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**Joint Degrees -  
A Hallmark of the  
European Higher Education Area?**

**Italy**

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# 1 The development of joint degrees in Italy

A ‘joint’ degree or a ‘double’ degree are two possible outcomes to an ‘integrated’ course of study. An integrated study programme envisages a curriculum that has been jointly designed by two (or more) higher education institutions and is regulated by a specific negotiated agreement. Students who freely choose the programme undertake defined periods of study in each institution in terms of duration and content. At the end of the courses and after the relevant joint examinations, the students are awarded either a single qualification jointly signed by the academic authorities of both institutions (joint degree) or the final national qualifications of both institutions (double degree).

The study presented herein documents the development of joint degrees in Italy with effect from the reform of 1980 which opened the doors to integrated study programmes for universities and stimulated international university cooperation, both bilateral and multilateral. The study then concentrates on the implementation of the Bologna Process reforms from 1999 onwards and documents the potential for and actual developments in joint degrees. Finally, the study proposes a classification of the types of degrees awarded upon completion of integrated courses and formulates guidelines for the design of curricula and the organisation of joint courses.

## 1.1 The origins: joint study programmes

Integrated study programmes have become a feature of European universities only in very recent times. Indeed, they date back to the action plan and incentive measures adopted by the European Community in 1976<sup>1</sup>. The Community granted financial aid to joint study programmes (JSP), whose objective was to strengthen collaboration among universities in different countries, thereby fostering direct contacts and agreements as well as exchanges among students and teachers. In order to benefit from the economic aid on offer, the cooperation agreements among the higher education institutions had to provide for student mobility (i.e. the possibility for students to follow part of their course abroad), teacher mobility, or the drawing up of joint curricula. From 1976 to 1984 the European Community financed 409 JSP. Italian universities participated in 73 projects, accounting for 18% of the total.

Italy welcomed this new European programme and in order to facilitate full participation by Italian universities the national law was changed in 1980<sup>2</sup> thereby allowing “forms of agreements – including consortia – between Italian and foreign universities for integrated learning activities and integrated study programmes for students as well as for experience in the use of particularly complex scientific and technical equipment”. European financial aid allied to the sums allocated by the Italian government in connection with the new legislation greatly stimulated the development of international university cooperation, as can be seen from the rapid growth in the number of international agreements signed by Italian universities.

Although the establishment of integrated study programmes was fostered in this initial period, the awarding of joint academic qualifications was expressly prohibited<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution of the European Council and the Education Council of 9 February 1976 for an action plan in the field of education; Resolution of the European Council and the Education Council of 13 December 1976 concerning measures aimed at improving the preparation of youth for work and at facilitating the transition from study to active life.

<sup>2</sup> Presidential Decree n. 382 of 11 July 1980 - “Reorganisation of University Teaching, relative training Band and Organisational and teaching experiments”, art. 91.

<sup>3</sup> Ministerial Circular (MPI-DGIU) n. 82 of 6 March 1981 (“it is as well to clarify that in any event inter-university agreements may not include clauses that envisage the award of joint academic qualifications or give validity to foreign

## 1.2 University cooperation agreement between Italy and France

“Wishing to contribute to the development of cultural and scientific relations between the two countries”, on 5 July 1992, in Paris, the Italian and French governments signed a framework agreement on university cooperation. The agreement is important historically since it formally established for the first time the awarding of a double degree.

The agreement provides that “the universities of the two countries may conclude agreements with one another which envisage integrated study programmes leading to the joint award of an Italian academic qualification (*laurea*) and a French academic qualification (*maîtrise*) having the same value. Such programmes shall concern students who have successfully completed the first two years of study at either an Italian or French university”. The agreement also specifies the matters that inter-university agreements should regulate: the organization of studies, examinations, the method of awarding the academic qualifications, exchange of teachers, the duration of students’ study periods abroad and joint commissions<sup>4</sup>.

## 1.3. “Doctor Europæus”

The “European doctorate” is not a supranational academic qualification, nor a degree awarded by an international institution; it is a sort of joint certification attached to a national doctorate which qualifies for the European tag because it possesses certain international features.

The history of the European Community has some rather significant precedents in the matter of designing ‘European’ academic qualifications. For example, in 1959 plans were made for the establishment of a ‘European University’ on the basis of the provisions of the Euratom Treaty. It was envisaged that the university in question would be able to award a European doctorate at the end of a two year course and thesis; however, it never came about due to French opposition. Ten years later, principally on the initiative of Italy, plans were drawn up for the European University Institute, which would end up being located in Badia Fiesolana (near Florence). Likewise, in this case the European Council did not wish to create a ‘European’ university in the sense of one established under Community law. The European University Institute of Florence came about on the basis of an intergovernmental Convention (1972) among the Member States of the Community and today issues its own doctorate degrees, which each signatory to the Convention has undertaken to recognize in accordance with their respective national law.

