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## Appendix to the Vice-Chancellor's decision of 19 December 2011

### Guidelines for joint degrees at SLU

#### Introduction

This document describes the SLU guidelines for joint degrees, and provides instructions for establishing educational cooperation for this purpose. The document also sets out the relevant statutory requirements, as well as SLU's requirements for establishing educational cooperation of this kind. The fundamental conditions and requirements are the same for the three levels of education (first-cycle, second-cycle and third-cycle), although third-cycle programmes are subject to certain additional requirements. The levels of education in this document are therefore divided into two parts: first/second-cycle and third cycle.

#### Recommended reading

The Higher Education Act (HEA) provides the main basis for the operations of all Swedish higher education institutions. The Higher Education Ordinance (HEO), issued by the government, adds detail to HEA, and also applies to all Swedish higher education institutions. These *Guidelines* are SLU's interpretation and application of HEO. In some cases reference is made to the bill on which the general body of regulations is based. The bill in turn reflects the proposals set out in a white paper entitled "Joint Degrees" ("*Gemensamma examina*") (Ds 2008:80). The references are intended to explain the positions adopted in the Guidelines.

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## 1. Background information

Since 1 January 2010<sup>1</sup> HEA has allowed Swedish universities and university colleges to award joint degrees with foreign or other Swedish higher education institutions<sup>2</sup>. The term 'joint degree' means a "qualification that may be awarded by the higher education institutions that have jointly organised courses and programmes that can lead to the award of the qualification." (HEA , ch 1, s 17(2)). Thus, a joint degree is not a new category of qualification; it offers the opportunity for two or more higher education institutions to organise and carry out a joint programme resulting in a joint degree of the same kind as the other qualifications they are entitled to award individually.

The purpose of allowing (joint education programmes leading to) joint degrees is to enable synergies for education providers, and to increase internationalisation by making it easier for students to study at more than one higher education institution within the framework of their programme. Since it is already clear from the outset which courses students can study at various higher education institutions, they will be able to gain credits for all approved courses on their degree course without special review.

### 1.1. SLU's strategy for international collaboration

"Knowledge for a Sustainable Future", SLU's strategy for research, education and environmental monitoring and assessment 2009 – 2012, emphasises that SLU must to a greater extent "*collaborate with other educational institutions, with the intent of offering a wider range of courses and collaborative programmes, primarily at the advanced level. In order to achieve this, SLU will take an active part in networks within Sweden and internationally.*"

Whilst SLU's management is encouraging international educational cooperation, this collaboration also requires that educational quality standards be maintained. It is therefore essential to establish close collaboration with selected higher education institutions at which relevant subject expertise can be found and whose quality evaluation systems are reliable. Examples of these higher education institutions may found in the NOVA and ELLS networks<sup>3</sup>. However, subject to the Vice-Chancellor's approval, collaboration agreements can naturally also be concluded with other higher education institutions offering high quality (see below).

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<sup>1</sup> Effective as from 1 July 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Under HEA, a joint degree may be awarded with "1. Another higher education institution; 2. an independent course provider entitled to award a qualification pursuant to the Act Concerning Authority to Award Certain Qualifications (1993:792); or 3. a higher education institution outside Sweden that is not a physical individual."

<sup>3</sup> *The Nordic Forestry, Veterinary and Agricultural University Network* (NOVA University Network) and *Euroleague for Life Sciences* (ELLS) are among the most important strategic partners identified in the SLU strategy for 2013 – 2016, which is currently being drawn up.

