



Procedure for the shared master program, version 1

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Abstract.

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Integrated programmes are a relatively new phenomenon to the European universities. Current university procedures and national legislation complicate, unintended, the implementation of integrated master's programmes. This deliverable lists the potential obstacles and suggests solutions to take them away.

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Executive Summary

Following the project's plan and stimulated by the European Commission's Erasmus Mundus subsidy programme, we are considering to set up an integrated Master's programme.

An integrated Master's programme is a Master's programme developed and delivered by more than one university and in which its students receive a formal degree from at least two universities. An integrated programme can have the form of a double degree, multiple degree or joint degree programme, depending of the number of the degree documents issued to the student.

Integrated programmes are a relatively new phenomenon to the European universities. Current university procedures and national legislation complicate, unintended, the implementation of integrated master's programmes. This first deliverable lists the potential obstacles and suggests solutions to take them away.

This is only the first release of the deliverable, just sketching potential problems as we encounter them. The final version of this deliverable will be of course much more precise and pro-active in the solution of problems.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Following the project's plan and stimulated by the European Commission's Erasmus Mundus subsidy programme, we are considering to set up an integrated Master's programme.

The Erasmus Mundus programme is a co-operation and mobility programme in the field of higher education which promotes the European Union as a centre of excellence in learning around the world. It supports European top-quality Masters Courses and enhances the visibility and attractiveness of European higher education in third countries. It also provides EU-funded scholarships for third country nationals participating in these Masters Courses, as well as scholarships for EU-nationals studying in third countries.

The Erasmus Mundus programme has been very well received by the European higher education community. They see the programme as a useful means to respond to the challenges European higher education faces today, in particular the need to stimulate the process of convergence of degree structures and to enhance the attractiveness of European higher education world-wide. These are themes central to the Bologna process and to national reform in higher education in Member States.

An integrated Master's programme is a Master's programme developed and delivered by more than one university and in which its students receive a formal degree from at least two universities. An integrated programme can have the form of a double degree, multiple degree or joint degree programme, depending of the number of the degree documents issued to the student.

In order to be eligible by Erasmus Mundus, integrated Master's programmes should comprise high-quality integrated courses at masters level offered by a consortium of at least three universities in at least three different European countries. The courses must be well *integrated* to be selected under Erasmus Mundus, which means that they must foresee a study period in at least two of the three universities and that it must lead to the award of a recognised double, multiple or joint diploma.

Integrated programmes are a relatively new phenomenon to the European universi-

ties. Current university procedures and national legislation complicate, unintended, the implementation of integrated master's programmes. This deliverable lists the potential obstacles and suggests solutions to take them away.

Chapter 2

Integrated Masters programmes

An integrated masters programme is quite different from standard masters programmes, as it has all of the following characteristics:

- It is a single program.
- It is delivered by two or more universities (for Erasmus Mundus programmes: minimum three universities).
- There are joint criteria and procedures for admission and examination.
- Tuition fees are common to the course and must not depend on the individual study destination of the students.
- Examinations passed at one university location are recognised fully and automatically by all degree awarding universities.
- Students carry out a period of study in at least two universities.
- A joint degree is awarded or a degree for the same program is awarded by two (double degree) or more (multiple degree) universities.
- The degrees are recognised in the countries concerned.

Chapter 3

Consequences for each single university

In order to be able to offer integrated master's programmes the following potential obstacles must be addressed:

1. The Master's programme must be certified internally.
2. The Master's programme must be accredited by the Ministry.
3. A certain number of places must be reserved for third-country (non-EU) students.
4. Additional application and admission arrangements must be made.
5. Tuition fees must be paid in compliance with national legislations.
6. All students must be formally enrolled in each university.
7. All student achievements must be registered in each university.
8. Students arriving at the second year.

3.1 The Master's programme must be certified internally

A typical solution to this problem is to have the European Master programme as part of the standard MSc in Computer Science of each university. In this way, the MSc programme is not a new degree, but it is just a specialisation of an existing degree.

