

Report on working group: Legal and administrative matters

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In contrast to the excellent contributions on best practices and outstanding achievements that had preceded, this working group on legal and administrative matters had to deal more with problems arising from day-to-day business.

Of course, we could not address all aspects of this field – this would have easily taken another whole conference – we decided rather to focus on two main questions. Accreditation and diplomas were discussed first; secondly, some brief financial matters were addressed.

1. Accreditation and diplomas:

It has been stated that although the Bologna process has increased transparency and knowledge about the European system for the North-American partners, it has also raised several problems:

- The framework is new for European universities and the implementation is still an ongoing process. It is not yet determined in all details, some of which might require changing after evaluation.

- The accreditation process, which is compulsory for all degree programs in Germany, has proven to be very demanding and expensive. In the case of true joint degrees, the accrediting agency also has to examine not only the domestic content but also the foreign component, which will make the whole process really onerous. Thus, it might be advisable if accreditation is carried out at the same time as the whole process for your home university, instead of adding it afterwards. In the US, accreditation seems to be a difficult issue as well.

The discussion then went on to registration matters and on delivering diploma. The Graz consortium can join up to six institutions signing the diploma without students having been actually present on each of the campuses. However, joint degrees delivered from this consortium, seem to be less acceptable to the North-American university ethos, which stresses the personal alliance to the university that delivers the diploma.

There is also the question of who guarantees the quality of the diploma, which is closely linked to this. We had a rather lively discussion on this topic. To summarise

- Joint diplomas cannot work out without a minimum of mutual trust.

- And trust can only be found if you choose your partners carefully from the beginning.

This is true for supervising master theses as well as for admission criteria to the degree program.

2. Financial matters:

We had very little time left to address the second point: money. There seem to be several models: assistantships offered to North-American students, reduction of tuition fees in some cases for European students, exchanges based on an account balance, everyone continuing paying the tuition fee of his/her home university.

Of course, first of all, it is important to find day-to-day solutions to these problems – it seems to be a matter of individual negotiations between universities, as long as there is no best-practice framework that fits all cases.

However, it should be more thoroughly understood that the tuition fee question is also a highly symbolic matter and an issue of different academic cultures. For a lot of continental Europeans, substantial tuition fees like in North America not only rebuild social barriers to higher education but seem to transform education from a right into a trading good. In the long run, we might need to accept that our partners feel differently about this rather sensitive matters and try to find solutions that respect those differences.

In the field of administrative, legal and financial matters a lot of information finding and problem solving still has to be done.