Although the idea of a “European doctorate” has not yet come to fruition in concrete terms, national doctorate degrees have witnessed a growing level of internationalisation. We are referring in particular to co-supervised doctorates or to the mobility of researchers supported by the Community framework programmes for research: thanks to the framework programmes it has been possible to finance research networks in which research groups from various countries collaborate on joint projects and train young researchers. This has led to a request for formal recognition of the “added value” of international doctorates. To take account of this impetus while at the same time creating a reference international standard, the Confederation of European Union Rectors’ Conferences (today EUA - European University Association) has drawn up a common “European doctorate” brand.

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academic grades unless recognition is for purposes of allowing further studies”); Inter-ministerial Decree on Inter-university Cooperation, issued pursuant to Article 91 of Presidential Decree n. 382/1980 of 10 February 1988 (Article 5: “It is not permitted to include clauses that envisage the award of joint academic qualifications or give validity to foreign academic diplomas”).

<sup>4</sup> Law n. 761 of 18 October 1984 - Ratification and Implementation of the Framework Agreement for University Cooperation between Italy and France, signed in Paris on 5 July 1982.

This designation can be added to a national doctorate, which was obtained fulfilling four conditions: a) co-supervision; b) assessment by an international jury; c) multilingualism; d) mobility of the graduate.

#### **1.4 The Socrates/Erasmus Programme: double degrees and curricular design**

The Erasmus Programme first and then the Socrates/Erasmus Programme have been the principal tools used by the European Commission to foster cooperation among universities in the member countries and to support university student mobility and study periods abroad. The agreements among universities, signed within Inter-University Cooperation Programmes (IPC) and Institutional Contracts, have in some cases provided for such advanced forms of curricular integration as to justify the award of a double degree.

Other initiatives were accomplished during the initial stage of the Socrates Programme under the heading of “curricular projects”, which involved the joint development of university curricula: CDA - Curriculum development at advanced level; CDI - Curriculum development at initial and intermediate level. Also in these cases agreements were signed for the award of joint degrees or double degrees.

#### **1.5 The European university Diploma**

Within the framework of the national curricula provided for in Italy in Law no. 341 of 1999, the European university Diploma in Industrial production (*Diploma universitario europeo in Produzione industriale*) was established at the end of 1999<sup>5</sup>. The general objective of this course – which can be organized by the Faculties of Engineering – is to produce technicians who, provided with a university level education in a European context, are also qualified to take on and manage innovation in the production sector by easily adapting to scientific change and technological evolution. In other words, the course seeks to create professionals who are competent not only in production technology but also in the management of enterprises with reference to economic issues and human resources.

The originality of this programme lies in the innovative nature of the professional it creates as well as in the new educational model adopted: the studies must be planned and organised symmetrically in Italy and in another country. This means the signing of agreements between the universities concerned which specify the resources for realising the integrated project, the study periods to be spent by students in the home and host university, and the mutual recognition of examinations and teaching modules. Also the internship is to be done in two periods, in companies located in two different countries. At the end of the three year study and training period, students are awarded two qualifications the Italian *Diploma universitario europeo in Produzione industriale* and the corresponding foreign qualification from the partner university.

#### **1.6 Co-supervision of doctoral theses**

A significant facet of bilateral university cooperation is the organization of joint research doctorates by universities of two different countries which envisages co-supervision of theses. In such a case

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<sup>5</sup> MURST Decree of 19 December 1996 - Changes to University Teaching Regulations Relative to the European University Diploma in Industrial Production, published in the Official Journal of the Italian Republic - n. 70 of 25 March 1997.

the doctoral student undertakes the research under the supervision of two teachers-tutors – one for each university involved – who agree to collaborate in a spirit of joint responsibility. The doctoral student spends time in both countries and defends the thesis before a joint commission which in all cases counts the two supervisors among its members. A co-supervised thesis normally entails the award of a mutually recognised joint doctorate.

The most significant example of this type of collaboration is afforded by the bilateral Franco-Italian project for co-supervised theses<sup>6</sup> stemming from the framework agreement signed in Paris on 13 February 1998 by the Rectors' Conferences of the two countries concerned.

## 1.7 The Italo-French University

The Italo-French University<sup>7</sup> arose out of the Italo-French summit in Florence on 6 October 1998. Its administrative headquarters are in Grenoble and Turin. It is an original experience of a virtual university, *sans murs*, which aims at co-ordinating the cooperation between the universities of the two countries and which is based largely on distance learning made possible by new technologies.

