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EXPERIENCE OF DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF DOUBLE/JOINT DIPLOMA PROGRAMMES OF BELARUSIAN TRADE AND ECONOMICS UNIVERSITY OF CONSUMER COOPERATIVES

The article briefly describes the experience of implementation of double/joint diploma programmes in Europe; describes the practice of development and implementation of “Two-Three Diplomas” programme at Belarusian Trade and Economics University of Consumer Cooperatives (BTEU).

В статье кратко охарактеризован опыт реализации программ двойных/совместных дипломов в Европе; описана практика разработки и реализации программы «Двух-трех дипломов» в Белорусском торгово-экономическом университете потребительской кооперации (БТЭУ).

Key words: Bologna process; double diploma; joint diploma.

Ключевые слова: Болонский процесс; двойные дипломы; совместные дипломы.

Introduction

Participation in numerous international projects resulted in development of double diploma programmes by Belarusian Trade and Economics University of Consumer Cooperatives.

A special role in this issue was played by the meeting in frames of project “Development of approaches to harmonization of a comprehensive internationalization strategies in higher education, research and innovation at EU and Partner Countries” – HARMONY in Tomar (Portugal) in April 2018 where faculty members of BTEU learned the experience of double diploma programmes implementation in European partner-universities of the HARMONY project.

Integration of Belarusian higher education institutions in the world educational space is one of the most important priorities for the system of higher education. In this regard, a set of measures is being taken to promote internationalization of higher education in our country both at the state level and at the level of individual universities. Thus, recently a number of normative documents has been introduced with

the purpose of increasing educational services export, among them the Concept for Development of Educational Services Export, developed and submitted by the Ministry of Education in December 2017 [1], Presidential Decree No. 232 as of June 12, 2018 "On scholarships" [2]. Internationalization of higher education institutions in the world educational space is carried out through a whole range of activities, among which separate place is occupied by implementation of double/joint diploma programmes. The term "double diploma" is considered by authors to be conditional, since this concept has already been established and is widely used in academic circles. It should be noted that, as a rule, students don't obtain a "double diploma" unless it is an issue of some specific documents stipulated in the agreement in frames of consent between higher education institutions. Graduating students obtain two different standard diplomas: State-recognized diploma of Belarusian institution of higher education and diploma of foreign university where they passed their studies.

The idea of implementation of double/joint diploma programmes in Europe was developed at the end of the last century. "The main reason for development of such programmes was the relevance for mutual recognition of diplomas obtained in European universities in the conditions of emerging European labor market. Erasmus programme was established in the late 80's, which appeared to be an additional incentive for development of double diploma programmes" [3]. Over the past period the issue of double/joint diploma was repeatedly discussed at the meetings of European Ministers of Higher Education. Eventually, at the regular Conference of Ministers of European Higher Education Area (Bucharest, Romania, April 26–27, 2012), it was proposed to develop common European approaches to assessing the quality of double diploma programmes, as a result this document was submitted for approval at the Conference of Ministers of European Higher Education Area which was held on May 14–15, 2015 in Yerevan (Armenia).

Introduction of double/joint diploma programmes is gaining increasing recognition in higher education institutions of our country. Moreover, higher education system of the Republic of Belarus has more than 20 years of experience in implementation of joint educational programmes, formation and development of which is the result of work in frames of international projects, interstate and interuniversity agreements. Through the implementation of such programmes in cooperation with foreign universities, the task of increasing convertability of Belarusian diplomas of higher education, their recognition at international level, involvement of domestic universities in international ratings, and improving competitiveness of national education is being completed. However, it is quite difficult to evaluate actual extent and scope of distribution of double/joint diploma programmes. Systematization and data collection turned out to be a quite labor-consuming issue, as the information provided by institutions of higher education on websites doesn't always give an idea of extent and nature of cooperation, since the existence of agreements with foreign universities doesn't signify a real interaction. Besides that, the concept of joint programmes or double diploma programmes is interpreted in a fairly diverse manner. Thus, for example, in recommendations of Council of Europe on recognition of joint diploma it is indicated that a joint diploma should be understood as a diploma issued jointly by at least two institutions of higher education or jointly by a university and other institution on the basis of educational programme developed and/or implemented jointly by universities or with the assistance of other institutions.

Study of experience on implementation of double/joint diploma programmes at European universities makes it possible to distinguish three main models of this kind of academic training:

- a joint diploma of two or more institutions of higher education, presented as a single document recognized in the partner countries;
- a model of double, triple, etc. diploma, when each partner university assigns its own degree to a student and issues its own diploma;
- the third model is a combination of the first two ones with multiple variations.

In accordance with Bologna Declaration [4], higher education programmes, including double/joint diploma programmes, consist of training programmes of bachelors, masters and doctors. In current practice double/joint diploma programmes are more common for master's and doctoral, rather than bachelor's programme. In some countries joint programmes are not applied to training of bachelors at all.

Currently there is neither a unified algorithm for development and implementation of such programmes, nor national legislation that recognizes such types of diplomas in the Republic of Belarus.

Analysis of European practice, carried out during study of economic literature, makes it possible to distinguish the following main stages of the process of development and implementation of double/joint diploma programme:

- selection of partner-university (-ies) and specialty (-ies);
- conclusion of an agreement with partner-university (-ies);

- coordination of curriculum and educational programmes, actual development of double/joint diploma programme;
- definition of forms, periods and tuition fee at the partner-university (-ies);
- dissemination of information about the possibility of participation in the programme and selection of students;
- implementation of double/joint diploma programme;
- quality control of double/joint diploma programme.

