

Double-Masters programmes as a way for international student collaboration

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ABSTRACT: In the years since the Bologna Agreement was signed, all European countries modified their university programmes to become dual programmes, accommodating both Bachelors and Masters Degrees. Russia also has signed the Bologna Agreement and is now on the way to changing its university's education system. Many of Russia's universities have long-standing ties to European partner universities. One form of the ties between Russian and European universities involves exchange students undertaking joint projects enabling the students to obtain a joint diploma from its own university and the partner university. Such programmes are sometimes called *Double Diploma* programmes. However, as the transition took place to the new double-level education programmes by European universities, further realisation of such projects became impossible. Some examples of the collaboration by Rostov State Civil Engineering University (RSCEU) with German universities, on the basis of the Double-Masters programmes, are presented and discussed in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

Each country has its own specific traditions in the field of engineering and technology education. They were established for many years by professors and state administrations on the basis of the country's traditions and experience.

After the Bologna Agreement was signed by European countries, all of them began step-by-step to educate on the basis of double-level programmes: the Bachelors Degree and the Masters Degree. Traditional forms of engineering education have been consigned to history.

POSSIBILITY FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT COLLABORATION

Russia also has signed the Bologna Agreement and is now on the way to changing its university's education system. From next year, first-year students in Russia will enter the universities on the basis of a new double-level system.

At present, the list of new Training Directions for the Bachelors Degree and the Masters Degree are at the stage of final consultation and approval by the State Government, i.e. Federal Educational Standards (FES). After their approval by the State Government, the universities, on the basis of FES, will start to improve their own Educational Plans. For now, Russia's universities are continuing to train in the previously approved list of specialties. At the same time, many of Russia's universities over the past 10 years have started training in new Bachelors Degree and Masters Degree courses, although not on a very large scale.

Typically, the best students with an interest and inclination for scientific work undertake this training at the RSCEU, with the prospect of admission to postgraduate study. At one time, it was even possible to enter Masters Degree training after receiving an engineering degree.

Many of Russia's universities have long-standing ties to European partner universities. In addition to joint research by professors, there were also possibilities for exchange students. For this purpose, organised by various types of short-term summer schools, the students visited partner universities to study a foreign language and, sometimes, for short-term training.

One example of the exchange is the joint projects and agreements from which the students could obtain a diploma from their own university and the partner university. Such programmes are sometimes called *Double Diploma* programmes. Based on such a treaty in the recent past, several students from Russia and Germany graduated at the Rostov State Civil Engineering University (RSCEU) and the Hildesheim University of Applied Science (HUAS). However, as the

transition took place to the new double-level education programmes by European universities, further development of such projects has become impossible.

In recent years, it has become much easier for European students to study at least one semester in another country. There are a lot of different European programmes for supporting this process of student exchange. But, unfortunately, all of them do not include Russia. So what could be done under those new conditions of double-level education programmes?

Unfortunately, the implementation of such programmes for the Bachelors Degree became impossible for two main reasons:

1. the substantial difference in terms of training (4 years in Russia and 3 years in Germany);
2. consequently, substantial differences in the curriculum.

In Russia the curriculum, based on FES with a substantial share of disciplines defined by the federal (required) component, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: FES content.

FES	Federal (required) component in FES	University opportunities in FES
Bachelors Degree	62%	38%
Masters Degree	7%	93%

Finally, for Russia's technical universities only one possibility could be found by which students could obtain *Double-Masters* degrees. Further cooperation and development between the RSCEU and German universities can be based on two main points:

1. Masters Degree training should be over two years;
2. FES in Russia for a Masters Degree at the present time gives universities great opportunities for curriculum development and the federal component is insignificant (see Table 1).

This was the basis for the implementation of the *Double-Masters* programme between the RSCEU and Erfurt University of Applied Science (EUAS). With substantial support and the activity of Prof. Jens Mischner on the basis of Russian FES direction, *Building Construction* partner universities had been developed, and virtually identical curricula were approved for the Masters Programme called *Ensuring the Microclimate of Buildings and Structures*. Also approved was a special *Double-Masters* agreement.

This allows students to obtain a partner university's degree through successful study over one semester. It is also possible to increase the training period at a partner university to one year, if students have the financial means. In 2006, the first RCEU student enrolled in a Masters degree under this programme and, in 2008, successfully completed the training and obtained a diploma. Now the second student is studying in the same programme in Germany.

Last year, a similar agreement, with the substantial support and activity of Prof. Jens Kickler, was signed between the RCEU and HUAS for different *Building Construction* programmes under FES direction. This year, three students from Germany have come to Rostov-on-Don to study for 1 or 2 semesters.

Prof. Petra Winzer initiated further development of this experiment. The next Masters Programme – *Quality Management in Building Construction* – was adopted between RCEU, Bergische University Wuppertal (BUW) and HUAS. At the present time, six students from Rostov are studying in partner universities in Germany.

But not all is so simple. Of course there are problems; for example, language and students' financial support to stay abroad. The latter needs the support of stakeholders. In Russia, these could be representative offices of foreign companies. But the main interested party in the mobility of students in order to obtain a multifaceted quality education should be the State. In Germany, for example, such support can be administered through DAAD, as well as for Russia's students in Germany. In Russia, unfortunately, practically there are no such programmes.

In these circumstances the gravity of resolving financial problems rests with the universities themselves (that, for Russia, is not always possible). The support by partner universities for Russia's students who go to Germany deserves special recognition and appreciation. Without such support it would not be possible to obtain the right results.

CONCLUSIONS

It is hoped that the further rapprochement between Russia and Europe in all spheres of interaction, in the first place, will increase opportunities for Russia's students to learn abroad, as well as to widen the acceptance of students from Europe in Russia's universities.