### ***1.1.2. Choice of partners***

The justification for developing a joint education programme should be that the programme will be better as a result of collaboration than if each institution were to offer the programme on its own. Collaboration should therefore be based on the special strengths of each partner. Exacting demands should be made of all potential partners in order to ensure that all education provided under the SLU flag is of good quality. As far as possible, those considered should be 'tried and tested' higher education institutions of equal standing. Anyone planning or desiring to start a joint programme resulting in a joint degree must at an early stage consult first the head of department, and faculty, then the Pro-Vice-Chancellor. The Vice-Chancellor must then sign a letter of intent (see below). A statement of the reasons for the choice of partner(s) must be attached. It must include an evaluation of the potential partner on the basis of the following criteria:

- Strategy and policy – should accord well with those of SLU and the faculty in question.
- Reputation and quality – SLU fosters its image through its partners; it is essential that collaboration enhances, rather than weakens the SLU brand.
- Accreditation of the institution in its home country – essential that information on quality is reliable.
- Establishing closer/more formal ties with priority universities in line with "*Knowledge for a Sustainable Future*" and "*Science for Global Development*" – deepening/extending ongoing collaboration.
- Demand among students, teachers and researchers.
- Administrative processes and national regulatory frameworks – these may partly determine how unwieldy the collaboration is.
- Administrative capacity – what resources are available for administrative support?
- Reciprocity – the benefit derived by each institution from potential collaboration.

### **1.2. Legal security for undergraduates and postgraduate**

The higher education institutions involved in developing a joint education programme should very much bear in mind the legal security of undergraduate and postgraduate students. These students' rights and obligations must be the same as those applying to all other students admitted to the institutions. It is therefore essential that the written agreement contain extremely detailed and unequivocal provisions governing all matters potentially affecting the students' chances of ultimately being awarded a degree (see above).

### **1.3. Workflow when formulating a joint education programme**

It is essential to plan so that, right from the outset, a joint education programme has broad support at departmental and faculty level. This is because, to a greater or lesser extent, administrative resources are usually deployed as soon as the programme starts, and because the faculty is responsible for funding. It is important to note that funding responsibility for third-cycle programmes in Sweden extends over four years of study, not three as in many other European countries. To ease the process and avoid misunderstandings, a letter of intent should be drawn up at the earliest possible stage. This must be signed by SLU's Vice-Chancellor. To ensure that the process progresses as smoothly as possible, the following workflow should apply (Fig. 1). It is important that staff engaged in admissions, contracts and

degree issues at the International Students Office (SUS), and also staff at the Division of Legal Affairs, are always consulted during the planning phase.

