



UNIVERSITETS- OG HØGSKOLERÅDET

The Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions

**Norwegian Association of
Higher Education Institutions**

Handbook on Joint Degrees

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Foreword

The Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR) published the first version of the joint degree handbook in 2008. The handbook was based on the report from a working group which had evaluated joint degrees and cotutelle agreements the previous year on commission from UHR's education committee.¹ The handbook underwent a minor revision in 2009,² but later UHR wanted a more thorough review of its contents and assigned the task to the "joint degree team" at the University of Oslo.

In the process of revising the handbook, we have largely drawn on our own experience working with joint degrees. The handbook is written with the master's level in mind, and does not address special challenges related to the bachelor's and Ph.D. levels. The handbook is intended to serve as help and inspiration for the joint degree process, not as a detailed reference manual.

The handbook could not have been written without assistance from colleagues at the University of Oslo and partners at the other institutions, the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU) and the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). We wish to extend a special thanks to Etelka Tamminen Dahl of the University of Bergen and Frank Moe of SIU for all of their input throughout the process, as well as to Rachel Glasser and Birgitte Levy of UHR for their excellent follow-up work.

Joint degrees require a coordinated effort from academic environments and institutional administrations, and we hope that the handbook will be beneficial to everyone. However, the handbook is merely an overview, and we encourage everyone to check the references and regulations closely for any updates. The reference list points to more material for those who want to learn more.

Good luck!

Ten Golden Rules for New Joint Master's Programmes³

1. Know why you are setting up the programme.
2. Choose your partners carefully.
3. Develop well-defined programme goals and student-learning outcomes with your network partners.
4. Make sure that all the institutions (and not just academic colleagues) fully support the goals and objectives of the programme.
5. Ensure that sufficient academic and administrative staff resources are involved in the programme.
6. Ensure that a sustainable funding strategy for the programme is in place.
7. Take care that information about the programme is easily accessible to students.
8. Organise and plan sufficient meetings in advance.
9. Develop language policy and encourage local language learning.
10. Decide who is responsible for what.

¹ The working group was chaired by Ingunn Sandaker of Akershus University College and comprised of Etelka Tamminen Dahl of the University of Bergen, Shalini P. Frøiland of the University of Stavanger, Kåre Sandvik of Buskerud University College, Anne Marie Snekvik of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Jonny Roar Sundnes of the University of Oslo and Birgitte Levy of UHR.

² The revision was carried out by Anne Marie Snekvik, Jonny Roar Sundnes and Birgitte Levy from the working group.

³ Taken from the EUA's report *Developing Joint Master's Programmes for Europe* (2004).

1. Basis for a joint degree

Joint degrees between educational institutions in several different countries can develop and enhance study programmes and academic environments. Joint degrees can increase the attractiveness and relevance of study programmes that address new needs, and they can provide a framework for connecting expertise to fields that require shoring up nationally.

For students, a joint degree is not only highly relevant for working life, but it also provides new academic perspectives and opportunities for studying abroad in different countries. This can make it easier for students to be more in tune with the international labour market than if they held a national degree.

For institutions and academic environments, joint degrees involve strategic cooperation on education and research. In the long term, joint degrees may also increase transparency across national borders and decrease differences between educational systems, thereby facilitating broader, closer international cooperation.

How to cooperate

Successful joint degrees can generate great added value for both the academic environments and the students. However, it may be beneficial to consider other forms of cooperation as well, and it is important that institutions choose the type that is best suited for achieving the objective of the collaboration. A study abroad agreement may be the best tool for sending students out into the world, whereas an ordinary exchange agreement creates more reciprocity in the exchange. If institutions want to develop their cooperation gradually, other types of programme cooperation can be a step towards a full joint degree, e.g. institutional programmes with integrated international components or joint programmes with separate degrees.

Basis for cooperation

Establishing a joint degree is an elaborate process, and administering such a degree involves aspects not found in ordinary study programmes. Consequently, the basis for the collaboration must have a strategic foundation and the value added must be clear for both the students and the institutions. Joint degrees should build further on sound academic environments and utilise each other's advantages to create a stronger study programme than the institutions are able to achieve alone. Joint degrees must be financially sustainable and relevant vis-à-vis working life and society at large.

Joint degrees cannot be solo projects, but must have their basis in all levels of the organisation – the department, faculty/division and institutional leadership. It is also crucial that the support system is in place by involving the administration in the planning process. The climate of cooperation within the network should be taken into account when assessing whether the joint degree project can be realised. The likelihood that unforeseen problems can be solved through consensus is greatest if cooperation is already good. A network whose members know each other well, have effective, open communication, and work well together has the greatest potential for success.

2. Definition of a joint degree

There are many ways to define a joint degree depending on the purpose of the definition. For example, the Erasmus Mundus Programme and most other schemes that fund the development of joint degrees have formulated their own definitions, but these have not corresponded with each other. This section does not review the many alternatives, but it does propose a definition that can serve as the basis for activities related to joint degrees in Norway.

