

Cross-Newtonk Collaboration

Jointly-Awarded PhD project

The *Universitas 21* Jointly-Awarded PhD Project aims to foster internationalisation of graduate research programmes and enhance student mobility and exchange – both key drivers in the globalisation of research education. As universities develop their internationalisation strategies and demand for international higher education grows, collaborative undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes are increasing rapidly. Collaborative degree programmes lead to a more sustainable type of relationship than many other internationalisation strategies and bring important academic benefits.

In May 2008, a Jointly-Awarded PhD Working Group chaired by Professor Mary Bownes, Vice-Principal Research Training, University of Edinburgh presented its first report at the U21 Presidents' Meeting in Dublin. The challenges and benefits of both joint and double PhD models were addressed and it was agreed that a more detailed proposal should be developed for discussion at the Meeting of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies in Hong Kong in November 2008.

Between Dublin and Hong Kong the project made excellent progress and attempted to address the many regulatory and governance challenges faced. The advantages far outweigh the obstacles and include:

- international student mobility;
- knowledge transfer and sharing of research, learning and resources;
- international research collaboration;
- recognition of partner university qualifications in other countries;
- employment prospects for students;
- research as a career for high-calibre students;
- enhanced recruitment of excellent graduate students;
- access to additional sources of student financial support.

One of the main challenges has been addressing the different models of collaborative programmes acceptable by the partner universities. Collaborative international degree programmes can take the form of both double and jointly-awarded programmes. However the terminology used can be unclear and confusing. For the purposes of clarity and in the context of the U21 project the following definitions apply:

- jointly-awarded PhD in which the student receives one degree, awarded and jointly recognised by both institutions. This may be one or two parchments but clearly states that the award is joint and awarded for one piece of work. A jointly-awarded PhD is normally completed in the same time period of time as a PhD from either partner institution;

A jointly-awarded degree programme awards one joint qualification upon completion of the collaborative programme requirements established by the partner institutions.

- double PhD in which the student receives two degrees awarded separately by two different institutions for one piece of work. The duration of study is normally extended beyond the length of a single degree programme in order to meet the requirements of both the partners.

A double degree programme awards two individual qualifications at equivalent levels upon completion of the collaborative programme requirements established by the two partner institutions.

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Models vary between different countries raising questions about accreditation, recognition, quality assurance and legitimacy, e.g. government approval for jointly-awarded degrees is required in countries where universities are not autonomous. In some countries, national regulations may not allow a university to confer a degree jointly, especially in association with a foreign university.

At the meeting of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies in Hong Kong, the detailed nuances of the project were discussed at lively sessions. Everyone was very committed and enthusiastic about the way forward. A lot of discussion revolved around the definition of what is meant by double and jointly-awarded PhDs and there was clearly confusion over the often ambiguous terminology. Although tough going, the outcome in the end was that all partners agreed the following terminology in the context of this project:

A jointly-awarded PhD is a qualification conferred upon a student on completion of a collaborative programme established by the partner institutions and is characterised by:

- *meeting the academic requirements of both universities;*
- *agreement regarding a lead university;*
- *joint supervision;*
- *a single degree awarded for one PhD thesis;*
- *parchment(s) issued which indicate that there has been joint supervision.*

It was agreed that U21 universities do not want to offer two degrees for one piece of work, although in some countries there is little choice due to their university governance. Some universities are required to offer a separate certificate, one from each partner. Others are permitted to put both logos on a single degree certificate – however, all certificates would clearly state that the degree was jointly supervised and name both partners.

A way forward was agreed which allowed the group to concentrate on the wording of an overarching Memorandum of Understanding for jointly-awarded PhDs for the Presidents to sign in Korea in 2009. Those present were sufficiently committed that after hard individual work on the high-level memorandum overnight, a second session was timetabled on day two to proceed with this point. It was important to agree the high-level priorities before the legalities of individual agreements could be examined. Partners left the meeting with a new draft overarching MoU that all those able to offer jointly-awarded degrees felt would satisfy their university's needs.

The individual student agreements are going to be complex as they will contain all the specific details on supervision, coursework, thesis and examination arrangements. It was agreed that the Working Group would proceed to work on a template once the Presidents in each university were briefed by their VP/Dean/Director.

The Working Group still needs to produce a suitable MoU for double degrees for those universities unable to link into the preferred jointly-awarded degree initiative.

The challenge now facing the U21 partners is to establish a common understanding of joint PhD programmes and address the many academic governance issues that will arise between the different national regulatory frameworks. The goal will be to provide a collaborative PhD programme that is respected and recognised worldwide by students, universities and employers.

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