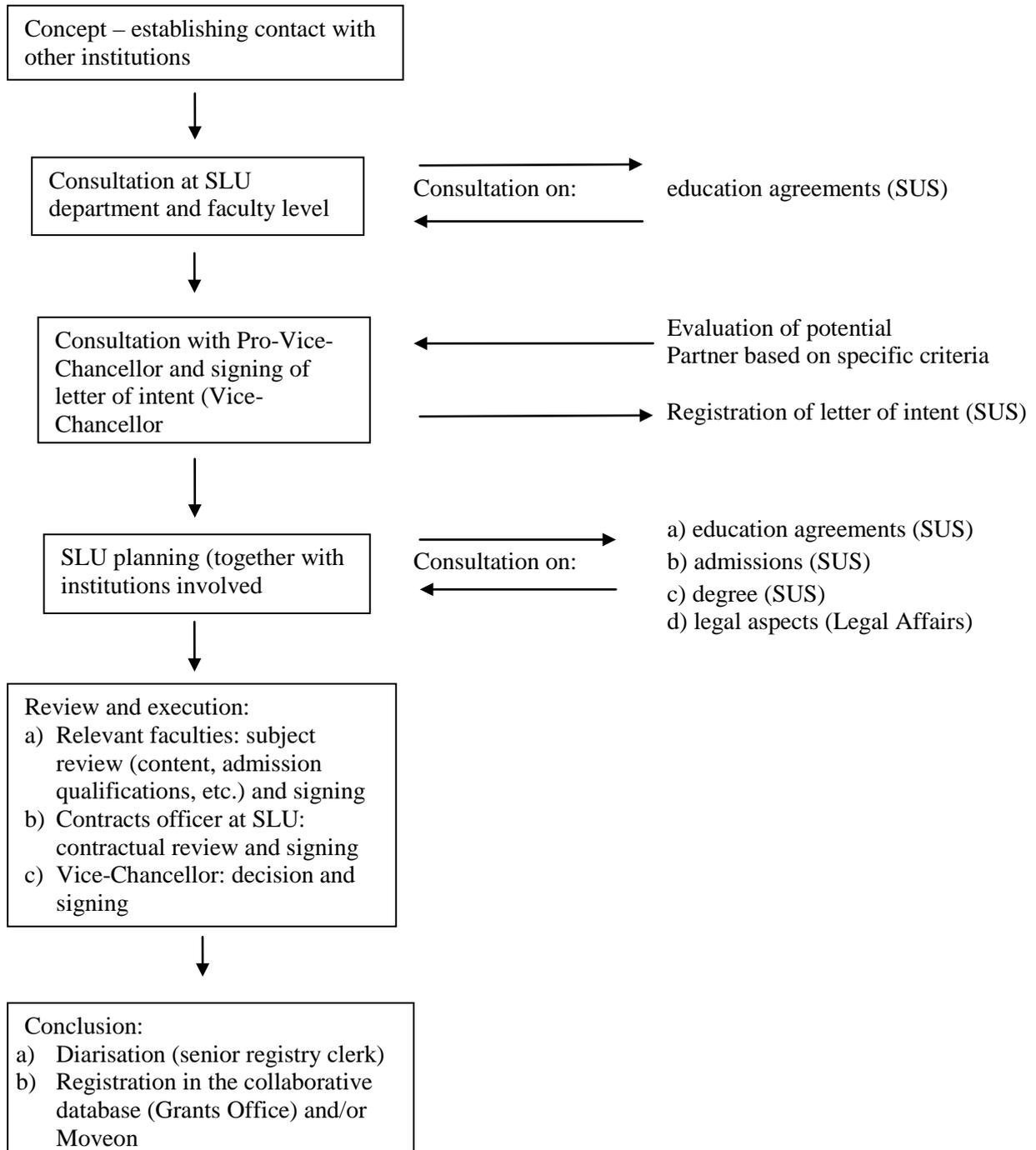


Fig. 1. Workflow when formulating a joint education programme resulting in a joint degree

When funding for the joint programme is sought under various EU programmes, e.g. *Erasmus Mundus*, the application – from SLU's perspective – can be sent to the EU Commission following consultation with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, once the Vice-Chancellor has signed the letter of intent. Only when SLU is a *full partner* in the EU programme can educational cooperation lead to a joint degree. Where SLU is an *associated partner*, educational cooperation may instead result in a double degree.

Links to literature and websites about joint degrees, as well as tools for drawing up agreements, can be found at the page [Gemensam examen](#) on SLU's internal website. Other documents governing education at SLU are included in [SLU:s regelsamling för utbildning på grund- och avancerad nivå](#) ("SLU regulations for first and second-cycle education") or are available via [SLU:s webbsidor om utbildning på forskarnivå](#) ("SLU's web pages on third-cycle education") (internal website).

#### **1.4. Worth considering in the planning phase**

The following should be taken into account early in the planning phase in order to create good conditions for trouble-free collaboration:

- *Key differences between the internal regulations of the higher education institutions that are collaborating* (e.g. admission requirements for courses, who is entitled to act as supervisor, forms of, and criteria, for study plans, annual evaluations, etc).
- *Timing of courses* (in relation to term times at the different institutions).
- *Procedures if key members of an institution's teaching staff leave.*

## **2. Joint degrees at first-cycle and second-cycle level**

### **2.1. Comparison: joint degree – double degree**

Although efforts have been made within the European Union to formulate criteria for defining the term 'joint degrees', no final definition has yet been produced. According to Bill 2008/09:175, common features of definitions in member states are:

- Degree certificates are awarded on the basis of a programme developed or provided jointly by two or more higher education institutions.
- A joint degree should preferably be documented by a single examination certificate awarded jointly by the institutions involved.

Nor is the difference between a joint degree and a double degree entirely clear. The National Agency for Higher Education<sup>4</sup> defines joint and double degrees as follows:

Joint degree: "a degree awarded by at least two higher education institutions in Sweden or abroad. The education programme must have been organised jointly and both higher education institutions must be entitled to award degrees in accordance with the legislation in each country."

