



Procedure for the shared master program, version 2

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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 programmes. This deliverable proposes a way to manage them and reports briefly about the plans for setting up such a master programme in the area of Semantic Web education.

Keyword list: Master of Science, Erasmus Mundus, European Master

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Executive Summary

Educating students in Semantic Web technologies is one important aspect to foster the transfer of Semantic Web technologies from academia to industry. However, even the leading universities in Europe in the Semantic Web area have difficulties to set up their own Semantic Web study programme because of the high diversity of a Semantic Web study curriculum: No single European university is currently offering all necessary courses for such a programme. In order to realize a quick setup of a Semantic Web programme, we are considering to set up an Integrated Master programme, which is developed and delivered by more than one university and in which its students receive a formal degree from at least two universities. This Integrated Master is also stimulated by the European Commission's Erasmus Mundus subsidy programme, that is intended to stimulate the process of convergence of the European degree structures and to increase the mobility of students within Europe.

The main problem, however, is that such Integrated Master programmes are a relatively new phenomenon to the European universities. Current university procedures and national legislation complicate, unintended, the implementation of Integrated Master programmes. This deliverable summarises potential obstacles and suggests solutions to manage them. While they were developed in the course of setting up an Integrated Master programme in the area of Semantic Web, its findings are of general interest for setting up Integrated Master programmes.

This is the second release of the deliverable, which extends the problems as summarised in the first release of the deliverable with possible solutions to manage them. We also sketch a workflow for the management of the Integrated Master, and present a refined Cooperation Agreement among the partners, being involved in the Integrated Master programme. This Cooperation Agreement is the legal basis for running and developing the Integrated Master programme. We additionally provide a summary of the experimental setup for the Integrated Master in Semantic Web topics. This version of the deliverable reflects the current state of the Integrated Master activities within KnowledgeWeb as an outcome of the discussions and negotiations among the partners during the last six months.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Educating students in Semantic Web technologies is one important aspect to foster the transfer of Semantic Web technologies from academia to industry. However, even the leading universities in Europe in the Semantic Web area have difficulties to set up their own Semantic Web study programme because of the high diversity of a Semantic Web study curriculum: No single European university is currently offering all necessary courses for such a programme. In order to realize a quick setup of a Semantic Web programme, we are considering to set up an Integrated Master programme, which is developed and delivered by more than one university and in which its students receive a formal degree from at least two universities. An Integrated Master 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.

This Integrated Master is also stimulated by the European Commission's Erasmus Mundus¹ subsidy programme, that 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 which 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 central themes in the Bologna process² and for the national reforms of higher education in the Member States.

In order to be eligible by Erasmus Mundus, Integrated Master programmes should comprise high-quality integrated courses at masters level offered by a consortium of at

¹http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/index_en.html

²http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna_en.html

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.

The main problem, however, is that such Integrated Master programmes are a relatively new phenomenon to the European universities. Current university procedures and national legislation complicate, unintended, the implementation of Integrated Master programmes. This deliverable summarises potential obstacles and suggests solutions to manage them. While they were developed in the course of setting up an Integrated Master programme in the area of Semantic Web, its findings are of general interest for setting up any Integrated Master programme.

This is the second release of the deliverable, which extends the problems as summarised in the first release of the deliverable with possible solutions to manage them. We also sketch a workflow for the management of the Integrated Master, and present a refined Cooperation Agreement among the partners, being involved in the Integrated Master programme. This Cooperation Agreement is the legal basis for running and developing the Integrated Master programme. We additionally provide a summary of the experimental setup for the Integrated Master in Semantic Web topics. This version of the deliverable reflects the current state of the Integrated Master activities within KnowledgeWeb as an outcome of the discussions and negotiations among the partners during the last six months. The structure of this deliverable is necessarily schematic, since it deals with procedures and problems related to regulations.

The deliverable is structured as follows: After having briefly summarised the characteristics of an Integrated Master programme and its differences to standard programmes, Chapter 2 lists the necessary requirements to be able to implement an Integrated Master programme, including the resulting problems individual universities might be faced with; this is a revised version of what has been presented in the first release of this deliverable. Then, we report about the experimental status of the Integrated Master in Semantic Web Education in Chapter 3 as to be started in the following months; this experiment does not try to tackle with the previously identified problems yet, but it will try to be an experience on fields. Chapter 4 proposes a possible workflow for the administrative tasks necessary to run the Integrated Master programme. The Cooperation Agreement, which has been adapted according to the discussions of the past six months, is contained in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2

Requirements on Running an Integrated Master Programme

An Integrated Master programme is quite different from standard master 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 programme and must not depend on the individual study destination of the students.
- Examinations passed at one location are recognised fully and automatically by all other universities who participate and award a degree in that programme.
- 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.

