

**Joint Statement  
by the Hochschulrektorenkonferenz (HRK)  
and the Czech Rectors Conference (CRC)**

**Prague, 5 November 2004**

The Presidia of the Czech Rectors' Conference (CRC) and the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) met at Charles University in Prague on 4 and 5 November 2004. They discussed current developments in higher education and research in the Czech Republic and in Germany, giving particular attention to recent European developments such as the Bologna Process and the forthcoming Bergen Conference of European education ministers in May 2005. They issued the following statement:

**On the Future of the Doctorate in Europe**

As was stated in the Berlin Communiqué, links between the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA) should be strengthened. The doctorate will have to play a central role in this process. Both associations agree that the doctorate is the proprium of the university. Responsibility for its content and design is a matter of university autonomy.

It was confirmed that

- selective recruitment of doctorate students,
  - encouraging of interdisciplinary research,
  - the creation of networks among universities of similar profile and mission and
  - programmes of doctoral study involving exchange opportunities
- are appropriate means to promote excellence and initiate a 'continuing process of quality improvement'.

In the future development of the doctorate in the European Higher Education and Research Area the following aspects should serve as guidelines:

- the development of structures which ensure the research-led formation of methodological, disciplinary and interdisciplinary skills and competences at a level extending beyond that of Master's programmes,
- the delivery of independent research, presentation and publication skills and competences,
- the delivery of key qualifications (the ability to analyze and to communicate, subject-specific experience abroad, independence and autonomy),
- an appropriate time frame on the time to doctorate (as a rule, three years),
- intensive support respectively supervision for doctoral students,
- use of curricular elements to complement the independent work.

The institutional structure and design of the doctorate must be set autonomously by the universities as part of their profile building activities. To ensure that universities are actively able to position themselves in competition with each other, nationally and internationally as well as in respect to the labour market, the associations recommend consideration of the following aspects:

- providing doctoral students with supervision and support through a team of experienced scientists, possibly coming from several fields of knowledge ('multiple supervision' in the human resources and interdisciplinary sense),
- carrying out joint intermediate assessments of how the training and dissertation are progressing (especially for doctoral students who have not been integrated by means of appropriate staff posts),
- completing doctorates within a formalized framework (research training groups, graduate schools),
- undertaking the competitive selection of domestic and foreign doctoral students on the

- basis of transparent criteria,
- integrating profile-based, defined curricular sections as a means of delivering methodological, disciplinary and interdisciplinary skills, competences and key qualifications,
  - institutionally and thematically locating the doctorate so as to open up new research fields and with a view to promoting the interdisciplinary competence of doctoral students,
  - specifically promoting disciplinary and methodological exchange between doctoral students from related disciplines,
  - creating more time-limited qualification posts for doctoral students.

### **On Quality Assurance and Accreditation**

Quality is at the heart of the Bologna Process. CRC and HRK therefore strongly endorse the statement in the Berlin Communiqué that the primary responsibility for internal quality assurance lies with each individual higher education institution. They declare their determination to live up to this obligation. They support EUA in its effort to reach, together with ENQA, ESIB and EURASHE, the objective set for the Bergen Conference of producing a report that will propose standards, guidelines and procedures for quality assurance at a European level. CRC and HRK declare their intention to hold bilateral consultations on the experiences in the development of their respective accreditation systems.

### **On Joint Programmes and Degrees**

Strengthening the European Dimension of higher education programmes is one of the main objectives of the EHEA. The launch of the Erasmus Mundus Programme in the spring of 2004 is giving considerable momentum to the idea of Joint Programmes and Joint Degrees. CRC and HRK declare their intention to support their members in the development of joint programmes and degrees at Bachelor, Master and doctoral level by providing guidelines and examples of good practice. A model agreement for jointly supervised Czech-German doctoral projects (*co-tutelle de thèse*) will be developed by CRC and HRK. The above mentioned consultations in matters of quality assurance will facilitate the mutual recognition of accreditation decisions, thus clearing away one of the major obstacles in the development of joint degrees.

### **On the central role of Higher Education Institutions in the Bologna Process**

CRC and HRK take note of the tendencies reported by EUA that higher education institutions are not being recognised by national governments and the European Commission according to their actual role in the further implementation of the Bologna Reforms. They fully support EUA's efforts to explain to the national governments that, as the Process advances, the responsibility of the universities increases constantly. The commitments of higher education institutions as well as the active contribution of professors, administrative staff and students are vital to the success of the Bologna Process and this fact should be adequately reflected in the layout of the Bergen Conference. CRC and HRK appeal to their respective ministries to support this position in the Bologna Follow-up Group.

Finally, the Presidia of the Czech and German Conferences of Rectors consider joint meetings of this kind beneficial for both sides and intend to deepen the cooperation not only between universities of the two states, but also between the conferences of rectors. In future both parties will adopt and press bilateral or multilateral negotiations with other partners for standpoints similar to the ones reached at this meeting.

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