Double degree: "two degrees based on one and the same university education programme<sup>5</sup>."

In a report produced at the instigation of the Government Offices, district court judge Lennart Johansson (Ds 2008:80, p. 72) states that:

"The term *joint degree* essentially refers to an education programme developed or offered jointly by two or more education institutions and leading to a degree certificate. The term *double degree* refers to education programmes developed or offered jointly by two or more education institutions and leading to two or more degree certificates, in practice one from each institution involved."

SLU has chosen to use this latter interpretation as the basis for developing a joint degree policy. Information on managing educational cooperation intended to lead to a double degree may be found on the page [Dubbel examen](#) ("Double degree") on SLU's internal website.

## **2.2. What is required for a joint degree and by whom**

The award of a joint degree based on a joint education programme is a complex process, since it requires compatibility between at least two higher education institutions. It is particularly complicated when international educational cooperation is initiated, since the education systems of at least two countries must be reconciled with one another and the legislation in those countries complied with. The Swedish Parliament and Government have therefore decided that the Higher Education Act (HEA) and Higher Education Ordinance (HEO) should lay down the criteria to be met before joint degrees can be awarded by Swedish higher education institutions. Additionally, SLU has set further requirements for the written agreement that will form the basis for educational cooperation intended to result in a joint degree. The fundamental requirements for cooperation of this kind are discussed below. There then follows a list of the requirements laid down by HEO and SLU, sometimes with interpretation and application from an SLU perspective. However, it is important to stress that

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<sup>4</sup> URL:

<http://www.doktorandhandboken.nu/densvenskahogskolan/sveengordbok/termer/g/gemensamexamen.4.8f0e4c9119e2b4a60c800012396.html> and <http://www.doktorandhandboken.nu/densvenskahogskolan/sveengordbok/termer/d/dubbelexamen.4.8f0e4c9119e2b4a60c800012659.html>

<sup>5</sup> "Note: A double degree may be the result of a university education programme offered at two higher education institutions in one or more countries. A double degree may also comprise two degrees from the same higher education institution, e.g., a professional qualification and a general qualification based on the same education programme, such as the nursing programme. The term *multiple degree* may be used if more than two higher education institutions award a degree certificate." (URL: <http://www.doktorandhandboken.nu/densvenskahogskolan/sveengordbok/termer/d/dubbelexamen.4.8f0e4c9119e2b4a60c800012659.html>)

alongside these basic requirements, a large measure of flexibility is needed in relation to SLU's "normal rules" for educational cooperation of this kind to be at all feasible.

### **2.3. Joint degree – joint education programme**

Under HEA, a fundamental prerequisite for the award of a joint degree is that it must result from a joint education programme, i.e. a programme developed and offered jointly by the higher education institutions in question. From an SLU viewpoint, it is essential that the planning process be conducted with great care and thoroughness, so that all the conditions required for a Swedish degree are met by the joint education programme. Accordingly, any foreign higher education institution involved in the programme must ensure that the requirements for an equivalent programme in its own country are met. All parts of the programme must be organised by the higher education institutions involved – different institutions organise different programme components, whose content is decided jointly by the institutions. This means that students can apply to transfer credits for courses successfully completed at an institution not involved in arranging the education programme. In legal terms, each institution is responsible for its part of the education programme: the components offered at SLU are subject to the provisions of HEA and HEO; the other components fall under the regulations governing education programmes at each institution involved.

Modification of an existing education programme to meet the requirements for a joint degree will require a (new) written agreement between the institutions involved (see below), and incorporation of the details of the joint education programme and joint degree in the education plan.

Just as for all new joint programmes, it is important to consult the relevant department and faculty first, and then consult the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, who may initiate a general discussion of the contents of the programme on the Council for education at basic and advanced level (GUR).

New joint education programmes resulting in a joint degree must be approved by SLU's Vice-Chancellor.