The definition that serves as a guidepost for Norwegian institutions' work on joint degrees is based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region was entered into between countries in UNESCO and the Council of Europe to promote greater academic mobility across national borders. Norway ratified the convention in April 1999, and it entered into force in Norway on 1 June 1999.

In 2004, the Lisbon Recognition Convention was expanded to include recognition of joint degrees and incorporated a definition of joint degrees:

A joint degree should, for the purposes of this Recommendation, be understood as referring to a higher education qualification issued jointly by at least two or more higher education institutions or jointly by one or more higher education institutions and other awarding bodies, on the basis of a study programme developed and/or provided jointly by the higher education institutions, possibly also in cooperation with other institutions. A joint degree may be issued as

- a. a joint diploma in addition to one or more national diplomas,*
- b. a joint diploma issued by the institutions offering the study programme in question without being accompanied by any national diploma,*
- c. one or more national diplomas issued officially as the only attestation of the joint qualification in question.*

The term *qualification* is used in this context about a degree, diploma or other proof issued by a competent authority (such as an educational institution) and that verifies that a higher education programme has been completed.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention's definition of a joint degree is broad in scope, whereas the definition used in the European Area of Recognition Manual is narrower. The manual states that a joint degree is documented with a single document that verifies completion of a joint programme, that the document is signed by the competent authorities from each institution and that it replaces the respective national qualifications (EAR Manual, page 66).

The following definition of a joint degree is used for the purposes of this handbook:

A joint degree is a qualification awarded by at least two cooperating institutions on the basis of a study programme developed and offered jointly by the institutions. A joint degree should be documented with a joint diploma to the extent this is legally possible.

3. Academic recognition (accreditation)

Academic accreditation of the study programme is one of the most critical issues when establishing a joint degree. It is essential that the parties are well versed in their own country's and their own institution's regulations and that the coordinators of joint degree projects consult with the proper units at their respective institutions.

In Norway, the general provisions on accreditation of degrees are found in Sections 3-2 and 3-3 of the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges. In addition, three main regulations are important for issues related to accreditation:

- Regulations of 16 December 2005 on degrees and professional education programmes, protected titles and nominal length of study at universities and university colleges (regulation on degrees), approved by the Ministry of Education and Research. The regulations state which degrees each institution has a right to confer.
- Regulations of 1 February 2010 on quality assurance and quality development in higher education and vocational education (regulation on quality), approved by the Ministry of Education and Research. The regulations state that universities and university colleges may award degrees in cooperation with other Norwegian or international institutions (joint degrees).
- Regulations of 28 February 2013 on oversight of educational quality in higher education (regulation on oversight of study programmes), established by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). The regulations lay down the requirements for the quality assurance system and standards and criteria for accreditation of study programmes.

It is also important to be familiar with the regulations of 10 April 2006 on accreditation of higher education (regulations on accreditation), established by the Ministry of Education and Research. The regulations state the requirements on the number of credits that must be completed at an institution when awarding degrees alone or together with other institutions. See also the section on economics and financing.

Institutions have the same opportunity to establish joint degrees as they do to establish study programmes for which the institution has sole responsibility:

- Norwegian partners that have the authority to recognise study programmes at the relevant level will also use the ordinary procedures for accreditation of joint degrees.
- Norwegian partners that are not authorised to establish study programmes at the relevant level must apply to NOKUT for accreditation of their portion of the joint degree. If NOKUT accredits a master's programme, the institution must also apply to the Ministry for approval to establish the programme. This applies even if the institution already has the right to confer other master's degrees.

For more information about the terms and conditions related to NOKUT's accreditation of study programmes, please refer to NOKUT's applicant handbook.

For more information about the agreement structure, please refer to Section 6.

4. Timeline for development of a joint degree

There are many ways to organise the tasks involved in establishing a joint degree, but this handbook is based on an outline of the trajectory of a joint degree implemented under the JOI.CON Training Project (cf. reference list). The various phases of the joint degree process may be categorised as follows:

- Investigate (why?)
- Develop (how?)
- Implement
- Evaluate and adjust
- Terminate

The purpose of this overview is to outline the trajectory of a joint degree without going into detail about the factors mentioned. For a more detailed discussion, please see the other sections of this handbook.

4.1. Investigate

Developing a new joint degree requires time and thought, and it is crucial both to ensure that the project has the support of relevant actors at all the institutions and to set aside sufficient time for groundwork. The key questions to ask in this phase are why one wants to establish a joint degree and whether the cooperating institutions have the ability to carry it out. It involves investigating the pre-requisites for cooperation, selecting the partners with care, and securing academic and administrative support for the project. The most important message in this phase is “start early”!

