



Design and implementation of joint/double degrees

Development of joint degrees and degree programmes implemented in international co-operation forms an important part of the international activities of higher education institutions. According to the Ministry of Education Recommendation issued on 12th May 2004, a 'joint degree' refers to a degree programme jointly developed and provided by more than one higher education institution, which confers one or more degree certificates. The Ministry of Education Recommendation and this memo also use the term 'joint degree' to cover what are known as 'double degrees', i.e. programmes conferring two or more degree certificates. A 'joint degree' may also be used in international contexts to refer both to a double degree and to a joint degree conferring a single certificate.

The following passages list aspects that Finnish higher education institutions designing joint degrees would do well to take into account. The memo can also be used in international co-operation as applicable. It is also available in Finnish and Swedish.

The memo was prepared at the Finnish National Board of Education (NARIC/ENIC) in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish higher education institutions and CIMO. This is the third revision of a check-list originally drawn up in 2005. The preparatory work was carried out with due consideration of international reports and recommendations.

1. Why a joint/double degree?

- Demand for a joint degree and educational needs in a broader sense
- Added value brought to existing degrees, such as potential expansion of educational provision
- Any other possible connections to existing degrees
- Objectives of a joint degree
- Links to education, research and the world of work
- Benefits for the unit/higher education institution
- Adding an international perspective, bringing quality assurance to student and teacher exchanges
- Duration and continuity of the programme

2. Co-operation within the consortium and an individual higher education institution

2.1 Co-operation partners and co-operation within the consortium

- Recognised/official/accredited higher education institutions: verify the right of the higher education institution/unit to award degrees at the projected level (and/or professionally/academically oriented degrees as applicable)
- Number of partners: not too many partners; all partners should have a clear role, such as in terms of provision of education
- Quality of partners: each partner's strengths, areas of expertise and specialisation, partners' educational provision
- Added value brought by the partners in terms of the degree delivered
- Prior experiences of co-operation facilitate programme design and implementation
- Written agreement on organisation of co-operation, responsibilities and communication between partner institutions
- Language(s) of the programme and the administrative language of co-operation

- The partners should appoint a joint management/steering group or equivalent for the programme, with representation from both teaching and administrative staff, and agree on its status, roles, remit and composition.

2.2 Co-operation within a higher education institution

- Department/faculty/study administration/international affairs, etc.: ensure the flow of information
- The necessary support and academic and administrative resources for the programme
- Confidence: commitment from the organisation and management is important and needs to be ensured
- The institution's own rules and regulations governing the curriculum, student admissions and other matters relating to completion and administration of degrees must be observed
- Internal co-operation within partner institutions should also be ensured as far as possible (co-operation should not depend on 'one contact' alone)

3. Programme resources

- Funding and continuity of funding
- External funding and each institution's liability upon expiration of external or separate funding
- Budgeting (incl. teaching, co-ordination, administration, meetings, travel expenses, marketing, recruitment, use of equipment and facilities, student and teacher mobility)
- (Human) resources for education and research; in particular, human resources for preparation and monitoring of individual study plans and for adequate tutoring
- Support services for learning and teaching, (human) resources for administration and guidance
- (Human) resources for student admissions and recruitment
- (Human) resources for programme development and evaluation
- Other resources, such as libraries, equipment, facilities
- Any possible tuition fees charged to students: the consortium should aim to establish transparent and consistent practices

4. Agreements

According to the Ministry of Education Recommendation, the agreement must include at least information about the extent of the degree programme, student admission, the rights and status of the student, the award of degree certificates, the responsibilities of each institution and the funding of the programme. Additionally, the agreement may cover administration of financial transactions, a description of the joint management/steering group, questions relating to quality assurance, procedures concerning termination of the agreement (on what terms, to what timetable; how the rights of registered students are secured) and which country's legislation will be applied in case of disputes. There may also be several agreements for different purposes.

It is advisable for the agreement to cover decision-making procedures for making changes to the programme or its implementation.

It is useful to draw up a yearly calendar for the project, indicating dates relating to student admissions, scholarship applications, etc.

5. Student admissions

5.1 Admission criteria

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- General and specific criteria for eligibility (required prior education, language skills, work or work placement experience) and any other possible requirements
- In the case of a Master's programme, for example: the fields in which qualifications conforming to the level of a university Bachelor's degree should have been completed in order to be deemed eligible
- A joint degree programme must have common/harmonised admission criteria
- National statutes and institutional admission criteria must also be complied with in terms of student selection

5.2 Admission procedures

- Selection methods (application form, recommendations, statements of purpose, interviews, entrance examination)
- Common application and selection materials
- Organisation of the application and selection process (incl. agreeing on and co-ordinating the timetables of partner institutions)
- Applicants may be assessed together; final selection is made according to each institution's own regulations
- Intake quota for each institution
- Students should address any possible complaints concerning the admission procedure to the institution that made the decision

Government Decree No. 1044/2009 on the Joint Application Procedure to Polytechnics:
Section 1

'The joint application procedure shall not be used for admissions of students to labour policy training or to education financed from the European Union's Structural Funds, nor to admissions of students transferring from another polytechnic or those completing a double degree.