In this Chapter we consider problems for managing an Integrated Master in the general sense, as they may happen for any Integrated Master. In order to be able to offer Integrated Master programmes the following potential obstacles must be addressed:

1. The Integrated Master programme must be certified internally.

2. The Integrated Master 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.

These issues will be discussed in detail in the remainder of this section.

Internal Certification

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

Accreditation by the Ministry

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

Reserved Places for Third-Country (non-EU) Students

According to several national regulations, each faculty should reserve a pre-defined amount of places for non-EU citizens in each academic year. 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 Integrated Master programme to accept a number of students which is larger than the pre-defined maximum. The best solution is that the international Cooperation Agreement should have a stronger applicability than the national regulations, so that it is always possible to fulfil the obligations coming from the Integrated Master programme. A temporary solution is to reserve anyway a fixed pre-defined number of places for non-European students accepted for the Integrated 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. Moreover, according to the EU rules, Rumanian, Bulgarian, and Turkish citizens (belonging to candidate countries for accession to the EU) can not be considered non-European citizens anymore, putting them in an unchartered territory – since most universities do not recognise the European status of them.

Additional Application and Admission Arrangements

Integrated Master programmes usually require a joint application and admission procedure. In practice this means that there is one admission office for the programme, hosted typically by the coordinator of the consortium. The procedures of Integrated Master programmes typically differ to 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 handled 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 Integrated 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, and the integration with the national procedures starts at the time of enrolment. This solution would put too many constraints on the common application/registration calendar. It is suggested, therefore, to agree on a common application and admission procedure centralised by the coordinating university; the consortium should have the authority to decide about the applications (through a joint selection panel where all the partner universities are equally represented) by applying common quality criteria that also satisfy all the local constraints imposed by the national legislations.

Remark:

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

Compliance of Tuition Fees with National Legislations

A student within a European Integrated Master programme has to be formally enrolled at each university, he/she is visiting during the studies. Hence, this student has to pay the tuition fee for each of these universities, which might differ significantly depending on the location of the universities.

As an example, by 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 in some states 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 frequently 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 installments, may lead to high amount of fees for the international bank transfers.

As a possible solution to that, the consortium of the European Integrated Master programme sets its tuition fee as follows: 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 credits 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 credits 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 in anyway.

All students must be formally enrolled in each university

Ensuring that all students are formally enrolled in each university seems a simple problem in theory but it may be a major problem in practice. Due to the contrasting nature of the European Integrated 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 maybe difficult for a university to still comply with the formal rules.

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 Integrated 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 Integrated Master consortium equivalent to 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 Integrated Master common tuition fees at the moment of the centralised enrolment. Partner universities should be ready to accept a remote payment (through a money transfer from the coordinating university), which may happen at different times with respect to the local habits and regulations.

Registration of the Achievements of All Students in each University

In order to be able to award a Master 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 Integrated Master. For instance: all exam results of students at their first year are automatically awarded by the program coordinator of the European Integrated 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 Cooperation Agreement.

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 credits 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 (which includes his/her BSc history) does not satisfy the national required distribution of credits. Hence, 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

2. REQUIREMENTS ON RUNNING AN INTEGRATED MASTER PROGRAMME

receive an official approval of the whole submitted study career by the Integrated Master consortium.

Chapter 3

The Integrated Master on Semantic Web: The Experimental Year

It is envisioned that all problems presented above can not be solved now in the context of the Integrated Master on the Semantic Web, nor that they will be mentioned in the international Cooperation Agreement among participating universities. On the one hand, we want to proceed with an informal and experimental first year starting from academic year 2006/2007. On the other hand, we believe that the international Cooperation Agreement to be put in place from 2007/2008 should be lightweight, and all the specific questions will be regulated by the consortium internally by means of additional documents decided by the Joint Commission. In the chapter 5 we discuss a new version of a possible international Cooperation Agreement that may serve for this purpose.

3.1 Academic Year 2006/2007

It has been decided to start an experimental phase from the academic year 2006/2007. In this phase we call for European students who are willing to start a double degree European Integrated Master on Semantic Web technologies. The Knowledge Web partners from the universities of Bolzano, Trento, Amsterdam and Madrid are founding partners of this new Integrated Master. We have a recognisable brand name as **“European Academy for Semantic-Web Education” (EASE)**, and we have set up a complete web page (see Figure 3.1) at

<http://www.semantic-web-academy.eu>

The web site contains all information regarding the application (see Figure 3.2), the common study plan, and the modules offered by each partner.