By means of this virtual institution, Italy and France wish “to promote the award of double degrees and joint degrees, and to participate in the design of common programmes”<sup>8</sup>. In addition to this commitment to double degrees, five objectives are specified:

- promote convergence between the respective university systems;
- invite the participation of higher education institutions of other European countries in such a process (convergence of university systems);
- promote joint research programmes and life-long learning;
- provide assistance to the university institutions and bodies of both countries in matters of inter-university cooperation;
- support the creation of databases and telematic links between the two university systems with a view to establishing a virtual network of information, teaching and life-long learning.

## 1.8 The Italo-German University

Germany and Italy play a fundamental role in the process of reform started by the Bologna Declaration. The need for closer inter-European co-operation offers a good opportunity to develop the Italo-German collaboration in the university sector.

On 25 May 2002 the Italian and German rectors' Conferences (CRUI and HRK), DAAD (*Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst*) and the University of Trento agreed to establish the so called “Italo-German University”. The project aims to make the co-operation between the university contexts of the two partners more effective, and particularly to promote the development of new

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<sup>6</sup> The text of the framework agreement, the competitions and the information on the Programme are available on the web site of the Ministry for University and Research at <http://www.miur.it> and that of the Italian Universities' Rectors' Conference at <http://www.crui.it>.

<sup>7</sup> A presentation in Italian is available on the web at <http://www.universita-italo-francese.org>; the French version can be found at <http://www.universite-franco-italienne.org>.

<sup>8</sup> Law n. 161 of 26 May 2001 - Ratification and Implementation of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Italy and the Government of the French Republic Establishing the Italo-French University, with relative Protocol, done in Florence on 6 October 1998 (published in the Official Journal of the Italian Republic - n. 141 of 9 June 2000).

joint programmes at bachelor/master level, the co-supervision of doctoral theses as well as the creation of post-graduate courses in natural sciences and technical fields.

To such purposes, initiatives in the following areas must be undertaken or strengthened:

- information on the Italian and German university systems, their scientific research programmes, and possibilities of further co-operation;
- experimentation of methods to guarantee quality;
- collaboration in the development of the “virtual education” through information networks;
- support of the collaboration between the university and economic systems of the two countries, also by fostering students’ training periods at the companies of the partner country;
- promotion of student and staff exchanges within projects of inter-university co-operation;
- promotion of language learning (Italian/German) in both university contexts;
- development of university teaching methodologies and life-long learning.

## **2 The “Bologna Process” and the further development of joint degrees in Italy**

### **2.1 Reforms in Italian higher education and joint degrees**

#### **2.1.1 University higher education**

An important turning point for the development of joint degrees was the approval of the Regulation on university autonomy in 1999<sup>9</sup>. It completed the process of university independence, also in view of the process of convergence of the policies of the European countries proclaimed by their ministers for education in the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations. The reform was also motivated by the need for the universities to open up internationally.

The reform of the university system tackles this aspect by providing new instruments aimed at promoting and supporting the initiatives of universities. A number of provisions in the Decree no. 270 of 22 October 2004<sup>10</sup> – that has substituted the previous Regulation no. 509/99 – allow universities to engage themselves more incisively in the international arena:

- the classification of qualifications into:
  - a) first-cycle degree (*laurea* - 180 ECTS credits),
  - b) second-cycle degree (*laurea magistrale* - 120 ECTS credits),
  - c) doctorate or third-cycle degree (*dottorato di ricerca* - min. three years),with the introduction of “university master” programmes (*corsi di master universitario* - min. 60 ECTS credits);
- the possibility to award joint degrees with foreign universities;
- the recognition of study periods abroad, of credits and qualifications awarded in other countries for the purpose of pursuing further studies;

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<sup>9</sup> Decree n. 509 of 3 November 1999 “Regulation Setting Out the Norms Concerning the Curricular Autonomy of Universities” (published in the Official Journal of the Italian Republic - n. 2 of 4 January 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Decree n. 270 of 22 October 2004 “Modifications to the Regulation Setting Out the Norms Concerning the Curricular Autonomy of Universities, approved by MURST Decree n. 509 of 3 November 1999” (published in the Official Journal of the Italian Republic - n. 266 of 11 November 2004).

- the obligatory study of another language of the European Union and the awarding of credits therefore;
- the possibility to sit the final degree examination in a foreign language;
- the introduction of the Diploma Supplement based on the model agreed at the European level.