'A polytechnic may decide to exclude a specific adult education programme or foreign-language degree programme from the joint application system.'

5.3 The student's status

- Determine the student's home institution
- The student's status at other partner institutions, including relevant rights and services (any possible fees)
- The student's right to study
- The student's right to belong to a student union/association
- Students must be informed of their own status at each partner institution

6. Content, structure and learning outcomes of a degree programme

The organisers of a joint degree programme must have sufficient knowledge about higher education in the other participating countries, including statutes, degree structures and degree certificates. Partners need to determine the type of degree to be created from the early stages of programme design. From the perspective of Finnish higher education institutions, it is important for students to receive a formal degree upon completion of the programme.

- The starting point for programme design is the definition of learning outcomes
- The academic content and methodology will be agreed on the basis of the learning outcomes

- One key consideration for joint design work is the extents to which the programme will be based on existing provision and on new courses specifically designed for the programme
- Scope of the programme, credits
- Content of the programme, such as possible core courses compulsory for everyone; optional courses
- Opportunities to study national languages; language studies
- Any possible internship/work placement that may be included in the programme (duration, location, supervision and guidance, credits)
- Studies abroad and relevant credit transfer; the extent to which the degree may or must include studies taken abroad and their timing as part of the programme
- Scope, tutoring and assessment of a thesis/final project; relevant statutes in the participating countries and partner institutions
- Eligibility for further study provided by the programme
- Connections of the programme to research
- Any possible professional qualifications/eligibility that may be provided by the programme in each country, as applicable
- Compatibility/connection of learning outcomes with/to national qualifications frameworks in particular, as well as with the European Qualifications Framework
- Placing the degree in the national qualifications frameworks of the participating countries

7. Organising the degree programme

It is useful to assign both academic and administrative responsibilities for the programme to a specific unit and individual.

7.1 Questions relating to mobility

According to the Ministry of Education Recommendation, all joint degree students must complete a significant proportion of their studies at a minimum of one foreign partner institution, and studies taken abroad will be counted in full towards the Finnish degree.

- The partner institutions must define what constitutes a ‘significant proportion’ (workload/ECTS or a time-related definition) and what constitutes studies at a certain higher education institution (distance learning, jointly organised intensive courses or similar, or a jointly supervised final project).
- Teacher mobility
- Student mobility: it is advisable to agree on the terms and conditions of mobility, such as whether passing exams/courses affects mobility and mobility plans.
- Organisation of mobility, including documentation, funding, insurance, visa and residence permit issues for students from third countries
- Questions relating to reception, accommodation and orientation of students and teachers, etc.

7.2 Forms and methods of teaching, student assessment

- Ways of ensuring achievement of learning outcomes
- Multiform, virtual teaching, lectures, seminars, practicals, etc.
- Ways of ascertaining teachers’ language proficiency
- Any possible alternative ways of taking courses/exams; possibilities to retake exams

- Student assessment criteria and grading scales (national or institutional/unit-specific regulations; transparency important)
- Guidance for students about assessment criteria and exam procedures

7.3 Guidance counselling

- ISP (individual study plan)/learning agreement
- recognition of prior studies and other learning
- Questions relating to optional courses and study performance
- Monitoring and control of students' progress
- Information and agreement on the maximum time allowed for completing the programme and procedures in the event that a student fails to complete the studies within the specified timeframe

8. Degree, degree certificate and Diploma Supplement

The degree to be conferred must fall within the official degree system of at least one of the countries participating in provision of the programme. If those completing the programme are to be awarded several degrees, it is advisable to determine the status of each degree within each country's national education system.

With respect to higher education degrees, the starting point of the Finnish system of higher education is that higher education degrees are always awarded by an institute of higher education. If a Finnish higher education institution awards a Finnish degree, the partners will comply with Finnish legislation governing higher education degrees as well as any possible internal institutional regulations in all matters relating to programme provision and award of the degree. The higher education institution awarding the degree certificate is responsible for the quality of the degree and for ensuring that the degree fulfils the criteria specified.

Section 3 of the Government Decree on University Degrees (794/2004) states as follows: '...Education leading to a higher education degree may also be provided as international co-operation.' If a Finnish university planning a joint degree does not have a Master's programme in the subject(s) concerned or if the planned degree does not fall within the university's educational responsibilities, the Master's programme leading to the planned joint degree must be included in a proposal concerning Master's programmes submitted to the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Section 4 of the Government Decree on University Degrees (794/2004, as amended by Decree 1136/2009) states as follows: 'A Finnish- or Swedish-language degree certificate shall also be awarded for a degree completed in a language other than Finnish or Swedish according to section 11(2) of the Universities Act, accompanied by a Finnish or Swedish degree title included in the Annex hereto, as well as by the English degree title mentioned therein.'

Government Decree No. 423/2005 amending Section 3 of the Government Decree on Polytechnics (351/2003) lists the English-language titles of polytechnic Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

8.1 Degree certificate

- The partners must determine whether to award one or more national degree certificates; signatories of the degree certificate(s).