The main principle for the experimental year has been to keep all the procedures simple and basically possible already within all the local legislations, without any exceptions

3. THE INTEGRATED MASTER ON SEMANTIC WEB: THE EXPERIMENTAL YEAR

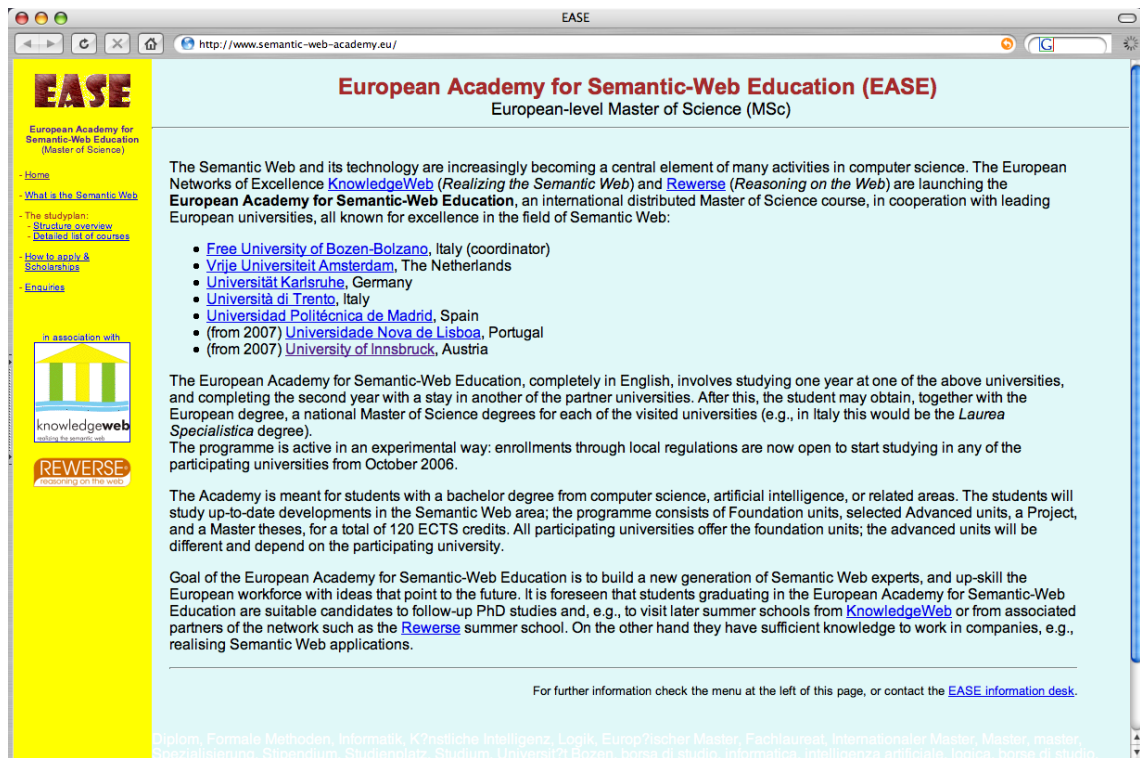


Figure 3.1: The EASE home page

and without the need of a specially signed Cooperation Agreement.

First of all, perspective students will be selected in autonomy by each partner within the standard local Master of Science framework, with a possible involvement of the potential partner where the student will possibly spend the second year. Students enrol to a first “local” university and go to a second university at the second year; at the end students get two MSc degrees.

At the beginning of their first year, students will be assigned a personalised studyplan, which has to be coherent with the already designed EASE curriculum (as Knowledge Web deliverable “D3.2.4 Joint curriculum for a shared masters program”) and with the local rigid curricula. Since the EASE curriculum has been designed also with this precise criteria in mind, all the students willing to start the EASE Academy can easily fulfil this requirement.

The personalised studyplan has to be formalised as a “learning agreement” (similar to the learning agreement used for international exchange students, like Socrates Erasmus) signed by two authorised representatives of each of the two universities involved in the exchange. This is primarily as a guarantee for the students, and as the main “repository” of the career of the student. So, an initial (on day one of year one) agreement is signed by the two universities, personalising the (Erasmus Socrates-style) studyplan on a student-by-student basis.

