;
- no reason.

As in the former case, arguments could be very different and disputable; therefore, they should be a matter of broad policy discussion – with involvement of institutions, students and employers – and deliberate decision.

**(10) Examples of problems to be considered and tasks to be addressed in near future.** A set of questions and tasks has been established in discussions in the different working groups at the seminar which call for joint European co-operation when searching and developing possible solutions.

(a.) Joint Study Programmes and Joint Degrees should be considered in the light of the already proposed *European framework of higher education qualifications*.

(b.) Even when the *Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees* (Lisbon Convention) will be approved and formal obstacles removed from national legislation, some *potential collisions* among national regulation from different countries (e.g. accreditation and/or quality assessment procedures, degree titles, financial provisions, relationship between higher education and research, etc.) are possible; constant measures should be taken to detect such potential collisions and find appropriate solutions – on the national as well as on the European level.

(c.) *Diploma Supplement* should be adapted from its existing “national application” to the (transnational) nature of future Joint Study Programmes, including their definition in the Bologna sense.

(d.) With regard to genuine Joint Degrees to be developed in the near future a need has been expressed *to agree upon a common label (prefix)*; however, higher education qualifications remain nationally based. After an exchange of arguments participants of the seminar agreed that in this context the term “European” shouldn’t be used.

(e.) A broad set of *financial questions and consequences* has been established; these issues are linked to *the social dimension* of the Bologna process, but not only. Special consideration should be put to the question of *different systems of financing* and different positions of the co-operating institutions (e.g. with regard to relationship between higher education and research). There are open questions also from the point of view of *organization of studies*, e.g. different definition of semester in different national environments, which should be addressed as well.

(f.) *Students* in Joint Study Programmes should have the same (or similar) status as Erasmus students. Access to Joint Study Programmes can be much more difficult for (postgraduate) *part-time students*; therefore, special support measures should be available for these students. Finally, *language courses* should be of special concern also here.

(g.) The further development of Joint Study Programmes and Joint Degrees depends very much on *systematic and careful monitoring*.

**(11) A need for a systemic follow-up.** In this sense, *a proposal for a special working group on Joint Degrees* to be appointed by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) which was disputed at this seminar, prove that there is *a lack of reflected and/or organized good practice* and that *unclear definitions of Joint Degrees hinder faster developments*. A handbook of good practice and/or recommended guidelines could

have positive effects but they should not be a top down commandment. The workshop participants, however, in their conclusions agreed not to recommend the BFUG to appoint a special working group, but to – in the way the BFUG chooses – map the experience of higher education institutions and students regarding joint study programmes and joint degrees.

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