BOLOGNA DECLARATION – A CASE STUDY OF COLLABORATION

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Abstract - The Bologna Declaration is a statement of intent to establish a European Learning Space that principally enables mobility of students, staff, transferability of credits and compatible learning cycles. This paper examines the processes required to establish a collaborative programme delivery between a university in the UK and Poland. The issues that emerge from this are then considered in the context of the aims of the Bologna Declaration and some proposals are put forward that seek to offer ways to progress.

Index Terms – Bologna, Quality, Collaboration

Introduction

The proposal to establish a link between the Institute of Production Management, Warsaw University of Technology (WUT) and the University of Glasgow Business School, was initiated through a discussion between members of staff of each institution who had known each other for some years. The discussions resulted in a proposal to establish a twinning programme enabling the delivery of the Master of Business Administration (MBA) at WUT. In more general language this is represents a collaboration between two institutions that are currently in the European Learning Space to meet the delivery of a common educational goal.

Collaboration

The University of Glasgow Business School MBA programme is structured into a set of core and elective modules. Core modules are to be delivered in Warsaw and students from Warsaw will then attend elective schools provided by the University of Glasgow Business School in Glasgow. To qualify for the award students must successfully complete core and elective modules and submit a thesis gaining a total of 180 M-level credit points. In this collaboration the awarding body is the University of Glasgow.

Processes Required

To implement this collaboration a number of processes have to be completed in both institutions. The processes reflect academic and quality issues that will in the UK, be audited by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) as well as other university committees. The purpose of such processes is to ensure that both institutions have considered all the issues related to the collaboration, and as far as is possible, establish procedures to ensure compliance with recognised practice. In addition these processes provide the basis of an audit trail.

At the Institutional level the procedures consider:

A Memorandum of Understanding is drawn up to reflect the intention of the institutions to proceed with the collaboration.

A Memorandum of Agreement is then drafted. The MoA is a more comprehensive document dealing with issues such as:

- The definition of the parties to the MoA
- The regulatory framework that will apply to the award:
- Regulations that will govern the award
- Disciplinary processes that apply students on the programme
- Support mechanisms
- Legal issues
- Duration of the agreement
- Other matters that parties to the agreement consider appropriate

The preparation of this will involve both institutions and their legal advisors. Once an agreed draft is available it will be presented to the appropriate authorities within the parent institutions. For example at the University of Glasgow this would involve

Draft Document Prepared at Department Level
Education Comm. Sub-committee of Senate
Senate Receives Education Committee Recommendation.
Court Approves Senate Decisions.

These procedures ensure that at an institutional level appropriate authority is granted to proceed with collaborative arrangements. In the same manner academic arrangements for the delivery of the programme are subject to scrutiny by the Board of Studies responsible for the programme – in this example the Glasgow Business School Board of Studies. At this level of scrutiny, it is the arrangements to be put in place to ensure equivalence of
academic experience and the appropriateness of the content that are of interest. Matters appropriate to this would include at least the following:

- Programme content
- Examination arrangements
- Staffing profile and experience
- Student support
- QA requirements in relation to continuous improvement strategy

The Board of Studies has to approve these arrangements as an operational protocol. Once this has been approved the appropriate documents then go through the same institutional committees as outlined above.

This very brief description of the collaboration process touches on some of the fundamental principles that the Bologna Declaration seeks to establish. The relationship between just two institutions collaborating requires to have approved a set of specific documents that define the relationship.

The Bologna Declaration seeks to establish a situation in which students from different countries in Europe could move between institutions, and finish with a pan European qualification. A major issue in this will be how institutional, national and transnational quality assurance systems evolve throughout Europe. The current arrangements in the UK involve the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in auditing institutions and departments within institutions against standards set by the QAA. It is unlikely that these would be adopted across Europe therefore there will be a need to have some form of recognition for national systems.

Individual institutions in the UK all have QA policies and processes that are established to reflect the needs of the institution and the UK Quality assurance agency. The QAA in the UK represents a national quality framework and has published a sequence of papers that define the expectations of the QAA in respect of provision within institutions in the UK. The following list is not exhaustive but addresses some key issues:

- Programme definition
- Resource standards
- Continuous improvement culture

**Programme definition**

Engineering programmes can vary considerably from one institution to another depending on interests and strengths of the staff of the institution. In addition to that, the national engineering institutions e.g. IEE in the UK have a validation role in respect of individual institution programmes. Within the Bologna Declaration framework it would seem that engineering programmes have a number of options, which are:

1. To aim for a consistent interpretation of for example what should an Electrical Engineering undergraduate programme look like across Europe? This option is not practical, since even within a single institution, there may be various programmes that lead to a degree in electrical engineering.

2. To agree a set of definitions of the competences students are expected to be able to demonstrate after completion of the undergraduate cycle. The exact mechanism by which these are achieved is then a matter for the national and institutional QA systems to approve. This is a more realistic approach since it allows individual institutions to reflect their distinctiveness established through research or industrial practice. However to achieve this a benchmark system agreed trans-nationally would seem to be a sensible approach. To achieve such a benchmark standard for a range of engineering disciplines, will involve significant effort. In addition to these comments it will also be necessary to have some agreement in respect of what awards are to made as a result of moving towards common cycles of undergraduate and postgraduate study.

**Resource Standards**

The general approach to this issue in the UK involves physical and staff resources. The quality of the student experience is a function of the access the student has to staff and library resources and, in addition, the opportunity and effectiveness of computer based systems to encourage student centered learning. Attitudes to these issues vary from one country to another and hence the view of what should be an acceptable standard might be expected to vary. One approach to this is to take the view that the learning experience of students should be broadly equivalent across institutions. Is it realistic to adopt such a view on a transnational level or is the definition of equivalence with respect to, national frameworks? If so how is the transnational dimension to be established?

**Continuous Improvement**

A clear objective of any quality system is to identify those parts of the system that are working well and those that could be improved. Such a methodology is usually referred to as continuous improvement. A particular example of how this is implemented is the use of student feedback on completed modules or programmes. Students complete the questionnaire and the results are analysed and feedback given to the staff and department responsible for the module or programme. Other examples of this type of methodology
are staff and student committees where matters of concern are debated and any changes that can be seen to contribute to improvements are agreed. It is important that minutes of these meetings and any others relating to continuous improvement are maintained as they represent an audit trail of this particular activity. Once again it is necessary to ask the question should continuous improvement be part of this European learning space and, if so, how should it be implemented?

The options would appear to be similar to those outlined in programme development, namely - Should there be a single approach that is transnational or should national standards apply as long as the outputs are recognised as conforming to a continuous improvement policy? A subsidiary question then is who agrees the benchmark that defines what the outputs of such a continuous improvement policy should be?

Conclusions or recommendations?

It is difficult to draw any conclusions from such a brief survey of the complex issues that even this superficial consideration raises. It is more realistic to acknowledge, that to resolve the differences that exist in processes and standards currently being adopted across Europe will take time and effort. Within this context it is realistic for the Engineering community to consider how it wants to progress.

Should we attempt to set European Standards or to adopt the approach of seeking to define transnational benchmark standards that national QA systems recognise, and then seek to ensure conformance within their national frameworks?

While considering this question we should bear in mind that Europe is not an island unto itself – there is also the international dimension beyond Europe that must be considered.