### **2.4. Swedish regulations governing the award of a joint degree**

Under HEO, SLU may award a joint degree only if:

- 2.4.1. *"...the educational cooperation is based on a written agreement" (ch 6, s 11 a; see below).*
- 2.4.2. *"The student has completed a joint education programme and also fulfilled the requirements for the award of a qualification at SLU and at least one other higher education institution that has organised a component of the programme" (ch 6, s 11 e(1)).*
- 2.4.3. *"Each higher education institution awarding a qualification included in the joint degree may award the degree in question" (ch 6, s 11 e (2)).*

2.4.4. *"each qualification included in the joint degree and which is awarded by a higher education institution subject to the Higher Education Act (1992:1434) or by an independent course provider is a designated component for the same qualification as the higher education institution's, and every qualification included in the joint degree awarded by a foreign higher education institution belongs to the same cycle as at the higher education institution" (ch 6, s 11 e(3-4).*

### **SLU guidelines**

Before educational cooperation leading to a joint degree begins, anyone planning to take part in the cooperation must ascertain that the requirements set out under 2.4.1 – 2.4.4 above will be met.

### **2.5. HEO requirements governing the written agreement**

As mentioned above, educational cooperation resulting in a joint degree must be based on a written agreement intended to assure legal security for students and governing certain fundamental conditions of the cooperation. Under HEO, the following must be evident from the written agreement:

2.5.1. *"Every component of the programme is arranged by one of the higher education institutions party to the educational cooperation" (ch 6, s 11 b (1) (i)).* It should be made clear exactly which courses may be included in the joint degree (and where they are held).

2.5.2. *" Which components of the programme are to be organised by SLU and which by the other higher education institutions" (ch 6, s 11 b (2) (i) and (ii)).* However, the content of the various components of the programme must be decided jointly by the institutions concerned.

2.5.3. *"The components of the programme arranged by an institution other than SLU should also be based on a scientific footing and on proven experience and should be organised so that the programme maintains a high standard" (ch 6, s 11 b(1)(ii)).* The level and quality of all programme components must be of a high international standard.

2.5.4. *"To which higher education institution(s) organising components of the programme an applicant to the programme is to be admitted" (ch 6, s 11 b(2)(iii)).* It must be evident from the agreement which institution will admit students – perhaps the institution responsible for the first programme component.

2.5.5. *"That the higher education institution may admit applicants only to the component of the programme it will arrange" (ch 6, s 11 b (2) (iv)).* SLU can admit students to the

programme, since all participating institutions offer the programme jointly, but SLU can only admit students to the courses offered by SLU.

2.5.6. *"When a student who has been admitted to a component of the programme by another higher education institution is to be considered to be a student pursuant to section 11 c" (ch 6, s 11 b(2)(v)).* Students admitted at SLU or a participating institution to a joint programme leading to a joint degree will be considered to be students at SLU throughout their study period, irrespective of where they pursue their studies.

2.5.7. *"That students should be able to transfer credits for a successfully completed component of a programme at another higher education institution to the higher education institution without special review" (ch 6, s 11 b (2) (vi)).* Students at SLU will gain credits for approved programme components from participating institutions within the framework of the joint programme without separate assessment. It is therefore essential to be very clear about which courses are included in the educational cooperation and where they are held (see also 1. above).

2.5.8. *"What qualification the programme can lead to at each of the higher education institutions" (ch 6, s 11 b (2) (vii)).* In the interests of the students' legal security it is essential that great effort be made to arrive at correct degree titles at the various higher education institutions.

2.5.9. *"Other conditions required for the organisation of the programme (ch 6, s 11 b (2) (viii)).*

- There may be specific requirements for educational cooperation under the *Erasmus Mundus* programme, for example (accommodation guarantee, provision of language courses, etc).
- SLU-specific requirements (see below).

### ***SLU guidelines***

SLU's interpretations and guidelines for application of the HEO requirement of a written agreement are set out above after the relevant quotes from HEO (2.5.1 – 2.5.9).