3.2 The Master's programme must be accredited by the Ministry

The proof of national accreditation by the Ministry is usually available for the standard MSc in Computer Science programme.

3.3 Number of places reserved for third-country (non-EU) students

Accordingly to several national regulations each Academic Year each Faculty should reserve a pre-defined amount of places for non-EU citizens. This has to be mediated among all the various specialisations of the degree, since this number is global. The problem that may arise is that a university may be obliged by other partners in the European Master to accept a number of students which is larger than the pre-defined maximum. The best solution is that the international exchange agreements should have a stronger applicability than the national regulations, so that it is always possible to fulfil the obligations coming from the European Master. A temporary solution is to reserve anyway a fixed pre-defined number of non-European students accepted for the European Master only.

Remark:

Citizens of Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein are given parity of treatment with respect to European citizens, according to EU rules 1408/71, 1612/68 and 574/72. Citizens of Switzerland are given parity of treatment according to the bilateral agreement signed on 21.06.1999, based on EU rules 1408/71 and 307/99. On the other hand, Rumanian, Bulgarian, and Turkish citizens can not be considered non-European citizens, putting them in an unchartered territory.

3.4 Additional application and admission arrangements must be made

The European master usually requires a joint application and admission procedure for the programme. In practice this means that there is one admissions office for the programme, hosted typically by the coordinator of the consortium. The procedures of integrated programmes always differ in some extent from the procedures of "stand-alone" programmes. The problem is to let the two procedures lawfully co-exist.

For example, the procedure to register into an Italian University consists of two phases:

(i) pre-enrolment and (ii) enrolment. For every non-EU student, the pre-enrolment application must be handed via the Italian representative authorities (embassies or consulates) abroad before a deadline date set every year by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This means that in principle the European master consortium is obliged to set its internal deadline for enrolment before the above nation-wide deadline, and that in principle it is always possible that the application will fail because of formal problems at the representative authorities. So, a first solution could be that the designated coordinating University is acting as central admission office, using an on-line application procedure. Integration with the national procedures starts at the time of enrolment. Possible calendar:

- **February-March:** Application of the students to the Consortium, i.e. to the central admission office, with indication of the chosen / preferred partner University for the first year. Check of *eligibility* by the Joint Committee of the consortium (composed by representatives of the consortium and of the chosen partner University).
- **March-April:** Notification of *eligibility*: a list of *eligible candidates* is sent to each partner University and the students are also notified.
- **May:** Non-EU students pre-enrol via the Embassy if they go to Italy.
- **June:** After processing the applications, each university sends an updated list of the *eligible candidates*. Some university may have to find a solution if this date does not coincide with the enrolment date according to the local regulation: in fact at this stage eligible candidates should become *selected candidates*, in order to allow them to get the VISA on time.
- **June:** The consortium decides about the selection, and informs the selected candidates with an official letter.
- **July:** The embassies issue candidate students the VISA to travel to the first country.
- **September:** Start of the courses.

Remark:

It is envisaged that EU students who have not sent their application to the central admission office of the European Master consortium can still apply to local universities following the standard procedures.

3.5 Tuition fees must be paid in compliance with national legislations

By the Italian law each student has to pay at least the legal tuition fee set by the Ministry nationwide in order to be enrolled. On the contrary, in Germany it is forbidden by law to have any tuition fee. In addition to this, single universities may be more or less flexible and/or autonomous in fixing a tuition fee. In addition to this, it is frequent the case that fees for EU citizens are different from fees for non-EU citizens.

Tuition fees should be paid preferably by the student himself or on behalf of him by an outside body (typically a scholarship funding agency, such as Erasmus Mundus). Note that payment of fees, if in multiple instalments, may incur into heavy international bank transfer taxation.