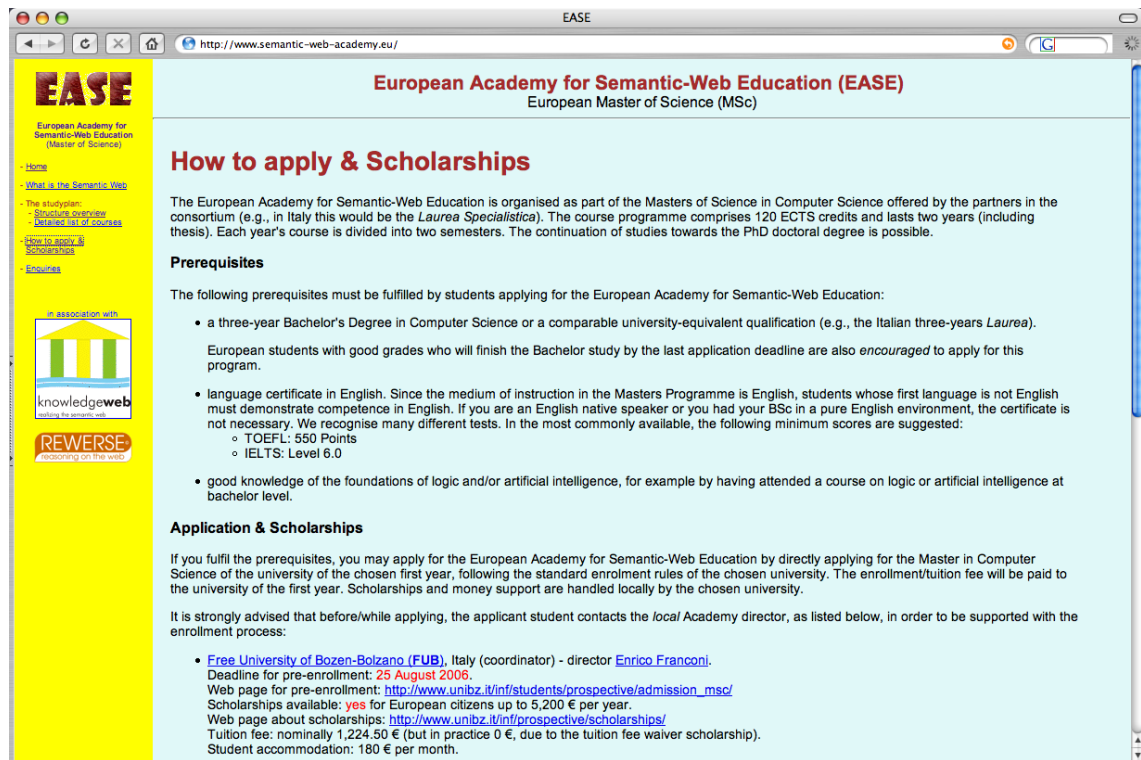


Figure 3.2: The EASE application page

The reference for the studyplan is the deliverable: “D3.2.4 Joint curriculum for a shared masters program”, which also serves the purpose of advertising the details to the perspective students (it has been put online in the EASE web pages).

When the student moves from the first to the second university, the first university issues a certificate with all the exams done by the student, and the second university recognises such exams. This comes for free, again because the personalised studyplan is consistent with the EASE curriculum, and with the curricula of both visited universities.

The student pays the tuition fees for both years at the first university, as expected; at the second year the student will be considered as an exchange of the first university visiting the second university for a while. Some student can, of course, get local scholarships by partner universities. Only the university at which the student has done the first year can give a scholarship to the student. An additional scholarship on top of the local one can be given to support the second year in the other university: we will exploit the standard Socrates Erasmus mechanism to get this additional grants while visiting the second university. The only difference wrt a standard Erasmus Socrates, is that the second university at the end will possibly award the second degree: this aspect has to be clarified by each single administration; we still have to find a formal way to guarantee the award of the second degree.

For the academic year 2006/2007, the enrolment is possible until mid July (at least

at FUB and VU). We have advertised the EASE academy to the Knowledge Web partners and the Rewerse partners. We expect to have only few but good students from the groups of the two networks of excellence. The cooperation between the two NoEs is also enforced by the fact that the Universidade Nova de Lisboa (UNL), which is major player within Rewerse, has agreed to join the EASE Academy from 2007/2008.

The general contact for the EASE Academy is at

`info@semantic-web-academy.eu`

3.2 The Erasmus Mundus application

The EASE Academy will hopefully submit an application for the recognition with Erasmus Mundus and for scholarships therein. The application will be done after the experience gained with the first students and with the first real bureaucratic problems we may encounter in the first experimental year, so to enhance the quality of our application.

The international Cooperation Agreement to be submitted for Erasmus Mundus should be lightweight, and all specific questions will be regulated by the consortium internally by means of additional documents decided by the joint committee. In Chapter 5 we discuss a new version of a possible international Cooperation Agreement that may serve for this purpose.

Chapter 4

Proposal for a Workflow for Administrative Tasks

This chapter sketches a workflow for the main administrative tasks connected with the management of the European Integrated Master programme. This includes a first description of the involved entities in the administration and the definition of the roles within the administration.

