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The design and implementation of international joint degrees / the degree and degree certificate

A higher education degree falling within the Finnish higher education degree system is always conferred by a higher education institution. The higher education institution awarding the degree is responsible for the quality of the degree and for ensuring that the degree fulfils the criteria specified. When a Finnish higher education institution awards a Finnish degree, Finnish legislation governing higher education degrees and also possible institutional regulations have to be complied with in all matters relating to programme provision and award of the degree. Also programmes that are implemented as international cooperation must fall within the educational responsibilities of the higher education institution.

Section 3(2) of the Government Decree on University Degrees and Specialisation Programmes (794/2004) states as follows: *“Education leading to a higher education degree can be organised jointly as international cooperation. Studies leading to one or more degrees can also be organised jointly in cooperation with one or more Finnish or foreign universities.”*

Section 1(3) of The Government Decree on Universities of Applied Sciences (1129/2014) states as follows: *“Studies leading to a degree can be organised jointly as international cooperation. Studies leading to one or more degrees can also be organised jointly in cooperation with one or more foreign higher education institutions or Finnish universities of applied sciences.”*

From the perspective of recognition of qualifications, it is important for a joint degree programme to lead to at least one degree that conforms with the national system of higher education degrees in one of the participating countries. If upon completion of the programme several degrees are awarded, it is necessary to determine the status of each degree within the national system of higher education degrees in each participating country.

Degree certificate

The participating higher education institutions must decide what and what kinds of degree certificates and other documents shall be issued upon completion of an international joint degree programme. If the higher education institutions award a joint degree certificate, they need to decide on the content of the degree certificate, its signatories and the layout.

Provisions on university degree certificates are laid down in section 26 of the Government Decree on University Degrees and Specialisation Programmes (794/2004). Provisions on foreign-language degrees are included in section 26(3 and 4) of the same Decree, which states as follows: *“For a degree completed in a language other than Finnish or Swedish in accordance with the Government Decree on University Degrees section 11(2), a Finnish or Swedish language degree certificate shall also be awarded, accompanied by a Finnish or Swedish degree title included in the Annexe thereto, as well as by the English degree title mentioned therein. If the studies leading to the degree have been organised in accordance with section 3(2) as leading to one or more degrees, organised jointly by one or more Finnish or foreign universities, the degree certificate shall contain information on all the degrees awarded on the basis of the same studies, the degree certificates awarded with reference to the degrees completed and the universities awarding the degrees.”*



Provisions on university of applied sciences degree certificates are laid down in section 10 of the Government Decree on Universities of Applied Sciences (1129/2014). Under the provisions on foreign-language degrees in section 10(1 and 2), "... For a degree completed in a language other than Finnish or Swedish a degree certificate in Finnish or Swedish shall also be awarded, accompanied by the Finnish or Swedish degree title listed in the annexe, as well as by the English degree title mentioned therein. If the studies leading to the degree have been organised in accordance with section 1(3) as leading to one or more degrees, organised jointly by one or more Finnish or foreign higher education institutions, the degree certificate shall contain information on all the degrees awarded on the basis of the same studies and the higher education institutions awarding the degree.

With regard to degrees falling within the Finnish higher education degree system, the award of the degree certificates must comply with national legislation and possible institutional policies of the higher education institution involved.

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. A Finnish higher education institution may only award certificates for degrees that it is authorised to confer. National legislation does not preclude degree certificates from being awarded by one or more foreign higher education institutions alongside a Finnish higher education institution.

If a Finnish higher education institution, together with other higher education institutions participating in the joint degree programme, awards a joint foreign-language degree certificate for a degree completed in a foreign language, it must also award a degree certificate with the same content in Finnish or Swedish, according to its language of instruction and examination. A degree certificate may also be bilingual or multilingual. A bilingual or multilingual degree certificate must contain the same information in the language of the joint degree programme, the language of instruction and examination at the Finnish higher education institution (Finnish or Swedish), as well as other possible languages.

Besides the degree certificate(s), graduates from a joint degree programme may also be awarded a joint certificate as additional information. However, this certificate does not constitute a degree certificate referred to in Finnish legislation.

The degree certificates must clearly indicate that they are awarded for a joint degree programme. Furthermore, details of any other degree certificates that may be awarded for the same studies must be indicated on the degree certificate(s). Further details about the studies completed and other additional information are recorded in the Diploma Supplement.

Diploma Supplement (DS)

To support the work of higher education institutions, the Finnish National Board of Education has prepared instructions for drawing up Diploma Supplements concerning Finnish degrees. The instructions take into account also joint degrees. The instructions can be found at the Europass website: http://www.europassi.fi/education_institutions/diploma_supplement.