As a possible solution to that, the consortium of the European Master programmes sets its tuition fee: it should preferably be cost price, but at least as high as the highest legal tuition fee. The consortium preferably opts for two different fees, one for EU students, one for non-EU-students. The student pays the total fee to the consortium's central admission office, hosted by one of the partner universities. The central admission office pays the other partner universities on behalf of the students, sending its part of the fee for each registered student, according to each partner university regulation. What is left can be spent by the consortium for improving the programme's quality.

Remark:

A distribution of the fee in proportion to the number of ECTS or to the time spent at each visited university is definitely harder to implement, and it is not advised to do so. Moreover, note that according to the Erasmus Mundus regulation students have to obtain at least the 30% of the total ECTS in each host university, hence they will anyway have to spend more than one semester at each site to meet this constraint, and this implies that they have to pay for the whole year anyway.

3.6 All students must be formally enrolled in each university

This seems a simple problem in theory but it may be a major problem in practice. Due to the contrasting nature of the European master (it is not formally a separated degree, since it is part of the existing degree in computer science; but it requires a separate unified procedure for selection, enrolment, and tuition fees), it may be difficult for a university to solve the contrasts.

Each student must be formally registered. In order to be registered as student, some legal checks need to be performed, like pre-enrolment, authentication of the student and payment of the tuition fee. Local procedures, for example enforced by dedicated software, may not be easily adaptable to handle the European master exception, since, after all, it is not legally an exception. For example, the procedure should consider the application to the central admission office of the European Master consortium equivalent to (pre-)enrolment to local university.

Another problem may arise when the students show the proof of payment done in due time to the coordinating university as proof of the payment of the (local) University fees at the moment of enrolment. Local universities should be ready to accept a remote payment, which may happen at different times with respect to the local habits and regulations.

3.7 All student achievements must be registered in each university

In order to be able to award a Master's degree, all achievements of all students, including those obtained at the location of the partner universities, have to be formally registered and awarded in ECTS-credits. So, examination results of the students have to be communicated by the partner university where students spend their first year to the partner university where they will spend their second year and to the central admission office of the European Master. For instance: all exam results of students at their first year are automatically awarded by the program coordinator of the European master consortium and by the second year university, and are registered formally in the second university internal documents. The problem may be that some universities or faculties are not ready to change their procedures and their autonomy about deciding what can be recognised: an automatic mechanism should be enforced at the level of the international agreements.

3.8 Students arriving at the second year

It is a general regulation that a Master of Science Degree can be awarded only if the whole study career (MSc or BSc+ MSc) fulfils the distribution of ECTS per area as stated in the national University Regulations. So, depending on these regulations, a student may be eligible to go to some university for the second year, but possibly not to some other university where the curriculum so far does not satisfy the national required distribution of credits. So, it is expected that students who want to study somewhere during their second year must submit their past Study Career (including the Study Career of their BSc and of the first year of MSc) and receive an official approval of the whole submitted Study Career by the Joint Committee as stated in the Bilateral Agreements.

Possible calendar:

- **By the beginning of March:** students choose the partner University where they want to spend their second year.
- **By mid March:** the Joint Committee consisting of representative of both partners universities involved (first and second year) gives its approval of the chosen partner University.
- **By the end of March:** EU students apply to the Socrates Erasmus program selection to receive a scholarship.

Chapter 4

How to proceed

It is envisaged that all the problems presented above can not be solved now in our context, nor that they will be mentioned in the international agreements among participating universities. On the one hand, we want to proceed with an informal and experimental first year starting from academic year 2005/2006. On the other hand, we believe that the international agreements should be lightweight, and all the specific questions will be regulated by the consortium internally by means of additional documents decided by the joint committee. In Appendix A we attach a possible international agreement that may serve for this purpose.

Appendix A

International agreement

We propose here a first version of international bilateral agreement that tries to be consistent with the discussion presented previously in this deliverable.

Bilateral Memorandum of Understanding

concerning the participation of the Faculty of Computer Science of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and the YYY in the ‘European Masters Program in Semantic Web’.

