

Problems by Organizing Students' Mobility for the Machine Engineering Specialties in the frames of SOCRATES/ERASMUS Programme

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Abstract: *The paper specifies the problems and difficulties by organizing students' mobility for the machine engineering specialties in the frames of the programme SOCRATES/ERASMUS. Those problems are related to the personal experience of the authors in the frames of this programme. The paper gives as well some suggestions for the solution of the part of the problems in this area. Conclusions are made. .*

Key words: *Students' Mobility, Machine Engineering Specialties, Problems and Solution Suggestions.*

INTRODUCTION

The general objective of the effort to reform the field of higher education is to effectively adapt the system of higher education to the changing demands of Bulgarian society. A mode of thinking and organization inherited from the past has been framed in a new hierarchical structure of higher education that has led to little qualitative change.

The way in which bachelor programs have been created has not affected the qualitative nature of the process and the contents of study but merely the quantitative aspects of the degrees such as the number of years, the course hours, and the institutions, which could offer them. In practice, old study plans and programs have been reshuffled. The implications are felt primarily at the bachelor's level where narrow specialization has been preserved, thus limiting the student's options from the very beginning of their professional carrier. Combined with the nascent market economy in the country and the high rate of unemployment, the future bachelors will be given few chances for development apart from continuing in the master degrees. As a result, the Bulgarian institutions' potential to achieve its goal of effective adaptation to the changing environment, the demands of the fluctuating market, and the need for higher quality mass education has been limited, [3].

One basic component of this reform was reflected in a new educational policy which stipulated the introduction of the three-tier system of education, that of the bachelor-master-doctor. This policy was to be implemented by the end of 1996 or in a year after the 1995 Law was enforced. If effectively implemented, this policy was expected to provide a mechanism for institutional adaptation to the changing environment as well as promote the integration of Bulgarian higher education into European structures.

However the European legislation and action programs have had strong influence on national governments and European higher education institutions. ERASMUS and ECTS have stimulated student mobility. The higher education institutions have been compelled to introduce new structures that comply with ERASMUS programs.

Three declarations, The Lisbon of 1997, the Sorbonne of 1998, and the Bologna of 1999, have in common the desire to focus on recognition and transparency of European higher education institutions and support the "Harmonization of the Architecture of the European Higher Education System". The Sorbonne and the Bologna Declarations give more concrete meaning to these terms through referring to the undergraduate-graduate structure. The Bologna declaration was signed by 29 countries amongst which was Bulgaria, [3].

The objective of the presented material is to specify the problems and difficulties by realizing the students' mobility for the machine engineering specialties in the frame of the

program SOCRATES/ERASMUS as a part of the process of the integration of the Bulgarian Higher education to the European structures and to offer some suggestions for the solution of the specified problems.

PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES BY ORGANIZING THE STUDENTS' MOBILITIES

The following problems and difficulties by organizing the students' mobility from machine engineering specialties in the frames of the programme SOCRATES/ERASMUS can be specified:

1. The bachelor study curricula of the machine engineering specialties at the University of Rousse are different from other European study curricula. There are not always opportunities for students to transfer between specialties as well, to enroll into master degrees different from their field of bachelor specialty, to select a greater amount of subject and to structure partially their curricula. Because of this circumstance, great difficulties appear by the attempts to form the learning agreements of the students considering the study curricula of the University of Rousse and the study curricula of European universities during the preparation and organization of the students' mobility from the machine engineering faculties;

2. A certain negative attitude towards that mobility shown from a part of the academic staff;

3. A financial disconnection for the students' grants in the frames of the program concerning the considerable difference between the standard of living in Bulgaria and those standards in the most the European countries;

4. A lack of motivation shown by the students in the cases when they have to invest additional efforts in the area of the study activities in their specialties. A part of the students do not see any sense in investing additional financial means in their education, which is inevitably connected with the uncertainty to find later on a job connected with their bachelor specialty;

5. The greater part of the students from machine engineering specialties do not have the necessary level of fluent English in order to order to understand the subject courses abroad.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SOLUTIONS OF SOME OF THE PROBLEMS DISCUSSED

The following solutions of some of the problems and difficulties by organizing the students' mobility from machine engineering specialties in the frames of the programme SOCRATES/ERASMUS can be suggested:

1. Creating organization and opportunities for a different ratio between the required, elective and optional courses, which will increase the students' right to choose more subjects within the framework of the approved curriculum. Such opportunities and in a certain degree a better synchronization of the study curricula are ensured in some faculties at the University of Rousse [4];

2. Investing efforts by a greater part of the academic staff towards educational synchronization in the system of Higher education with more efficient international models.

3. Ensuring additional grants from the budget of the University of Rousse for students, wishing to realize mobility in the frames of the program SOCRATES/ERASMUS;

4. Carrying out additional activities for the increasing the motivation of the students for acquiring greater theoretical knowledge and more practical skills in their bachelor specialty. A detailed description of such activities is given in [7]. Considering this problem it is necessary to use the experience of well-known Bulgarian lecturers and professionals [5] and the achievements of well-known international lecturers and professionals, [1,2].

5. Ensuring additional courses in English for the students of machine engineering faculties on a reasonable price and after their successful participation in the program SOCRATES/ERASMUS - an opportunity to give back from the budget of the University of Rousse those financial means to the students, which they have been invested in the language course.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

The improving of the education quality can be an individual, self-contained activity, but much more a process involving continuous review and evaluation of new information against existing information.

It is a process that is sensitive to organizational culture and politics, and that continuously scans the environment looking for important interactions among people, resources, and organizations. It also requires a focused examination of factors effecting educational policy implementation.

The presented survey of the state of SOCRATES/ERASMUS mobility for machine engineering faculties at the University of Rousse probably relates to a great extend to the problems in other Bulgarian universities. Unfortunately, some measures and national visions are not in accordance with the possible solutions of those problems.

The presented solution suggestions have the objective to strengthen the attention of those who work in the sphere of Higher education and especially of those, who are the decision – makers.

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