With specific reference to inter-university cooperation and the award of joint degrees, Article 3 of Decree n. 270/2004 provides that “further to agreements in this regard”, Italian universities may award first and second degrees (as well as the other qualifications envisaged by the new rules) “also in conjunction with other Italian or foreign universities”. The rules governing “the procedures for the award of joint qualifications” are delegated to the general academic regulations of the university (Article 11, paragraph 7, subparagraph o). In the case of joint degrees with foreign universities, the procedures for the award of the qualification concerned should be expressly regulated in the respective inter-university agreements, given the differences in the national rules among the various countries<sup>11</sup>.

### 2.1.2. Non-University higher education

The process of higher education reforms also concerns the non-university sector for arts and music (*AFAM - Alta formazione artistica e musicale*)<sup>12</sup>. The reform process began with Law 508<sup>13</sup> of 21<sup>st</sup> December 1999, which conferred university level status to these higher education institutions, granted them the university model of institutional autonomy and enabled the full application of the principles of the Bologna Declaration in the AFAM sector.

The reform launched in 1999 continued with the President of the Republic’s decree of 8<sup>th</sup> July 2005, no. 212<sup>14</sup> (DPR 212/2005), which has reorganised education at AFAM institutions according to the three cycles of the Bologna Process. The reform has established the following characteristics for the AFAM sector:

- the classification of qualifications into:
  - a) first-cycle degree (*diploma accademico di primo livello* - 180 ECTS credits)
  - b) second-cycle degree (*diploma accademico di secondo livello* - 120 ECTS credits)
  - c) third-cycle degree (*diploma accademico di formazione alla ricerca* - min. three years), with the introduction of master programmes (*diploma di perfezionamento o master* - 60 ECTS credits);
- the possibility to award joint degrees with foreign universities;
- the introduction of ECTS credits system;
- the recognition of study periods spent abroad, and of credits and qualifications awarded in other countries, in order to pursue further studies;
- the use of the Diploma Supplement according to agreed international standards.

With reference to international cooperation and the award of joint degrees, article n. 3 of DPR

<sup>11</sup> See the Ministerial Note (MURST - Saus - Ufficio III), document record n. 822, of 25 May 2001 concerning “Curricular autonomy - application problems”.

<sup>12</sup> Institutions belonging to the arts and music sector are: music conservatories (*conservatori di musica*), fine arts academies (*accademie di belle arti*), higher institutes for art industries (*istituti superiori per le industrie artistiche*), national academies for dance and dramatic arts (*accademia nazionale di danza, accademia nazionale d'arte drammatica*). For further information: [http://www.miur.it/0004Alta\\_F/0027Istitu/index\\_cf4.htm](http://www.miur.it/0004Alta_F/0027Istitu/index_cf4.htm).

<sup>13</sup> Law n. 508 of 21 December 1999 - Reform of Fine Arts Academies, National Dance Academy, National Drama Academy, Higher Institutes for Applied Arts, Music Conservatories and recognised Music Institutes (published in the Official Journal of the Italian Republic - n. 2 of 4 January 2000).

<sup>14</sup> President of the Republic’s Decree 8th July 2005, n. 212 - Defining Teaching Regulations in Higher Education Institutions for Arts, Music and Dance, following Article 2 of Law 508 of 21st December 1999 (published in the Official Journal of the Italian Republic - n. 243 of 18 October 2005).

212/2005 provides that “further to agreements in this regard”, AFAM institutions may award their degrees “also in conjunction with other Italian or foreign institutions of an equivalent level”. The rules governing the procedures for the award of joint qualifications are delegated to the general academic regulations of the institution (art. n. 10, par. 4, sub-par. p).

The reform granting AFAM institutions the possibility to award joint degrees is recent. Consequently, no joint degrees have yet been awarded in this sector. The effects of the change will become apparent in a not too distant future. In the meantime, there are concrete signs of interest from AFAM institutions, as shown by, e.g., a number of joint courses that are being planned for possible submission in the Erasmus Mundus Programme (see 2.1.3).

## **2.2 Joint degrees in the “Actions for internationalisation” of the National plans for the development of the Italian university system**

The policies developed in recent years by the Italian Ministry for University and Research (*MiUR - Ministero dell’Università e della Ricerca*) to internationalise Italian universities have aimed principally at strengthening the European dimension of Italian Higher Education according to the action lines indicated in the Bologna Process, in order to contribute to the establishment of the European Higher Education Area.

Such policies have generated specific “actions for internationalisation” in the three most recent plans for the development of the Italian university system<sup>15</sup>. Such actions are aimed at improving quality, increasing worldwide attractiveness for European Higher Education and at exporting the European education model to the rest of the world. An articulated policy for internationalisation has been undertaken, that has made available considerable financial resources and has set out guidelines for the development of bilateral and multilateral projects aimed at joint degrees. The common thinking that underlines the three actions can be summarised as follows:

- support of international student mobility;
- use of ECTS system and Diploma Supplement;
- participation of teachers and students from at least another country;
- co-financing of projects (50%) by institutions;
- quality assurance.