Within the European Masters Program in Semantic Web, the Faculty of Computer Science of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and the YYY will offer an integrated and distributed study program (*double degree program*) according to the constraints set out in the following paragraphs.

§1

Aims

The double degree program is aiming to provide:

- a) Cooperation in the field of student exchange in order to open the possibility for students to obtain a double Master degree within the study program “Laurea Specialistica in Informatica” at the Faculty of Computer Science of the Free University

of Bozen-Bolzano and the study program “YYY-MSc” at the YYY. To this end the partner universities will mutually recognise study and examination achievements earned in the course of the common study program, and which will be composed of equivalent modules, projects and the master thesis;

- b) Exchange of lecturers in order to foster the scientific collaboration, to further develop the curriculum and to share didactic and administrative experience.

§2

Prerequisites for Participation in the Double Degree Program

Students of the Faculty of Computer Science of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and the YYY are allowed to study in the double degree program if they are registered within the study program “Laurea Specialistica in Informatica” at the Faculty of Computer Science of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano or the study program “YYY-MSc” at the YYY.

Students intending to study in the double degree program should in general apply for it as part of their application for the study program “Laurea Specialistica in Informatica” at the Faculty of Computer Science of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano or the study program “YYY-MSc” at the YYY. The students are selected by the Joint Commission (see §5).

§3

Form of Study within the Double Degree Program

Students within the double degree program have to study at both the Faculty of Computer Science of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and the YYY. They are jointly monitored by two lecturers (tutors), one from the Faculty of Computer Science of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and one from the YYY.

Each student has to develop a plan of studies together with his/her tutors. This plan must be submitted for approval to the Joint Commission.

The master thesis can be submitted to and defended at either the Faculty of Computer Science of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano or the YYY. The university carrying out the defence delivers to the other university all necessary documents, such that the other university can award its degree.

The master thesis can be jointly supervised and defended in front of a mixed jury.

§4 **Stay at the Partner University**

During their stay at each of the partner universities students study according to the respective local study and examination regulations.

§5 **Joint Commission**

The Faculty of Computer Science of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and the YYY set up a Joint Commission with equal representation and appointed by the appropriate university authorities at each institution.

The commission is responsible for all tasks implied by this memorandum of understanding and aiming at running a successful double degree program, always under the general regulations of each university. Among these, the following tasks are included:

- Specify additional requirements for the acceptance of students;
- Select students;
- Select guest lecturers;
- Specify rules for the individual study program at the Faculty of Computer Science of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and the YYY;
- Approve the plan of studies for each student;
- Convert the marks for examinations;
- Develop the curriculum further;
- Report to the participating universities;
- Initiate additional third party funds.
- Administer joint funds raised by the Faculty of Computer Science of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and the YYY for the purpose of the double degree program.

The Joint Commission is to be consulted if the Faculty of Computer Science of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano or the YYY intends to change its involved study program.

The Joint Commission meets several times a year if necessary, but at least once each semester. The meetings can be physical, by email or by video conferencing.

The quorum consists of the attendance of at least one commission member from the Faculty of Computer Science of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and one from the YYY.

§6

Exchange of Students

Both universities enrol each year at least an agreed number of students from the partner university.

The fees (if there are any) for the participation in the double degree program at a partner university are waived. Students have to pay the social fees (if there are any) to the partner university.

Students are responsible for obtaining sufficient health insurance and have to present a proof thereof at the time of enrolment at the partner university.

§7

Exchange of Lecturers

The Faculty of Computer Science of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and the YYY intend to foster the exchange of lecturers aiming at cross-fertilisation in teaching through research.

§8

Financial Obligations

The financial arrangements for project-related activities are to be decided on a case-to-case basis and there are no financial obligations arising from this agreement.

§9

Duration

This memorandum of understanding shall last for three study years after the date below and shall be automatically extended by three study years thereafter if not cancelled in writing by one of the partners at least six months before the end.