In order to succeed, both the academic environment and the administration must be interested in developing the study programme, and key academic and administrative personnel for the project at each partner institution should be identified. The idea of establishing a joint degree usually comes from the academic environments, but the leadership in the basic unit must be brought in at an early phase to assess the interest in evaluating a joint degree. Then the faculty and institution should take a decision about further developing the project. These issues should be clarified at the other institutions as well.

A joint degree will often require more resources than an ordinary study programme in both the development and operation phases. It is therefore crucial to secure adequate resources for the joint degree and to be cognisant of any opportunity to acquire external financial resources. Funding sources may have early deadlines and long processing times.

If the investigation shows that a joint degree is feasible, it is useful to state the parties’ desire for further cooperation in a Letter of Intent (LOI). Under an LOI, the parties involved are only obligated to explore the possibility of establishing a joint degree, and there is no guarantee that the study programme will be launched.

4.2. Develop

In this phase, it is clarified that all of the partners want to take part in the joint degree and it is time to specify the plans. It is essential that all of the partners have identified key individuals who will be responsible for the project, while at the same time it may be necessary to draw on other expertise

within the organisations. The person who negotiates on behalf of an institution must be familiar with his or her own local guidelines, both with regard to the opportunities and the limitations these entail. Do not expect other institutions to be familiar with these, but do expect the partners to understand their own institution's framework.

In this phase, the partners will divide up the tasks related to the joint degree among themselves. Who will be the coordinator? How will the cooperative bodies be organised and how will cooperation among the partners take place? How will the administrative support processes be organised?

The development phase also includes the preparation of a draft of a programme description, detailed cooperation agreement and budget. The cooperation agreement and programme description together comprise the contractual framework between the parties in the consortium, and the content of these documents must be arrived at through negotiation among the parties. The content of the programme description is significant for the content of the cooperation agreement, meaning that the work involved in drawing up the programme description and cooperation agreement must be done simultaneously.

When planning a joint degree, it may be useful to prepare a “comparison table” which shows relevant practice, regulations, etc. for each partner in various areas, based on a model from the JOI.CON project (www.joiman.eu). Note that the examples on the project's website are not intended to be used as a template, but rather to provide inspiration.

4.3. Implement

When a draft of the agreement documents is ready, the joint degree must be formally approved by each partner within the framework for accreditation in each of the countries. When approval has been obtained, the assessment is then complete, and it is time to implement the plans. It is critical that the partners contact relevant units/persons at their own institutions with regard to deadlines and internal procedures as quickly as possible after it is certain the joint degree will be launched.

Information and recruitment activities will come first, then procedures for receiving and processing applications for admission. This will be the first test of whether the programme design agreed on by the parties is expedient and whether the cooperative bodies are working as intended. Who processes the applications? How will they be processed? Where will the students send inquiries and who will respond?

The further practical implementation of the programme should be discussed and agreed on as early as possible. The parties should draw up a check list or implementation plan for the joint degree in which technical-administrative tasks are scheduled and responsibility is assigned to institutions and units at the institutions. It is especially important to give due consideration to activities that affect the mobility of the students.

The administrative procedures and routines must be adapted both before commencement of studies and during the period of study. This applies to the functionality of the electronic systems used in study programme administration as well as to operations and logistics, such as sending information material, gathering documentation, student registration, issuing student attestations, academic supervision, registration for examinations, etc.

It may be beneficial to prepare a student handbook that makes it easier for students to familiarise themselves with the course of study and with special conditions in each country and each institution. It will be crucial to give students good information about mobility and housing, in addition to general information about contact points and support services. A handbook of this type will also help to clarify the level of service that students can expect at the various institutions.

4.4. Evaluate and adjust

The parties should draw up a joint plan for quality assurance that incorporates the relevant components of the institutions' quality assurance systems. Such a plan will be included either as part of the cooperation agreement or as a separate document.

An evaluation of the study programme must be conducted during the course of the programme and upon its completion. It is important to get the students', instructors' and partners' views on the programme at an early stage so that it is possible to go in and make adjustments if necessary. The evaluation should encompass both the academic programme and the administrative implementation.

It is especially interesting to get feedback on whether the joint degree actually gives the students and working life the planned added value since the programme is offered by multiple institutions. If added value is found, the joint degree will have an advantage in future marketing of the programme and recruitment of new students. If it is difficult to identify the added value, the entire programme should be reviewed with a critical eye.

If the joint degree is dependent on external funding, but evaluations show that it delivers good results for students, institutions and working life, it will be important to keep constant watch for potential ways of continuing the joint degree after the possibilities of external funding are exhausted.

4.5. Terminate

It is not a goal in itself for a study programme to last indefinitely, and study programmes are terminated for many different reasons. In such cases, it is critical to take care of the students in the programme who have not yet completed their studies. The same applies if one of the parties withdraws from the programme. The remaining students must have the opportunity to complete their studies, possibly with a new partner institution, under the same terms and conditions as previously. The cooperation agreement should contain a paragraph about termination and discontinuation of the joint degree.