The three actions were implemented through a national selection process<sup>16</sup> and were well received by the universities with high participation levels. Many universities demonstrated their ability to design a project, decide on resource allocation and define priorities in terms of countries and partners for international cooperation. The opportunity to give an international dimension to the new courses (*laurea, laurea specialistica, dottorati di ricerca* as well as *master universitari*) was appreciated by the academic bodies and enabled the majority of Italian universities to develop integrated curricula at international level with clearly defined objectives for the student employability. The overall scale of the public funding was significant, as well as the size of university co-financing and external funds. The outcomes of the three selection rounds are shown in tables 1, 2 and 3.

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<sup>15</sup> Ministerial Decree 21 June 1999, n. 313 (published in the Official Journal of the Italian Republic n. 256 of 27 October 1999); Ministerial Decree 8 May 2001, n. 115 (published in the Official Journal of the Italian Republic n. 195 of 23 August 2001); Ministerial Decree 5 August 2004, n. 262 (published in the Official Journal of the Italian Republic n. 277 of 25 November 2004).

<sup>16</sup> The selection procedures and programme information are available at the MiUR website (<http://interlink.miur.it/>).

Regarding the type of degrees awarded, the three actions funded a significant number of projects for integrated courses leading to joint or double degrees (Table 4). The total number of projects financed by the three actions does not refer to an equivalent number of degrees awarded: most project supported under the first Action (1998-2000) have been changed as a consequence of the implementation of the Bologna process, while in a number of cases the support for existing programmes has been extended to the second or to the third round. For such reasons, it is not possible at the moment to quantify the number of existing courses since the monitoring of projects selected under the second and third actions is still in progress. Figure in Table 4 give an approximate picture of the present situation.

Although provisional, data available seem to confirm the success of the policies implemented through the internationalisation actions. Firstly, they did not just support existing international cooperation: in many cases, they supported the creation and strengthening of entirely new courses (conceived from the start with an integrated international dimension); in other cases, they stimulated the international development of national courses. Secondly, supporting student mobility allows a significant number of Italian and foreign students to obtain a joint or double degree, which will have an impact on the labour market in the coming years. It is expected that the mobility supported under the third Internationalisation Action will enable over 4,000 Italian university students to obtain a double or joint degree at the end of an integrated study programme.

**Table 1 - Actions for internationalisation: number and value of projects funded**

	1998-2000	2001-2003	2004-2006
Universities with approved projects	64	50	64
Projects funded	162	175	297
Overall funding approved by MiUR (€ ml)	25	15	16
Funding awarded by MiUR (€ ml)	10	10	15
University co-funding (€ ml)	17	20	23

Source: MiUR, 2006.

**Table 2 - Actions for internationalisation: type of projects funded**

	1998-2000	2001-2003	2004-2006
<i>Laurea</i>	15	10	17
<i>Laurea specialistica</i>	13	13	26
<i>Master universitario di I livello</i>	47	41	34
<i>Master universitario di II livello</i>			18
Doctorate	81	73	48
Other*	6	38	154
<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>297</b>

Source: MiUR, 2006.

\* Summer schools, research projects, specialisation schools.

**Table 3 - Actions for internationalisation: projects funded by fields of study (%)**

Field of study	1998-2000*	2001-2003	2004-2006
Mathematics, Physics and Natural Sciences	56	17	29

Medicine	17	13	12
Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences	11	5	7
Civil Engineering and Architecture	11	10	5
Industrial and ICT Engineering	22	9	12
Ancient Civilisations, Philology, Literature, Art History	18	10	8
History, Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology	18	6	7
Law	20	10	8
Economics and Statistics	25	13	6
Social and Political Sciences	18	7	6
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
n.	162	175	297

Source: MiUR, 2006.

\* It was possible to indicate more fields of study for the same project.

**Table 4 - Actions for internationalisation: integrated programmes per type of degree awarded**

	<b>1998-2000</b>	<b>2001-2003</b>	<b>2004-2006</b>
Double degrees	72	79	51
Joint degrees	58	32	75
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>126</b>

Source: MiUR, 2006.