## **2.6. SLU requirements governing the written agreement**

In addition to the requirements laid down by HEO with respect to the written agreement governing joint degrees (see above), the agreement must ensure that SLU's quality assurance requirements are met. It must therefore specify:

2.6.1. *How independent and ongoing quality control of the education programme is to be implemented at each participating institution.*

SLU first and second-cycle education programmes are examined by the National Agency for Higher Education (NAHE) at four-year intervals (as from 2011). NAHE quality evaluations are based on a) independent surveys, b) alumni questionnaire

responses, c) self-assessments by the higher education institutions; and d) the students' experience of the programme. The evaluation of each programme results in an assessment on a three-point scale: very high quality, high quality or deficient quality.

#### 2.6.2. *Funding and fee management*

The agreement must assure the student's right to a degree without SLU having to assume responsibility for funding programme components for which other higher education institutions are responsible. It is therefore necessary to ensure that there are reliable funding sources for the entire programme, and that the agreement stipulates how funding responsibility is to be apportioned between the institutions. Students on a joint education programme must pay tuition fees in accordance with current Swedish legislation. In other words, students from third countries must pay fees covering the full cost of the programme components they study at SLU, except where studies take place within the framework of the *Erasmus Mundus* programme (Swedish parliamentary decision 14 April 2014). The agreement should therefore contain provisions governing tuition fees of this kind, including the position of paying students who do not successfully complete the programme in the 'normal' time (e.g., a student on a two-year programme who does not complete his/her studies in two years. SLU's standpoint is that examination outside the 'normal' length of the programme should not be subject to extra cost.

#### 2.6.3. *The form and content of the degree certificate and diploma supplement (DS)*

There are no restrictions as to the form of degree certificates as long as the HEO requirements as to content (ch 6, s 10) and SLU visibility requirements are met (see also "Degree certificates" below). DS should accord with the model developed by the European Commission and others and must be issued automatically at no cost to all students.

#### 2.6.4. *The institution that should deal with degree matters and certificates*

#### 2.6.5. *An agreement on which country's laws are to apply with regard to:*

- a) *The programme as a whole.* (Institution with primary responsibility for admission)
- b) *Each programme component (course).* The responsible institution's regulations on, e.g. tests and examinations must be complied with during the programme component. In other words, SLU's regulations governing tests and examinations, for example, must be followed during courses arranged by SLU.

*In addition, the agreement should stipulate that the regulations of the institution responsible always take precedence over the provisions of the agreement (if a conflict arises during a programme component).*

#### 2.6.6. *Clear rules governing the criteria for attaining a pass on each programme component, and for obtaining a degree.*

In order to ensure as far as possible that each student is able to obtain a degree on completing the programme, it is important to be very clear about what is needed to

pass each programme component. In the worst case, if one of the institutions involved does not consider it is able to award its degree to a student, SLU will not be able to award a joint degree to the student either. Under HEO (ch 6, s 9), anyone meeting the requirements for a degree at SLU is entitled, on request, to receive a degree certificate from SLU for a degree other than a joint degree.

SLU degree and other requirements are set out in the programme syllabus, and the requirements for individual courses are set out in the course syllabus. If possible, reference should therefore be made in the written agreement to a draft programme syllabus (as an appendix).

#### 2.6.7. *Responsibility for transferring credits between institutions*

The institutions must establish procedures for transferring information on credits awarded between them. The agreement must always clearly state whether the institution or students are responsible for transferring this information.

#### 2.6.8. *Procedure if/when an agreement is terminated*

The agreement should contain winding-up provisions allowing students reasonable time to conclude their studies. The length of the winding-up period should be in line with the customary period for the institutions' own courses and programmes. Aspects such as the legal implications concerning, e.g., copyright to material produced should be included in the winding-up provisions.

### **2.7. Additional requirements**

For the sake of clarity, it is important that the written agreement also contain more detailed provisions governing the conditions for cooperation. In addition to the above requirements, the agreement should (at least) specify the items below. If possible, refer to a draft programme syllabus.

#### 2.7.1. *Aims of the education programme*

#### 2.7.2. *Scope of the education programme*

- credits/terms
- courses included and the institution responsible (see 2.5.1 – 2.5.2)
- the timing of the various courses

#### 2.7.3. *Programme language*

#### 2.7.4. *Admission requirements, including required language skills.*

It is essential that the admission requirements for the programme are coordinated with the admission requirements for the programme components (i.e. the courses).