5. Regulations

As a general rule, the same regulations and the same requirements will apply to joint degrees as to other study programmes. To ensure the quality and sustainability of the administration of a joint degree, it should be integrated into the institution's ordinary routines and systems to the extent possible.

The institutions cannot normally grant exemptions from national regulations on admission, degrees, study programmes and examinations. This means that every joint degree involving a Norwegian institution will have some absolute requirements. For example, a Norwegian institution cannot deviate from a degree's nominal length of study or the size of a master's thesis.

This also applies to the general regulations on case administration in the Public Administration Act and associated regulations. Administration related to a joint degree must follow the same rules and standards as for ordinary study programmes, including quality assurance, equal treatment and predictability for the students. If provisions cannot be applied directly, they must be applied to the extent possible, and when in doubt they must be applied in a way that benefits the students.

The institutions' own regulations are established in keeping with the framework conditions set out in national regulations. The institutions may therefore also choose to deviate from the regulations they themselves have established, provided that any decisions on special schemes are taken by the proper authorities at the institution. If an institution's board has established a set of regulations, it is also the institution's board that must grant an exemption from these regulations. If the director has established a procedure, it is also the director who must grant an exemption from this procedure.

It can be beneficial to add "vents" in the institutional regulations that ensure a smoother process when joint degrees are established. For example, a rector or a director in certain areas and under certain conditions may be given the authority to deviate from the institution's ordinary regulations. One example of this may be the language requirement; even though the institution's ordinary master's degree has a particular language requirement, it may be necessary to accept a different requirement when entering into an agreement on a joint degree.

Areas in which the institutions must be particularly vigilant include, but are not limited to:

- Admission to studies (e.g. university and university college admissions certification and language requirement)
- Structure of study programmes and degrees (e.g. length of the master's thesis)
- Regulations regarding examination (e.g. explanation of marks, appeals, re-take of examinations, cheating)
- Case administration and appeal of individual decisions (e.g. specific recognition of courses taken at other universities and leaves of absence)
- Exchange of information
- Quality assurance

6. Agreement structure

There is no pre-established or ideal way to organise a joint degree. Task distribution within a joint degree consortium must be agreed on in each case and be based on the academic and administrative pre-requisites of each participating institution.

A detailed, customised cooperation agreement (also known in this context as a consortium agreement) and a programme description for the joint degree are the main components of the contract between the parties in the consortium. Norwegian institutions must satisfy a set of national requirements regarding an agreement on a joint degree, but otherwise the partners themselves decide what the agreement should consist of.

In the start-up phase, many networks choose to sign an LOI to confirm all of the partners' desire to collaborate, and often there is a need for exchange agreements (e.g. Erasmus). It may also be beneficial to prepare a student contract that establishes the students' rights and obligations vis-à-vis the institutions participating in the consortium.

6.1. National requirements

The national requirements for agreements on joint degrees are set out in the regulations on quality from the Ministry of Education and Research and chapter 3 on academic accreditation in the regulations on oversight of study programmes from NOKUT. The Ministry's and NOKUT's regulations apply to joint degrees at all levels.

Institutions offering joint degrees must enter into an agreement with the cooperating institutions which regulates distribution of responsibility among the parties, including awarding of degrees and design of diplomas.

The institutions must ensure that the cooperating institutions are accredited or publicly recognised as authorised to provide higher education in the country in question and that the study programme to be included in the joint degree is accredited as higher education at the level of the joint degree. In other words, all parts of the joint degree must be accredited.

It must be made clear which parts of the study programme the cooperating institutions are responsible for, that all parts of the study programme must comprise a cohesive whole, and that routines for quality assurance and development of the study programme in its entirety must be in place. The parts offered by Norwegian institutions must satisfy the criteria for accreditation of studies at the relevant degree level.

The students must be ensured a period of study of substantial duration at the cooperating institutions. The phrase "of substantial duration" is not described further, as this may vary with the type of degree and country.

If cooperation on the joint degree is terminated, the institution must sign an agreement with another institution that can assume the academic responsibility for ensuring that the students will be able to complete their studies and sit for examinations, or the institution must take other measures that allow the students to complete their studies. Such measures must be approved by NOKUT in cases where NOKUT has accredited the study programme in question.

6.2. Letter of Intent

In many cases it may be beneficial to sign a Letter of Intent (LOI) at the beginning of the process to demonstrate that the institution takes the matter seriously. Some funding programmes require an LOI. An LOI is a brief, general document stating that the parties are obligated to work on the plans to establish a joint degree. The document is normally signed by the rector or similar, and possibly by relevant deans or faculty heads as well.

6.3. Cooperation agreement

When institutions cooperate on a joint degree, they assume responsibility for providing the students with a programme that is quality assured in its entirety. Thus, all the institutions that participate are responsible for the entire study programme, not just the part of the programme offered by the institution directly.