4.1 Administrative Roles

The administration of the Integrated Master programme involves several entities at the different participating universities, which can take the abstract roles as depicted in Fig. 4.1. These roles comprises:

- a Consortium for the Integrated Master programme
- a Coordinating University of the Consortium
- the Partner Universities of the Consortium, whose relations are regulated by the Cooperation Agreement.
- a Coordinator of the Consortium
- a Local Coordinator for every Partner University (PU) of the consortium
- a Joint Commission, constituted by two representative for each partner university, including the Local Coordinators

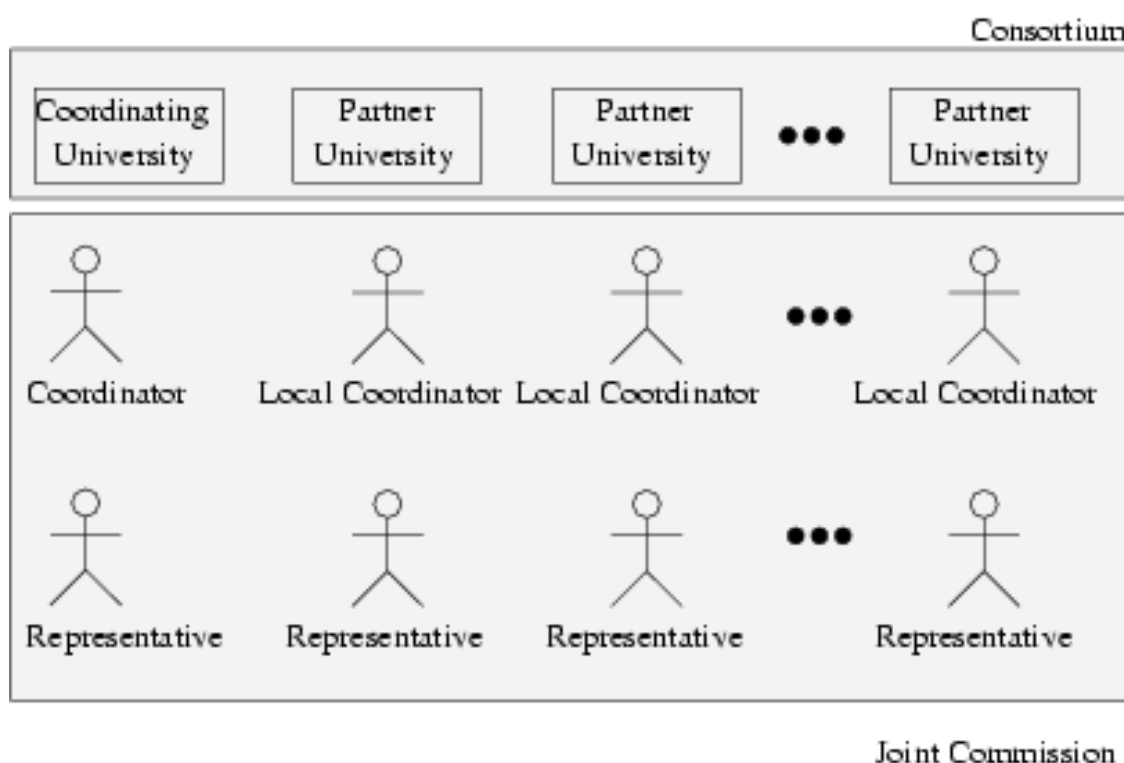


Figure 4.1: Entities involved in the administration

4.1.1 Tasks of the Joint Commission

The Joint Commission has the overall task to discuss and to prepare the documentation. Specifically, with respect to the bureaucratic perspective in relation to the local administrations of the partner universities, it has:

- to elaborate the common program of study,
- to verify that the perspective students applying to the Integrated Master programme have the necessary requirements,
- to select the students,
- to finalise the study plan of the students admitted to the Integrated Master,
- to verify before the departure of the student at the end of the first year that the studies carried out from the first university are compatible with the general EASE curriculum,
- to verify that the studies carried out by the students before the final defence are compatible with the general EASE curriculum,

- to authorise the student to graduate.

The documentation discussed by the Joint Commission should be approved (more or less automatically) by the Local Degree Committee at each partner university, to verify the consistency of the decisions with the local regulations.

The final achievement of the study programme is a double degree, namely the award of two Master of Science degree certificates, one for each of the two visited PUs, together with a combined certificate awarded by the consortium of the Integrated Master programme, and possibly a diploma supplement.

4.2 Administrative Management Procedures

The calendar of the administrative management of the Integrated Master programme can be divided into three main blocks:

1. Period towards the registration
2. Period towards the departure
3. Period towards the degree

We consider two perspectives: the 'local' perspective, i.e. the perspective of the university, where the student started his/her study, and the 'remote' perspective, i.e. the perspective of the university where the students changes to during her/his studies.