- Details included on a degree certificate: the certificate should indicate the most essential details (incl. participation in a joint degree programme and information on any possible other certificates awarded for the same studies); the studies completed and additional information are recorded in the Diploma Supplement.
- A Finnish higher education institution will award degree certificates to students that it has admitted to a degree programme, provided that they have completed their studies according to the requirements.
- Degree certificates may only be awarded to students admitted to complete a degree.
- A higher education institution may only award certificates for degrees that it is authorised to confer.
- If an international joint degree consortium involves more than one Finnish higher education institution, only one of them may award degree certificates.

Students who have taken a degree within the Finnish higher education system are always awarded a degree certificate in Finnish or Swedish. In addition to this, students can be awarded a degree certificate in English with the same contents. The national legislation does not preclude foreign institutes of higher education from awarding degree certificates in conjunction with Finnish institutes of higher education. Institutes of higher education may have their own policies on degree certificates and the practical issues relating to them.

In addition to the national degree certificate, it is also possible to award a joint diploma for joint/double degrees.

8.2 Diploma Supplement (DS)

The Finnish National Board of Education has prepared instructions for drawing up Diploma Supplements concerning Finnish degrees to support the work of higher education institutions. A reference to the joint degrees must be included at least in the following sections of the Diploma Supplement:

2.1 Name of the qualification: in case of a joint degree, this must be indicated here.

2.3 Name and status of the institution awarding the qualification:

- Indication of the higher education institutions involved in the programme
- A reference to the quality assurance system applied
- If the degree certificate has been jointly awarded by several higher education institutions or if another higher education institution has awarded another degree certificate for the same studies, this must be indicated
- Explanation in the event that the name of the higher education institution has changed.

2.4 Name and status of the institution (if different from 2.3) administering studies: if a single higher education institution confers the degree for studies provided by several institutions, all higher education institutions involved in provision of studies must be listed here.

4.3 Programme details: in case of a joint degree, it is advisable to explain which studies have been completed at each institution, unless this is clearly indicated on the transcript of (ECTS) records.

6.1 Additional information: a description of the joint degree, information about mobility involved in the programme and links to further information, for example.

9. Information about and marketing of the degree programme: prospectus, website

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- Provision of open and transparent information about joint/double degrees is important both for students' legal protection and from the perspective of the authorities: a degree certificate and its Diploma Supplement must indicate the status of the degree within the national system, eligibility for further studies provided by the degree, etc.
- Ascertaining the accuracy and clarity of programme information, consistent terminology and harmonised programme descriptions at all partner institutions
- It is advisable to reserve time for strategic planning and implementation of marketing efforts
- All parties at the higher education institution play their own roles and marketing must be directed at all levels, including the global level, Europe, the Nordic countries, the national level, rectors, teachers, students, alumni, etc.
- Joint marketing of all partner institutions and each institution's own marketing
- The partner institutions would do well to agree whether enquiries about the programme will be answered centrally or separately by each institution.
- Target audience for information and marketing
- Geographically important regions and student recruitment base; is the aim to attract certain types of students, such as mainly from partner institutions and/or from certain regions?
- Marketing channels, such as trade fairs, exchange teachers/students from partner institutions, daily newspapers, professional magazines, Internet marketing, international alumni relations, mentoring, etc.

10. Quality assurance, programme monitoring and evaluation

The quality assurance of joint/double degrees is important and involves considerations such as the following points:

- All partner institutions need to be officially recognised higher education institutions in their own countries and entitled to confer degrees of the relevant level.
- In addition to institutional quality assurance systems, joint/double degrees require a common quality assurance system covering all parties, including self-evaluation and possibly some aspects listed here (sections 1–9).
- Student representation needs to be specifically taken into account in the quality assurance systems
- Means of obtaining direct feedback and development of the programme include a system of student and employer feedback and alumni panels.
- In evaluation, attention needs to focus on achievement of learning outcomes.
- A reference should be made to the quality assurance systems applied (or to those applied nationally) in section 2.3 of the Diploma Supplement.

Further information about quality assurance of joint degrees:

- ENQA report 2005: Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (www.enqa.net), also includes recommendations for higher education institutions, which may be used in quality assurance for joint degrees
- ENQA Occasional Paper 9/2006: Methodological report: Transnational European Evaluation Project II (TEEP II), including a recommendation entitled 'A proposal for a methodology for evaluating joint master's degree programmes'
- EUA Guidelines for Quality Enhancement in European Joint Master Programmes, Guidelines for Higher Education Institutions (2006): www.eua.be
- UNESCO/OECD: Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education (2005)

Reports and recommendations relating to joint degrees and recognition of qualifications:

- UNESCO/Council of Europe: Revised Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (2007)

- UNESCO/Council of Europe: Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees (2004)
- Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications (2010)
- ECA (TEAM2 project): The recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes (2010)

Quality assurance and audits of higher education institutions in Finland:

- Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council: www.kka.fi