If possible, all matters that must be regulated by an agreement must be included in the cooperation agreement, except for any letters of intent signed at an earlier stage and any Erasmus exchange agreement or Nordplus network, if relevant. The agreement may have attachments, such as a programme description.

The minimum requirements set by the Ministry are formulated in a general manner, and the question of what the cooperation agreement will contain in detail will therefore vary from consortium to consortium and be dependent on the regulations in the various countries. It is difficult to recommend using a fixed template, as each agreement must be customised for the relevant study programme and the relevant partners in the consortium.

The following is a list of potential items that the agreement may contain based on a sample of joint degree agreements; see the examples on the EACEA's Erasmus Mundus website and the JOI.CON project report. Most of the agreements seem to cover most of the items, but the layout, wording and level of detail may vary. This is not meant to serve as a template, but as an overview of topics that may be relevant in a joint degree agreement.

The consortium's governing bodies

The agreement should describe the body (bodies) that will govern the joint degree/consortium, its composition and mandate/function, and possibly also state the frequency of meetings.

Content and structure of the joint degree

The agreement should regulate the programme's scope, structure and distribution of topics at the partner institutions, as well as student mobility. The agreement should also outline the framework for the forms of examination, system of marks, requirements for earning the degree, the degree title and the type of diploma selected.

Task distribution within the consortium

The agreement should regulate the distribution of tasks among the partners, as well as the coordinator's responsibility and tasks.

Funding

The agreement should include a paragraph/section on programme funding, operational expenses and distribution of external funding if relevant. If the other partners charge tuition fees, it must be clarified how Norwegian institutions will be excluded from this, which should be explained in the agreement.

Admission requirements and mobility

The cooperation agreement should address admission procedures, application and selection criteria and the students' mobility between the partner universities. The students' rights and obligations may either be included in the agreement or may be stipulated in a separate student contract to which the cooperation agreement should refer.

Student welfare and practical matters

This encompasses topics such as access to the institution's facilities, student housing and other student services, student guidance, practical guidance (visa, registration, etc.) and insurance.

Quality assurance

Norwegian institutions are required to have a quality assurance system, and joint degrees must also be covered by the institution's system for assuring the quality of the study programme. However, it may be necessary to adapt the ordinary system if the other partners have different requirements and methods for quality assurance.

Regulation of the agreement

This encompasses the agreement's duration, renewal, any evaluation of the agreement, termination and possibly how conflicts should be resolved should they arise. It is important to emphasise that the parties are responsible for the students currently enrolled in the study programme if the agreement is terminated.

As mentioned above, the programme description should be included in the agreement, preferably as an attachment. If student mobility is to be regulated by e.g. Erasmus agreements or other separate agreement, these should be referred to in the cooperation agreement.

6.4. Programme description

Norwegian institutions are required to have programme descriptions, cf. NOKUT's regulations on oversight of study programmes. The programme description must describe the students' learning outcomes and the study programme's content, structure, working and teaching methods, and forms of examination/assessment. In addition, there are requirements related to the programme's connection to research, academic and/or artistic development work, student exchange and internationalisation, and infrastructure around the study programme. It is also natural to use the ECTS Users' Guide with regard to matters such as workload and credits.

6.5. Exchange agreements

Requirements regarding mobility should be regulated by the cooperation agreement. This concerns, for example, the number of educational institutions that students must study at (minimum of two) and the length of the stay.

For European joint or double degrees, Erasmus exchange agreements may be entered into/used with EU member states, provided the institutions have an Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) and do not charge tuition fees. In addition to student mobility, employee mobility through Erasmus+ may also be used for joint degrees.

For Nordic joint degrees, it is also possible to consider creating a Nordplus network so that students may obtain Nordplus grants.

7. Funding

Norwegian institutions that cooperate on international joint degrees have found that joint degree programmes are more resource intensive than ordinary programmes. The cost of a study programme that culminates in a joint degree may be higher with regard to both *development* and *administration* of the programme.

Pursuant to Section 7-1 of the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges, state universities and university colleges are not permitted to charge student fees for ordinary study programmes that culminate in a degree or professional qualification (the “no-fee principle”). The general provisions in the Act are elaborated on in the regulations of 15 December 2005 on student fees at universities and university colleges. Exemptions from the no-fee principle apply to joint degrees as well; for example, institutions may charge student fees in accordance with the regulations if the joint degree is an experience-based master’s degree.

In other words, the regulations on student fees stipulate that state institutions in Norway cannot require students to pay for the education they receive at their own institution, either directly to the institution indirectly through the consortium. However, institutions outside Norway that enter into cooperation on a joint degree may be permitted to charge tuition in accordance with their national legislation.