4.2.1 Local Perspective

Period towards the registration

- The student sends the application to the Coordinating University; the selection of the student is done according to the rules of the consortium as set by the Joint Commission.
- The Secretariat of the Coordinating University communicates to the secretariats of the partner universities (PUs) the list of the selected candidates together with the preferences expressed by the candidates with regard to the chosen PUs.
- The local coordinator and/or the Local Degree Committee check the compatibility of the past study plan of the selected students with the local requirements, and inform the Coordinating University.

- The Coordinating University informs the selected candidates to proceed with the enrolment to the Integrated Master programme within the deadline at the Coordinating University.
- The necessary documents for the registration are collected by the Coordinating University, and then a copy is sent to the involved PUs.
- The secretariat of the PU contacts the students and supports them in the necessary steps to study at the PU (VISA, forms, accommodation, etc.)
- The student pays – remotely – the common tuition fee to the Coordinating University, which will then transfer the money to the PUs.
- The students go directly to the PU in the week before the beginning of the lectures.
- The international office of the PU will always support the students for any bureaucratic problem they may have.
- The academic tutor of the student will finalise together with the student the individual study plan, where all the planned modules and courses are listed in detail.

It is always possible to switch to the Integrated Master from a normal local master program: these students are allowed to apply and register with a later deadline (shortly after the beginning of the lectures), but nonetheless they have to undergo the normal *centralised* application and registrations processes at the Coordinating University anyway.

Period towards the departure

- At least a month before the deadline of the Socrates Erasmus applications (if the student made a request for a Socrates grant) or at least four months before the departure, the Local Coordinator communicates to the secretariat of the PU the approved study plan together with the destination of every student.
- The secretariat informs the interested students that they must participate to the Socrates call. Note that only the students enrolled to a recognised Erasmus Mundus Integrated Master programme can participate in the Socrates Erasmus program even if they have already taken part to it once previously. The learning agreement for the Socrates program will be taken from the Integrated Master study plan.
- For final approval, the Local Coordinator sends the study plans and the transcripts to the coordinator of the consortium and to the local coordinator of the PU, the student has selected.

Period after the departure

- The student goes to the remote PU.
- Within mid November the Secretariat of the local PU sends the exam transcripts to the remote PU.
- The student attends lectures and examinations at the remote PU.

Period towards the degree recognition

- As soon as possible before the end of the second year, the remote PU transmits the exam transcripts to the local PU.
- The secretariat of the local PU updates the local copy of the study plan by adding the exams done in the remote PU.
- The student applies for the final thesis defence, both at the remote PU and at the Joint Commission.
- The Joint Commission verifies that the study plan of the student is consistent with the Integrated Master curriculum.
- After the defence, the outcome and the grade of the degree are communicated to the local PU and to the Coordinating University.
- The local PU recognises the defence and the final degree mark.
- The PU issues the local degrees, and the Coordinating University the common certificate.

4.2.2 Remote Perspective**Period towards the arrival**

- The local PU sends the study plans and the transcripts for final approval to the coordinator of the consortium and to the local coordinator of the remote PU.
- The remote PU recognises all the exams and formally enrolls the student.
- The International Office communicates to every student the steps necessary to continue the study at the remote PU (e.g.. forms, VISA, etc)
- The students go directly to the remote PU in the week before the beginning of the lectures.

- The international office of the remote PU will always support the students in any bureaucratic problem they may have.

Period towards the degree

- Before mid November the remote PU receives the exam transcripts from the local PU.
- The secretariat of the remote PU updates the local copy of the study plan by adding the exams done in the local PU.
- The student applies for the final thesis defence, both at the remote PU and at the Joint Commission.
- The Joint Commission checks that the study plan of the student is consistent with the Integrated Master curriculum.
- The students makes the defence and gets a final grade.
- After the defence, the outcome and the grade of the degree are communicated to the local PU and to the Coordinating University.
- The PU issues the local degrees, and the Coordinating University the common certificate.

4.3 Fees

The objective is to adopt a common system of fees tied to the common registration, whose amount does not depend on the university in which the study is carried out.

The student pays the tuition fees for both years to the coordinating university, and the social fees each year in the university where it carries out the studies.

A mechanism has to be found that guarantees that the totally collected common tuition fees are always enough to cover the local fees declared by the partner universities. A mechanism of fair compensation should be established. The Cooperation Agreement presented in chapter 5 proposes a way to handle this delicate matter.

Chapter 5

Cooperation Agreement

We propose here a new version of the international Cooperation Agreement that is intended to be consistent with the discussion presented previously in this deliverable.