## **2.3 The Erasmus Mundus Programme: contribution to the development of joint degrees in Italian higher education institutions**

### **2.3.1 The Erasmus Mundus Programme: objectives and current set up**

Erasmus Mundus is a Programme of the European Union for cooperation and mobility in higher education. It aims to contribute to the improvement of quality in European higher education, by making the European Union a first class education destination and strengthening the visibility and attractiveness of European higher education in the world. The Erasmus Mundus Programme selects and supports second cycle courses in higher education (according to the Bologna Process). These courses are realised by consortia of European higher education institutions and receive a quality label that certifies them as “Erasmus Mundus courses”.

Erasmus Mundus masters courses are for students (from third countries as well as from Europe) who wish to obtain a second cycle qualification by following a European rather than a national programme. Courses are based on study programmes of recognised quality that have a specific “European added value” and award a joint or double/multiple degree at the end of the period of study. Erasmus Mundus masters courses have the following characteristics:

- a. duration of one to two academic years (60 to 120 ECTS);
- b. fully integrated study programmes, i.e. jointly developed curriculum (or full recognition by the Consortium of modules developed and delivered separately but making up a common standard), joint criteria for admission and examination, common policy for tuition fees, use of at least two languages spoken in member countries;
- c. student mobility in at least two higher education institutions in two European countries for a study period that enable students to obtain at least 30% of the total credits;

- d. award of a joint or a double/multiple degree from the institutions in the consortium<sup>17</sup>;
- e. full recognition of the degrees obtained in the countries concerned.

In 2006-2007 the Programme will support 57 masters courses offered by as many consortia<sup>18</sup>, that involve 260 higher education institutions in 21 member countries of the European Union. France, Spain, the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy are the countries that are most present in the consortia: institutions from these countries represent more than 55% of the total. A total of 2.245 third country students have received or will receive a grant in the academic years 2004-2005, 2005-2006 or 2006-2007 to attend an Erasmus Mundus course in Europe<sup>19</sup>. In order to quantify the total number of students who have received or will receive a joint or a double/multiple degree, European students who follow these courses at their own expense, or with grants from a consortium's own resources, has to be added to this number. Currently, the statistics of the Programme do not consider European students.

Regarding the degree awarded, 28 courses (i.e. one out of two) award double degrees while 12 (i.e. about one out of five) award joint degrees. For the remaining 27 courses, one can observe a variety of situations which depend on: *a)* the number of institutions visited by a student: double, triple or multiple degrees are awarded accordingly; *b)* the national legislation allowing or not allowing joint degrees: a combination of double/triple and joint degrees is chosen with a view to include all institutions of a consortium into the joint degree arrangements as soon as possible; *c)* the length of the course: some courses offer the possibility to follow a course of one or two years, leading to the award of different degrees; *d)* the agreements reached among the participating institutions.

### 2.3.2 The Italian participation in Erasmus Mundus

Italian universities<sup>20</sup> participate in 23 of the 57 Erasmus Mundus consortia. Five courses are coordinated by the Universities of Ferrara, Pavia/Iuss, Pisa and Trento (2 cases), while the others include – as partner institutions – the Universities of Bari, Bergamo, Bologna (3 courses), Bolzano, Catania, Firenze, Milano Politecnico (2 courses), Milano Bicocca, Milano cattolica (Piacenza campus), Padova (3 courses), Pisa, Roma “La Sapienza”, Torino Politecnico and Venezia “Ca’ Foscari”. Italian participation in the Erasmus Mundus Programme is summarised in Table 5. Social sciences and Engineering & Technology are the most common fields of study<sup>21</sup>. Most courses last two-years (120 ECTS), while the others are divided equally between one-year courses (60 ECTS) and courses between one and two years (90-95 ECTS).

The courses awarding double or double/multiple degrees are more than those awarding a joint degree. This is in line with the general tendency of the Programme: the Italian universities award one joint degree every six cases, while the Programme average for a joint degree is one every five

<sup>17</sup> The awarding of a double degree is the minimum required condition for consortium institutions participating in the Programme.

<sup>18</sup> The list is available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/projects/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/projects/index_en.html).

<sup>19</sup> Source: European Commission - D.G. Eac (2006).

<sup>20</sup> The Italian participation in the Erasmus Mundus Programme has been restricted until now to universities. Thanks to recent reforms (see 2.1.2) higher education institutions for arts and music (AFAM) are now eligible in the Programme.

<sup>21</sup> In the Programme subject areas and fields of study correspond as follows (some fields of study are linked to two different areas); *a)* Hard sciences: Engineering and Technology, Mathematics and Informatics, Natural sciences; *b)* Life sciences: Agriculture, Geography and Geology, Medical sciences, Natural sciences; *c)* Humanities: Architecture, Urban & regional planning, Art and Design, Education, Teacher training, Humanities, Languages and Philological sciences, Social sciences, Communication and Information sciences; *d)* Business: Business studies, Management science, Law, Social sciences, Other areas. The Erasmus Mundus courses are distributed relatively homogeneously among Life sciences (14 courses), Hard sciences or Humanities (13 courses each) and Business (11 courses).

cases. The distribution of the degrees awarded by the Italian universities participating in the Programme is as follows:

- joint 4
- multiple 3
- multiple/double 4
- double 12.

