

Supervising the execution of the SVC Consolidation program

Dr. R. Werlen, Deputy secretary general of CRUS

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If you allow me this drastic summary of history of SVC presented this morning by Prof. Levrat, The concept of Swiss Virtual Campus was elaborated in the late nineties by a working group of the Swiss University Conference. At this time the University Conference was a mixed organ with representatives of both political and academic worlds. It thus seemed natural, when the SVC impulse program started in 2000, that this organ took the operational responsibility of the program.

In 2001 however, new structures of university policy have split political and academic responsibilities. University Conference was transformed to a pure political organ, while academic responsibilities were committed to the Rector's Conference of Swiss universities, a purely academic organ.

What can be more academic than eLearning in universities? It's for this reason that, as Dr. Ischi just mentioned it, the operational responsibility of the consolidation program was transferred to the Rector's Conference. The overall responsibility remained to the University Conference as the organ enabled to takes all financial decisions for SVC as well as for all other project financed on the basis of article 20 of the law on promotion of universities.

What does it mean for Rector's Conference in the case of the consolidation program?

To answer this question, let us first have a look on the trends in which Swiss universities are evolving.

After the presentation of Prof. Jufer, you won't be surprised if I am saying that the most important element to consider is the Bologna process.

Bologna Declaration was signed shortly before begin of the impulse program. At this time very few people, if any, were aware of the impact this Declaration was going to have on European universities.

Nobody would have guessed at this time, that on December 2003, almost exactly at the begin of the consolidation program, the SUC would issue Bologna Guidelines, initiating on this way

officially the most fundamental reform, some would say revolution, Swiss universities have ever been involved in.

This process not only implies the complete renewal of all curricula in bachelors and masters and a systematic use of European credit transfer system as an accumulation credit system. As pointed out by Prof. Hotz-Hart, it also goes together with a change of paradigm, going from a logic where studies are mainly organised according to scientific and research fields – let's say a teacher's point of view - to a logic where studies are organised in curricula consisting of a coherent mix of fields, closer to a student's point of view.

This requires tremendous amount of work, at all university levels, and, of course, of financial means.

Even if the Rector's Conference quickly realised the potential of the Bologna process, its place in her Strategy continuously grew since 2000. In the strategic plan 2004-2007, Bologna reform was one objective among others, including the use of new learning technologies. It is on this basis that, as mentioned by Dr. Ischi, University Conference awarded 30 millions Swiss francs to finance initial costs of the Bologna reform. Unfortunately, no means are yet foreseen for the long-term additional functional costs, but that is an other story. From a project among others, Bologna became the kernel of the strategy 2005 – 2015 of the CRUS, in which quality of education and collaboration between universities are supposed to play a key role.

An other important aspect in university environment is the observed divergence between evolution of the number of students and evolution of public financial means available. Also federal subsidies for higher education are still growing for the period 2004-2007, there are no signs that let one hope financial means per student could stop decreasing.

In other words, if Swiss universities want to keep an internationally competitive quality of education – and the Rector's conference definitely want so – they will have to further increase their efficiency and effectiveness. This will not be possible without improving collaboration between fields in a given university as well as collaboration between universities. eLearning tools, and thus SVC courses, are particularly well adapted for collaboration between universities, as already stressed by several speakers, including during the panel discussion.

Under these conditions, renewal of teaching, limited financial means, it is extremely important to avoid the collapse scenario presented by Prof. Stucki and fulfil expectation

expressed by Mrs. Meier. From the point of view of the Rector's Conference, two points are particularly important, which are in accordance with the SVC Statement presented by Prof. Stucky:

1. on one hand, the courses of both impulse and consolidation programs (and I hope this will be close to one hundred, despite the evaluations results presented by Prof. Weber, what is still far away of the 10% of university education mentioned by Mrs. Meier) must be integrated in the Bologna curricula,
2. on the other hand, the know-how acquired during SVC programs must benefit to all universities on a sustainable way, so that further courses can still be developed after 2007, even without specific federal means, and I am referring here to the two class society mentioned by Co-Rector Nägeli.

The integration of SVC courses in curricula will be followed by a mandate in which the former coordinator, Dr. Cornelia Rizek, is playing a key role. But it is already clear, that a sustainable use of these courses in collaboration between universities also requires some infrastructure. For this purpose, universities have to quickly develop their individual as well as a national strategy regarding content servers, so that, as far as universities actually want it, an national content server, based for instance on WebCT Vista as proposed by Prof. Stucki, can be set up before end of 2007 with a long term financing scheme.

The best way to ensure sustainability of the know-how, especially in a rapidly evolving field as eLearning, is probably the development, in each university, of competence and production centres as foreseen by the execution plan of the consolidation program. Such centres seem indeed to improve the quality of projects, at least for those submitted to the 3rd series.

As you probably understood, collaboration between universities is now a day an important issue for the Rector's Conference. I would not conclude this speech without an admiring word to the collaboration achieved within SVC programs, not only between universities, including cantonal universities and federal institutes of technology – and this is not trivial if one considers the different financing mechanisms involved for SVC projects for these two types of institution – but also, as we heard from Prof. Hotz-Hart and Mr von Matt, collaboration with Universities of Applied Science. This is encouraging for the Future of a competitive higher education landscape the education country Switzerland.

Thank you for your work for in SVC programs and thank you for your attention.