This shall become the new Cooperation Agreement signed by the rectors of the participating universities. The new Cooperation Agreement shall hold for students starting their study in the EASE Academy in fall 2007 or later.

5.1 Aims

The European Academy for Semantic-Web Education (EASE) is aiming to provide:

1. Cooperation in the field of student exchange in order to open the possibility for students to obtain a master of science degree within the study programme EASE at the partner universities. To this end, the partner universities will mutually recognise study achievements, examination achievements and the final grade earned in the course of the common study program, which is composed of modules, a project and a master thesis.
2. Exchange of lecturers in order to foster the scientific collaboration, to further develop the curriculum and to share didactic and administrative experience.

5.2 Prerequisites for Participation

All students intending to study in the EASE must apply to the coordinating university. The deadlines for application are decided yearly by the Joint Commission (see Section 5.7). The students are selected by the Joint Commission.

Remark:

The application process is centralised through the coordinating university and all the decisions are taken by the Joint Commission. The students only interact with the centralised EASE application office by the coordinating partner.

If students are already registered at some partner university within a local master program then they are allowed to study in EASE. They have to officially apply to EASE before the end of October in their first year of studies and will become registered as EASE students at the same university for this year. Common tuition fees apply as determined in Section 5.8.

Remark:

It is always possible to switch to the EASE from a normal local master program: these students are allowed to apply and register with a later deadline (shortly after the beginning of the lectures), but nonetheless they have to undergo the normal application and registrations processes anyway.

5.3 Registration

All students in EASE have to register at the coordinating university.

First year students (wrt the joint curriculum, decided yearly by the Joint Commission) are subsequently registered at the first selected university. Second year students (wrt the joint curriculum) are subsequently registered at the two selected universities (see Section 5.4).

The deadlines for registration are decided yearly by the Joint Commission.

Remark:

All students register to the EASE program only through the coordinating university, which acts as a unified interface with the students. The registration to the local university happens automatically and through an internal procedure as a consequence of the centralised registration.

5.4 Form of Study

Students within EASE select two universities out of the partner universities. They are jointly monitored by two lectures (tutors), one from each of the selected universities.

Each student has to develop a plan of studies in agreement with the joint curriculum (decided yearly by the Joint Commission) together with his/her tutors.

Remark:

The study of students is constrained by the rules within the *joint curriculum*, which is decided yearly by the Joint Commission.

The master thesis is normally submitted to and defended at the selected university in the second year (wrt the joint curriculum). The master thesis can be jointly supervised and defended in front of a mixed jury.

As long as the participating universities have not agreed on a joint degree, students will receive a national master of science degree from each of the selected universities.

Remark:

The current Cooperation Agreement is still about a *double degree*. A *joint degree* will be foreseen later, since it will introduce additional bureaucratic complications.

5.5 Modules

Basic and advanced modules are decided yearly by the Joint Commission within the joint curriculum. There may be constraints on the combination of modules. The partner universities commit themselves on the modules offered in academic year X+1/X+2 by December of year X.

Remark:

The joint curriculum is organised in compulsory basic modules (which are offered by all partner universities) and a selection of optional advanced modules (which characterise the specialities of each partner university). It is likely that the joint curriculum will be mostly stable.

Modules may comprise several courses. The grade assigned to each module is determined by an examination or is based on the grades of the courses according to the local examination regulations.

Remark:

Due to the differences between local examination regulations, the Cooperation Agreement captures both the fact that some countries have exams only for full modules and that other countries have separate exams for single or few courses.

Partner universities accept study achievements of the students on the basis of modules, projects, the master thesis and final grades. Partner universities can accept study achievements at course level if the two tutors agree.

Remark:

Partner universities will mutually automatically recognise the study career of the students within the joint curriculum.

A student may assign a course only to one module.

5.6 Stay at the Partner Universities

During their stay at each of the partner universities, students study only according to the respective local study and examination regulations as long as joint study and examination regulations for EASE are not in place.

Remark:

In a later stage, a common study and examination regulation for EASE will be in place, together with a joint degree.

5.7 Joint Commission

The partner universities 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 Cooperation Agreement and aiming at running a EASE successfully. Among these, the following tasks are included:

- Specify additional requirements for the acceptance of students.

- Select students.
- Select guest EASE lecturers.
- Decide a conversion scale for the marks of the examination and of the final degree.
- Develop the curriculum further.
- Report to the participating universities.
- Initiate additional third party funds.
- Administer joint funds raised by the participating universities for the purpose of EASE.
- Compensation of fees.

The Joint Commission is to be consulted if the participating universities intend to change their module descriptions.

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

The quorum consists of the attendance of at least one commission member from each participating university.