For a joint degree, the institutions are expected to assume a relatively equal share of the responsibility for the academic programme. It will therefore be natural – and desirable – that the institutions arrive at an agreement on reciprocity which makes it unnecessary to deviate from the no-fee principle, cf. the Ministry’s guidelines for the regulations on student fees in the letter of 15 December 2005. It is not required, however, that the portion of the joint degree carried out at a cooperating partner abroad must be free of charge, but the Ministry has stated that in such cases the student fees for those portions should be set at a level whereby they fall within the amount eligible for funding under the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund.

One of the unanswered questions in the field is whether the institutions with joint degrees must use the Ministry’s guidelines for external funding activity and the rules for project management. This *may* be a solution in cases when a Norwegian coordinator must handle the collection and distribution of tuition fees on behalf of other partners in the consortium, and thus needs a detailed overview of the money flow, but this question has not been adequately examined.

For references to the most relevant funding sources for joint degrees, please see the reference list.

8. Practical matters

8.1. Information for students

It is crucial that students are given good information about the study programme, their rights and obligations, mobility, practical matters, etc. before studies commence. This may be communicated via a student contract, a detailed acceptance letter or a student handbook, and will help to ensure that the students receive important information at the right time.

8.2. Student welfare and housing

Student welfare plays a critical role in the students' overall educational outcome, and the consortium must assume overall responsibility for this. Student housing and other social aspects of student life must be planned at an early stage when developing the study programme.

To the extent possible, international students in joint degrees should be treated on an equal footing with other international students, also with regard to housing. This means that contact should be made early on with the department/unit responsible for international student housing or with the student welfare organisation directly, depending on how this is organised at the local level, so that students are able to apply for and be assigned housing in time. It is especially important to involve the relevant departments in the planning stage, particularly if students cannot come at the start of the semester and must arrive at other times instead, so that separate plans must be made to receive the group.

As far as possible, based on the programme description and taking the other partners and their academic years into account, studies should be scheduled to commence on the semester's usual start date so that students can participate in the entire course of study for one semester and be integrated into student activities from the start of the semester. Then the preparations for student orientation and commencement of studies for this group can also be integrated into the normal routines at the Norwegian institution.

Other services, such as a peer mentoring scheme and social activities, are also crucial for the students' overall educational outcome during the study period. In Norway, the student associations and welfare organisations are generally involved in these arrangements. Such arrangements must be included as a systematic part of the study programme, and the student bodies must be involved at an early stage when planning the joint degree.

8.3. Visa

It is crucial that each partner in the network is familiar with the regulations regarding residence permits and visas for the relevant student groups. The students enrolled in joint international degree programmes must normally study at a minimum of two of the institutions in the network, so it is important that mobility is well organised in advance.

Requirements and application procedures for visas and residence permits for Norway are dependent on the students' nationality. Students who are citizens of EU/EEA countries do not need to apply for a residence permit; it is sufficient for them to register with the police. Many joint degrees are also open to, or are mainly intended for, students from countries outside of Europe. In this case it is important to be knowledgeable about the requirements for obtaining a residence permit and how students can

apply. To obtain a residence permit, students from countries outside of Europe must be able to document that they have financial maintenance and housing.

More information is available on the website of the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration: <http://www.udi.no/Norwegian-Directorate-of-Immigration/Central-topics/Studies/>.

8.4. Insurance

Students at Norwegian public universities or university colleges do not have a separate insurance scheme through the educational institution because public educational institutions are not permitted to take out insurance policies on behalf of the students. The state is its own insurer.

If students want to have the same insurance coverage as university employees, they must purchase their own travel and personal injury insurance. All incoming and outgoing students should be encouraged to buy insurance if they are not already covered by their own or their parents' insurance.

For more information about insurance for students, please see UHR's guidelines on insurance and compensation issues related to students in the higher education sector, cf. reference list.

9. Student affairs administration and registration

When Norwegian institutions cooperate on joint and double degrees, the usual systems and routines for student affairs administration should be used as much as possible. Deviations from normal procedures can create a need for manual processes that will make cooperation more labour intensive and more difficult to administer.

There will be two primary methods of registration at a Norwegian institution, depending on whether the institution is the coordinator of or a participant in the consortium:

1. Students are admitted to the degree programme at the Norwegian institutions and registered at the Norwegian institution first. In these cases, the usual routines for admission to the entire programme should be used to the extent possible.
2. Students are admitted to the degree programme at another institution and come to the Norwegian institution during the course of the studies. In these cases, the usual routines for incoming exchange students should be used to the extent possible.

In the first instance, it would be natural to consider using *Søknadsweb*, the electronic application website for regular admissions. In the second instance, it may be possible to use *Nominasjonsweb*, the electronic application website for exchange students, although this may require some developing and adapting of the system. Regardless of the method chosen, students in a joint degree programme will normally have status as an ordinary student at all the institutions in the consortium, although in connection with mobility they may also qualify for grants under schemes that are used for student exchange.