In compliance with the above-mentioned stages Belarusian Trade and Economics University of Consumer Cooperatives developed “Two-Three Diplomas” programme, which provides students with an excellent opportunity to study their specialty in greater detail and obtain two (three) diplomas with European Diploma Supplement.

Varna University of Management (VUM) (Bulgaria) and Cardiff Metropolitan University CMU (United Kingdom) are the partner-universities in frames of the above-mentioned programme. The appropriate agreement was signed on May 20, 2015 in Dobrich (Bulgaria).

The programme provides two possible participation schemes (Table 1).

Table 1 – Schemes of participation in “Two-Three Diplomas” programme of Belarusian Trade and Economics University of Consumer Cooperatives

Scheme 1	Scheme 2
2 diplomas (Belarus – Bulgaria)	3 diplomas (Belarus – Bulgaria – United Kingdom)
3 years of study at BTEU + 1 year of study in English at VUM (Bulgaria)	2 years of study at BTEU + 1 year of study in English at VUM (Bulgaria) + 1 year of study in English at CMU (United Kingdom)
Obtaining qualification of specialist and bachelor's degree	Obtaining qualification of specialist and bachelor's degree
Fees: 90 € – admission fee at VUM (single-time); 200 € – once a semester during the period of study at VUM (franchise); 1900 € – tuition fee at VUM for 1 (last) year (single-time)	Fees: 90 € – admission fee at VUM (single-time); 200 € – once a semester during the period of study at VUM (franchise); 3100 € – tuition fee at CMU for 1 (last) year (single-time)
Preparation and defense of graduation thesis in English (at one of the universities at students' choice). Passing of state examination in the major specialty – at BTEU	
Living costs (60 € per month), visa processing (210 €). meals and transportation costs are borne by students themselves	
Tuition fee is paid in full extent in accordance with the concluded agreement	
Study at BTEU can be completed by distance-learning in the final year. Pre-graduation practice is to be completed in Bulgaria with provision of all necessary documents and report to BTEU	

One of the problems Belarusian Trade and Economics University of Consumer Cooperatives has encountered while implementing the above-mentioned “Two-Three Diplomas” programme is the financial problem. Due to the fact that all financial costs of participation in the programme are borne by students, the availability of participation in this programme depends on students' financial state. This problem can be solved through creation of specialized funds to finance preparation of students in the most perspective fields of study at state level.

In general, existence of such a programme at institutions of higher education provides a number of advantages: upgrading the university's rating, development of international cooperation, educational, scientific potential, etc.

Students participating in the programme gain additional competitive advantages in the labor market, improve language proficiency, etc.

We have conducted a selective research on the availability of double/joint diploma programmes at 8 Belarusian HEIs using information on official websites of institutions of higher education of the Republic of Belarus:

- Polotsk State University has agreement on implementation of double diploma programme with WSB University (Poland) [5] and Polytechnic Institute of Leiria (Portugal) [6];
- Belarus State Economic University has agreement on implementation of double diploma programme with Polytechnic Institute of Bragança (Portugal) [7], University of Applied Sciences (Germany) [8], Baltic International Academy (Latvia) [9], Poznan School of Logistics (Poland) [10], Russian University of Transport (Russian Federation) [11];
- School of Business of Belarusian State University has agreement on implementation of double diploma programme with South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (Finland) [12];

- Francisk Skorina Gomel State University has agreement on implementation of double diploma programme with Academy of State and Municipal Service in Kursk (Russian Federation) [13];
- Belarusian State Technological University has agreement on implementation of double diploma programme with Bialystok University of Technology (Poland) [14];
- Belarusian-Russian University has agreement on implementation of double diploma programme with University of Clermont Auvergne (France) [15];
- Belarussian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics has agreement on implementation of double diploma programme with a number of universities and colleges of the Sultanate of Oman [16];
- Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno has agreement on implementation of double diploma programme with University of Bialystok (Poland) [17].

This study showed that universities which pursue an active policy in terms of international cooperation have not only formally concluded agreements for implementation of double/joint diploma programmes, but, as well, have actual results in this field. Unfortunately, there are no quantitative indicators of the effectiveness of this work on websites, as a rule, and only certain facts are presented, such as awarding diplomas, lecturing, visits of delegations, negotiations in the framework of existing agreements, etc.

Along with this, current problem in the field of double/joint diplomas in the Republic of Belarus is development of normative and legal acts, which will make it possible not only to develop processes of internationalization of education, but will also contribute to protection of educational market of the Republic of Belarus.

Conclusion

As practice shows, Belarusian institutions of higher education, which closely cooperate with foreign universities, organizations, funds and programmes, are actively reforming their activity: management, system of training of specialists (especially in the field of economics, law, humanities, social sciences), create quality management systems for education, introduce modern teaching technologies. In addition to it, double diploma programmes serve as a means of increasing effectiveness of their own development programmes, obtaining foreign/international accreditation, and assigning qualifications that can't be provided by national education system. Joint educational programmes can provide the means due to which students would have the opportunity to learn foreign academic and cultural experience, while HEIs would have the opportunity to develop closer institutional cooperation. Such cooperation, obviously, leads to significant expansion of funds and resources involved in educational process, rather than those available to individual educational institutions.

According to the former Minister of Education of the Republic of Belarus Sergei Maskevich: "Double diploma programme in Belarus will help to solve the problem of recognition of Belarusian higher education at international level, increasing convertability and recognition of Belarusian diplomas of higher education" [18].

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