5.8 Fees

There is a common tuition fee for studying in EASE. The exact amount is decided yearly by the Joint Commission. The common tuition fee is collected each year by the coordinating university.

Each year each partner university announces in writing to the coordinating university its local fee, which includes the expenses related to the EASE, and the names of the EASE students who have selected it as their host university for this year. The coordinating university pays the minimum between the common tuition fee and the local fee, immediately after it has received the common tuition fee from the student and the announcement from the partner university. Additional compensation rules may apply (see Section 5.9).

Remark:

Each partner university will get, out of the money collected by the coordinating university as common tuition fees, only the part corresponding to its specific local fee.

Before the compensation takes place, a partner university receives immediately either the amount of the local fee per student (if this is less than the common tuition fee) or the amount of the common tuition fee (if this is less than the local fee).

In this way – in this first phase – no partner university gets more than the common tuition fee per registered student.

If a partner university announces in writing to the coordinating university that it is willing to pay the local fee for an EASE student who has selected it as his/her host university for this year and the local fee is higher than or equal to the common tuition fee, then the announcement will be regarded as payment of the common tuition fee and no fees or compensation are transferred by the coordinating university to the partner university for this student.

If a partner university announces in writing to the coordinating university that it is willing to pay the local fee for an EASE student who has selected it as his/her host university for this year and the local fee is smaller than the common tuition fee, then the announcement will be regarded as partial payment of the common tuition fee, the student is required to pay the difference between the common tuition fee and the local fee, and no fees or compensation are transferred by the coordinating university to the partner university for this student.

If a partner university announces in writing to the coordinating university that it is willing to pay the common tuition fee for an EASE student who has selected it as his/her host university for this year, then the announcement will be regarded as payment of the common tuition fee and the corresponding amount is not transferred by the coordinating university to the partner university for this student.

Remark:

Partner may decide to waive some part of the fees to a student. The student will have subtracted the waived fee from the common tuition fee, and the coordinating university will subtract this amount to the money that it will be transferred to the partner university.

Students have to pay student services fees to the coordinating university and the universities which they have selected as host university for this year (if there is any).

Remark:

Student services fees will always be paid by the students in addition to the common tuition fee.

5.9 Compensation

If the local fee of a partner university is larger than the common tuition fee, then the partner university may receive a fair additional compensation. The amount of compensation is determined yearly by the Joint Commission. The total amount of compensation paid from the coordinating university to the partner universities per year cannot be larger than the money left from the collected common tuition fees after the coordinating university has paid the money according to Section 5.8, i.e.

$$\sum_i(\text{CTF} - \min(\text{CTF}, \text{LF}(i)))$$

where i ranges over all enrolled students per year, CTF is the common tuition fee and $\text{LF}(i)$ is the local fee of the partner university which student i has selected as his/her host university for the year.

Remark:

The money that is left from the distribution in the first phase (which is at most equal to the common tuition fee per student) will be distributed (as a *compensation*) to the partner universities which have a local fee bigger than the common tuition fee.

Due to possible unbalances in the distribution of students among partner universities, it is possible that the collected money from the common tuition fees is not enough to cover the full compensation; in this case there will be a fair reduction of the compensation among the partner universities.

5.10 Use of Fees

If the coordinating university receives more common tuition fees than it needs to compensate, then the remaining money shall be spent for other EASE-related activities.

5.11 Exchange of Students

The exchange of students is agreed upon each year by the Joint Commission. Students are responsible for obtaining a sufficient health insurance.

5.12 Erasmus Mundus Student Scholarships

If the EASE is supported by Erasmus Mundus grants, students selected for a scholarship within an Erasmus Mundus program will sign a contract with the coordinating university.

As part of this contract, the coordinating university will subtract the common tuition fee and the student services fee from the scholarship.

Remark:

This clause is there in case we get a successful Erasmus Mundus application.

5.13 Exchange of Lecturers

The partner universities intend to foster the exchange of lecturers aiming at cross-fertilisation in teaching through research.

5.14 Financial Obligations

Except for the collection of the common tuition fees and the compensation as expressed in Sections 5.8 and 5.9, the financial arrangements for project-related activities are to be decided on a case-to-case basis and there are no additional financial obligations arising from this Cooperation Agreement.

5.15 Alterations, Additions and Termination

This Cooperation Agreement takes effect from the academic year 2007/2008 on, and it will be automatically renewed unless it is terminated by giving four months notice by the 31st of May of any year.

In case of problems encountered while running the EASE, the Joint Commission will first attempt to solve them in the best interest of the students.

Alterations and additions to this Cooperation Agreement and supplementary agreements must be in writing, and approved by all participating universities.

Each participating university has the right to terminate the Cooperation Agreement as long as there are no negative consequences with regard to the contractual obligations with the European Commission.