The method agreed on by the consortium for issuance of diplomas will have an impact on the registration of students which should take place during the joint degree programme:

1. If a joint diploma is to be issued, the student must be registered at all the institutions. It is important that all the institutions can document which candidates they have helped to qualify for a joint diploma, even though the student has not studied at all the institutions in the consortium.
2. If a diploma is to be issued by each of the institutions where the student has studied, it is sufficient that the student is registered at the relevant institutions. In this case, the other institutions are not formally involved in recognising the achievement of the degree by being included in the joint diploma. The joint diploma must nonetheless state the cooperative nature of the degree earned.

Section 4-2, fifth paragraph, of the regulations on accreditation, evaluation and recognition pursuant to the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges states that universities and university colleges must notify NOKUT of which joint degrees the institutions awards. This notification should be included in the institutions' ordinary reports submitted to the Database for Statistics on Higher Education.

10. Diplomas

Given the definition of a joint degree, such degrees may be documented in several ways: a joint diploma, a joint diploma in addition to one or more national diplomas, or national diplomas only. In most cases, though, a joint diploma will be the best documentation since this is the most coherent option vis-à-vis students and working life. However, when choosing one method over another, consideration must be given to the partners' legal situation and the distribution of tasks within the consortium.

The diploma's content and the consortium's plan for issuing diplomas should be clarified as early as possible and well before the first group of students complete their studies. The cooperation agreement is usually signed long before detailed planning of the joint degree begins when it would be natural to discuss diplomas, but this must be taken into account when developing the joint degree.

If a joint diploma is to be issued, it should be issued by the coordinating institution. The partners should comply as far as possible with the coordinator's technical and practical requirements regarding diploma issuance. Each institution should review its mandatory requirements regarding diploma content so that the coordinator can incorporate this into the diploma in a manner that the other institutions can accept.

When Norwegian institutions issue a joint diploma, the joint student system (*Felles Studentsystem*) should be the starting point for this so that existing routines and technical solutions are re-used to the extent possible. The new template from December 2013, which has been prepared but not implemented, does not include diplomas for joint degrees. However, the template should be used to the extent it is also suitable for joint degree diplomas, with adjustments as needed with regard to the requirements of the cooperating institutions. The title and information page in Norwegian diplomas will be flexible and may be adapted to a joint degree, e.g. with regard to use of the partners' logos, while the transcript of records must conform to the elements available in the joint student system.

The informational parts of the diploma must provide adequate information about all factors of relevance to the partners, such as rules related to the conferral of degrees and the scale of marks. A description of the learning outcomes, study programme and cooperation should appear on the diploma in keeping with the programme description and other agreements. The education completed by the student at cooperating institutions must be registered and included on the diploma in the same way as other recognised education is incorporated, the difference being that the joint degree diploma will also state the marks/grades for external education.

A diploma supplement must be issued together with the diploma. Since the diploma supplement follows a standard established by the European Council, UNESCO and the EU, it will not be difficult for the consortium to agree on the content. It is important that items containing specific national information, such as the date of the founding of the educational system, take into account all factors of relevance to the institutions. For example, it may be natural to attach descriptions of each country's educational system.

11. Double degrees

11.1. Definition of a double degree

The concept of a double degree is more difficult to define than a joint degree, but in practice there are few situations in which a precise definition is critically important. As a general rule, the term is used as a consequence of the way in which the diploma is issued or to indicate ownership of the study programme or degree.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention's definition of a joint degree allows a joint degree to be documented with more than one diploma. The variants that entail issuance of two or more diplomas are sometimes called *double* or *multiple degrees*, but this should be avoided for qualifications which formally speaking are joint degrees. In other words, a double degree can be a type of joint degree, depending on how the joint degree is documented.

There are also examples of educational cooperation in which two or more institutions coordinate academically related study programmes and agree on a scheme for student mobility that allows students to follow both/all of the study programmes simultaneously and qualify for degrees at more than one institution. It will function as a *double degree* in the sense that the student will be awarded two or more degrees. This type of arrangement does not require joint ownership or administration of the study programmes concerned. Each institution is wholly responsible for its own study programme, and students must satisfy the degree requirements at both/all of the institutions.

Forms of educational cooperation other than joint and double degree are not discussed here, as these fall under the ordinary provisions for study programmes and degrees.

The term "double degree" should be used to refer to close, binding cooperation between two or more separate study programmes that culminate in separate degrees. Based on this definition, double degrees are documented with two or more diplomas.

11.2. Accreditation of double degrees

Norwegian regulations include special provisions on joint degrees only, and thus apply only to educational cooperation that falls within the definition of a joint degree. Double degrees and all other forms of programme cooperation will therefore be regarded as ordinary study programmes and follow all the ordinary provisions on accreditation.