It is worth pointing out that the impossibility of awarding joint degrees and, in some cases, the complex procedures for the award of joint degrees in some countries of the European Union, has severely limited the award of such degrees. This has encouraged using double or multiple degrees which generally find no obstacles in national legislations in the member countries<sup>22</sup>. A positive sign here is the explicit intention declared in many consortia, and in many Italian universities, to award joint degrees as soon as possible even where double/multiple degrees are currently being awarded. This “two steps” policy has been pragmatically supported by the European Commission and by the EACEA - The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (responsible for the management of most of the Programme) so as not to discourage universities from submitting projects of high educational quality.

Italy finds itself in a privileged position compared to other member countries in so far as the national legislation has made it possible for some time now to implement integrated curricula at international level and to award joint degrees. In the Italian scenario with its ‘lights’ and ‘shadows’, this aspect is certainly a favourable and positive one.

As for the ‘shadows’, the problem areas that emerge from the Italian experience in Erasmus Mundus participation are:

- a) insufficient willingness of some academics to achieve more advanced levels of international integration in teaching and learning;
- b) insufficient willingness in certain sectors of the university administration and management to develop organisational innovation; this may turn in an obstacle to the full development of innovation of teaching and learning methods;
- c) inadequate financial and organisational resources available for international programmes in a number of universities, the effects of which influence the Italian performance in the Programme.

As for the ‘lights’, the following can also be mentioned:

- a) in around half of the courses, a *laurea specialistica* is awarded; in the other cases the students are awarded a *master universitario*<sup>23</sup>; the prevalence of two-year courses (120 ECTS) is in line with the general trend in the Programme and represents a meaningful contribution to the national achievements of the Bologna objectives;
- b) many institutions have shown great interest in experimenting and innovating through internationally integrated curricula, even in cases as the *laurea specialistica*, where university autonomy has to take into account national rules and accreditation procedures.

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<sup>22</sup> This is the result that emerges from the most recent survey on the state of national legislations for the awarding of joint or double/multiple degrees, carried out by the network of National Structures operating in the member countries for the Programme implementation.

<sup>23</sup> The distribution of the Italian Higher Education System in three cycles with corresponding qualifications awarded is described at point 2.1.1 of this report. For further information: <http://www.study-in-italy.it/study/new-degrees.html>.

**Table 5 - Participation of Italian universities in Erasmus Mundus courses (a. a. 2006-2007)**

<b>Title</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>ECTS</b>	<b>Degree</b>
AGRIS MUNDUS - Sustainable Development in Agriculture Masters Course	Catania	partner	120	double
ALGANT - Algebra, Geometry and Number Theory	Padova	partner	120	double
ATOSIM - Atomic Scale Modelling of Physical, Chemical and Biomolecular Systems	Roma "La Sapienza"	partner	60	double
CoDe - Joint European Master in Comparative Local Development	Trento	coordinator	95	joint
CoMundus - European Master of Arts in Media, Communication and Cultural Studies	Firenze	partner	90	double
EMCL - European Masters Clinical Linguistics	Milano - Bicocca	partner	90	double/multiple
EuMAS - European Masters Course in Aeronautics and Space Technology	Pisa	coordinator	120	double
EuMI - European Master in Informatics	Trento	coordinator	120	double
European Master in Law and Economics	Bologna	partner	60	double/multiple
European Masters Program in Computational Logic	Bolzano	partner	120	double
IMIM - International Master in Industrial Management	Milano Politecnico	partner	120	multiple
IMRD - Erasmus Mundus International Master of Science in Rural Development	Pisa	partner	120	joint
International Master in Quaternary and Prehistory	Ferrara	coordinator	120	double/multiple
International Master "Vintage", Vine, Wine and Terroir Management	Bologna; Cattolica (Piacenza)	partner	120	double
M.A. Degree in Economics of International Trade and European Integration	Bari	partner	60	joint
Master Mundus: Crossways in European Humanities	Bergamo	partner	120	multiple
Master of Bioethics	Padova	partner	60	joint
MEEES - Master in Earthquake Engineering & Engineering Seismology	IUSS Pavia	coordinator	60-90	double/multiple
MERIT - Master of Research in Information Technologies	Torino	partner	120	double
MSPME - Masters in Strategic Project Management (European)	Milano	partner	90	multiple
QEM - Models and Methods of Quantitative Economics	Venezia "Ca' Foscari"	partner	120	double
SUTROFOR - Sustainable Tropical Forestry Erasmus Mundus Masters Course	Padova	partner	120	double
WOP-P - Master on Work, Organizational and Personnel Psychology	Bologna	partner	120	double

Source: Erasmus Mundus National Contact Point - Italy, 2006.