11.3. Cooperation agreements on double degrees

Agreements on double degrees may be much simpler than joint degrees since they involve two independent study programmes with close cooperation and not one degree with joint ownership. However, agreements on double degrees should also address issues such as the programme's scope and structure, the master's thesis, which degrees the programme culminates in at each institution, the requirements for earning two degrees at each institution, the administration of the double degree, mobility, duration, evaluation and termination.

12. Regulations, funding sources and reports

12.1. Selected laws and regulations

- *Forskrift om egenbetaling ved universiteter og høyskoler av 15. desember 2005* (“Regulations of 15 December 2004 on student fees at universities and university colleges”) (Ministry of Education and Research).
- *Forskrift om kvalitetssikring og kvalitetsutvikling i høyere utdanning og fagskoleutdanning av 1. februar 2010* (“Regulations of 1 February 2010 on quality assurance and quality enhancement in higher education and vocational education”) (Ministry of Education and Research).
- *Forskrift om tilsyn med utdanningskvaliteten i høyere utdanning av 28. februar 2013* (“Regulations of 28 February 2013 on oversight of educational quality in higher education”) (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT)).
- *Forskrift om grader og yrkesutdanninger, beskyttet tittel og normert studietid ved universiteter og høyskoler av 16. desember 2005* (“Regulations of 16 December 2005 on degrees and professional education programmes, protected titles and nominal length of study at universities and university colleges”) (Ministry of Education and Research).
- Act of 1 April 2005 relating to Universities and University Colleges
- *Forskrift om krav til mastergrad av 1. desember 2005* (“Regulations of 1 December 2005 on master’s degree requirements”) (Ministry of Education and Research).
- *Forskrift om godskrivning av høyere utdanning av 10. april 2006* (“Regulations of 10 April 2006 on accreditation of higher education”) (Ministry of Education and Research).
- *Lov om studentsamskipnader av 14. desember 2007* (“Act of 14 December 2007 relating to Student Welfare Organisations”).
- *Forskrift om studentsamskipnader av 22. juli 2008* (“Regulations of 22 July 2008 on student welfare organisations”) (Ministry of Education and Research).

12.2. Funding schemes

Below are links to information about the most common funding schemes for joint degrees. The list is not exhaustive, but it does provide a general guide to the most important funding sources. The schemes vary as to whether they support development, administration or both.

The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU) has a web page on joint degrees that describes the various funding schemes: <http://www.siu.no/eng/Front-Page/Programme-information/Joint-degrees> .

EU

As of 2014, the previous funding scheme Erasmus Mundus for joint degrees at the master’s level will be continued as part of *Erasmus +, Key Action 1 - Mobility, Joint Degrees*. The scheme will now provide funding for one preparatory year in addition to operational expenses and grants for three student admissions (four to five years).

Erasmus +, Key Action 2 – Cooperation, Strategic Partnerships provide funding for academic cooperation that promotes innovative practices to enhance the quality of education across national borders. It is assumed that the development of joint degrees would be included under these schemes.

Nordic Council of Ministers

The funding scheme known as the Nordic Master Programme is being revised. The next funding announcement will probably be issued in 2015. It is expected that the programme will provide funding for both development and operation of joint degrees.

Norwegian funding schemes

SIU administers several other, national funding schemes targeted towards either joint/double degrees or particular countries or regions. Common for all of these is that they now provide funding for the development of joint degree, although this may change in the future.

Funding is also available for particular countries or regions. Some examples of this are the French-Norwegian master's degrees and regional programmes such as the Norwegian Partnership Program for Collaboration in Higher Education with North America, the Russia Programme, funding for cooperation with China, etc.

12.3. Selected reports

Council of Europe/UNESCO. *Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees*. Strasbourg, 2004.

Council of Europe/UNESCO. *The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region*. Lisbon, 1997.

Education and Culture DG. *ECTS Users' Guide*. European Communities, 2009

European Area of Recognition Project. *European Area of Recognition Manual*. Haag, 2012.

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA): *Standards and Guidelines for Quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. Helsinki, 2005.

European University Association (EUA). *Developing Joint Master Programmes for Europe. Results of the EUA Joint Masters project*. Brussels, 2004.

European University Association (EUA): *Guidelines for Quality Enhancement in European Joint Master Programmes*. Brussels, 2006.

The JOI.CON Training Project. *Practical Approaches to the Management of Joint Programmes: Results from the JOI.CON Training Project*. Leipzig, 2012.

Stensaker, Bjørn and Trine Danø: *Nordisk kvalitetssikring av høyere utdanning – studie 2*. ("Nordic quality assurance of higher education, 2nd study"). Copenhagen, 2006.

Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR). *Veiledning: Forsikrings- og erstatningsrettslige spørsmål vedrørende studenter i universitets- og høyskolesektoren* ("Guidelines: Insurance and compensation issues relating to students in the higher education sector"). Oslo, 2012.