### **3. Integrated study programmes and joint degrees at Italian higher education institutions: a summary analysis**

Cooperation between institutions of different countries in specific disciplines has generated common education and training activities, generally under the heading of integrated study programmes or integrated curricula, which are characterized by a common assumption of responsibility by the participating institutions as regards the curriculum design, the organization of the studies, the qualification awarded and the adoption of quality assurance criteria.

#### **3.1 Curriculum design**

Curricular integration implies the identification of shared educational goals and the drawing up of a common study path, in some cases highly compatible with national standards and in other cases seen as a markedly 'European' one.

Some highly integrated programmes envisage a parallel and contemporary offer of the same educational activities in all participating institutions and the complete sharing of teaching, learning and examination methods, thereby allowing participating students to follow the same course in different locations. Although mobility is seen as an essential element of the programme it does not introduce curricular variables in the study course, which must consequently be completed within the same period at all participating locations.

In other programmes, the participating institutions develop specific segments which complement the overall course designed, thus making it necessary for students to spend time at each of the participating institutions. Sometimes they identify specific components of the participating institutions' study programmes – be they basic parts of the curriculum or specialist areas – and then proceed to put together a programme which values those components to the maximum. Mobility is seen as an opportunity for integration that is important in itself but also a means of acquiring at partner institutions knowledge and skills not available at the home institution.

#### **3.2 Organization of the studies**

The organization or management of the studies mainly concerns decisions on logistical and financial aspects of the programme, the selection of students and the choosing of the teaching staff. Organization of the studies can be highly integrated in cases where students from various institutions converge on a single location, are subject to the same selection procedures and participate in the same didactic activities contributed by teachers from different institutions.

A lower level of integration occurs in cases where the periods of student mobility are limited in comparison to the overall duration of the studies, where the contribution of foreign

teachers is marginal with respect to the general programme or where students are selected by each institution in accordance with different criteria.

### **3.3 Type of qualifications awarded**

The type of qualification awarded by partners depends on the characteristics of the programme in the previous phases. Such an approach allows to draw up a classification of the qualifications on the basis of the level of integration reached in the design and implementation of the curriculum concerned.

Different models are emerging from the Italian experience on the issue of awarding qualifications:

- a)* JOINT “EUROPEAN” OR “INTERNATIONAL” DEGREE: the participating institutions jointly award a joint degree on the basis of bilateral or network agreements which envisage the completion of an integrated curriculum;
- b)* DOUBLE DEGREE: the participating institutions award the respective national qualifications on the basis of a bilateral agreement which envisage the completion of an integrated curriculum of the same duration as that provided for in each of the countries concerned; in some cases a joint certification may be added;
- c)* DOUBLE DEGREE WITH A PROLONGING OF THE STUDIES: the participating institutions award their respective national degrees on the basis of bilateral agreements which envisage the completion of an integrated curriculum which is longer (generally one more year) than the national curriculum provided for in the countries concerned;
- d)* NATIONAL DEGREE WITH JOINT CERTIFICATION: the participating institutions award their own national degree to their own students and issue a joint certification testifying a given level of curricular integration, whose requirements are agreed at bilateral or network level.

### **3.4 Criteria for quality assurance**

The issue of quality assurance in integrated programmes has gained prominence in recent years. On the one hand, the participation in international projects (like, e.g., the TUNING Project or the project EMNEM of EUA - The European University Association) has helped the Italian institutions to realise how strategic the issue has become. On the other hand, the implementation of the three “Actions for internationalisation” and the extensive participation of the Italian universities in the Erasmus Mundus Programme are supporting the adoption of a methodology for the design and the management of joint programmes based on agreed “best practices”.

A set of indicators for quality assurance is arising from the Italian experience in the European context: these indicators are to be used either as a checklist in the phase of curriculum design, and as a guideline grid for the management of a course. Quality assurance must take into considerations, among others, the following items:

- common criteria for student selection and admission

- curriculum integration
- use of ECTS system
- student and staff mobility
- use of the vehicular languages of the hosting countries
- availability of high quality facilities for students
- tutoring, language training and support to social integration for students
- mutual recognition of study periods abroad
- awarding of a joint or double degree
- use of the Diploma Supplement
- common tools for internal as well as external assessment.