2.7.5. *Selection and admission*

2.7.6. *Regulations governing dissertations/theses*

2.7.7. *Student and teacher mobility*

2.7.8. *Responsibility for advisory services and guidance for students*

This includes contact persons at the institutions/departments involved, responsibility for accommodation issues, and the institution/department to which the student can turn if he/she has any complaints.

2.7.9. *A communication strategy (ensuring reliable communication)*

## **2.8. Joint degrees in practice – areas requiring particular clarification**

2.8.1. *Admission*

Admission takes place as agreed at one of the institutions involved. For this reason, it is extremely important that the programme admission qualification requirements be carefully determined on the basis of programme syllabuses and course syllabuses. As mentioned above, it is important that the admission requirements for the programme be coordinated with the admission requirements for the component courses.

Admission via SLU is subject to the regulations in SLU's ordinance and admission regulations, except for the language requirements, which are governed by the programme admission requirements. Admission taking place at another institution will be subject to the regulations applying there.

2.8.2. *Ladok*

All students must be registered in the *Ladok* study documentation system, also where admission takes place at an institution other than SLU. When a degree is awarded, an entry is made showing that the degree is a joint degree.

2.8.3. *Degrees and degree certificates*

SLU can only award a joint degree if the degree requirements set out in the HEO Qualifications Ordinance are met. Other institutions involved are subject to their own national regulations.

The degree certificate<sup>6</sup> requirements set out in HEO (ch 6, s 10) must be met. The certificate must state 1) the degree title; 2) the degree level; 3) the fact that the qualification forms part of a joint degree; 4) the courses included in the qualification at first and second cycle level; and 5) the higher education institution at which programme components, where applicable, have been approved. Under SLU

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<sup>6</sup> Under Government Bill 2008/09:175, p 46, the joint degrees certificate itself can be issued in the form of a) a joint degree certificate, without any accompanying national certificate; b) a joint degree certificate together with one or more national certificates; or c) on or more national certificates.

guidelines, the degree certificate must be issued in the form of a joint document, on which SLU must be visible in accordance with the written agreement.

A diploma supplement (DS), describing the education programme and its place in the education system, must accompany the degree certificate. DS should accord with the model developed jointly by the EU Commission and others, and must be issued automatically to all students at no cost.

To ensure that the above requirements are met, the written agreement should govern the form and content of the degree certificate and diploma supplement, and also specify the institution responsible for dealing with degree matters.

#### 2.8.4. *Disciplinary measures*

"As regards universities subject to HEA, the above means that a decision by a certain university, e.g., to exclude a student, only applies to the part of the education arranged by the university. If a student – or a person studying who may be regarded as a student – is also to be excluded from other parts of the programme, this must be done in accordance with the regulations applying at the higher education institution arranging that part of the programme. If two universities subject to HEA arrange programme components, and the student or person studying is to be excluded from both parts, the disciplinary board at each university must decide on exclusion from its own part of the programme." (Bill 2008/09:175, page 50).

"If a person studying who meets the criteria to be regarded as a student at a university subject to HEA is excluded from the part of the programme arranged, e.g., by a foreign higher education institution, the person will continue to be regarded as a student on the programme at the university at which that part of the programme is arranged. As stated above, the question of whether the person is also to be excluded from the programme component arranged by the university will be considered by that university's expulsions board." (Bill. 2008/09:175, page 51).

### **3. Joint degrees at third-cycle level**

#### **3.1. Third-cycle programmes**

As with first and second-cycle programmes, Swedish law allows third-cycle programmes begun no earlier than 1 July 2010 to be arranged jointly by two or more higher education institutions, and result in a joint degree. The joint PhD is then based on a single education programme, a single public defence of a doctoral thesis and a single degree certificate.

By their nature, third-cycle programmes are different from those at first and second-cycle level, where students usually achieves the stated learning outcomes by following a number of specific courses that build on and complement one another. On a third-cycle programme, on the other hand, the PhD student acquires the knowledge and skills needed to achieve the learning outcomes by combining thesis work with course participation (see diagram below).

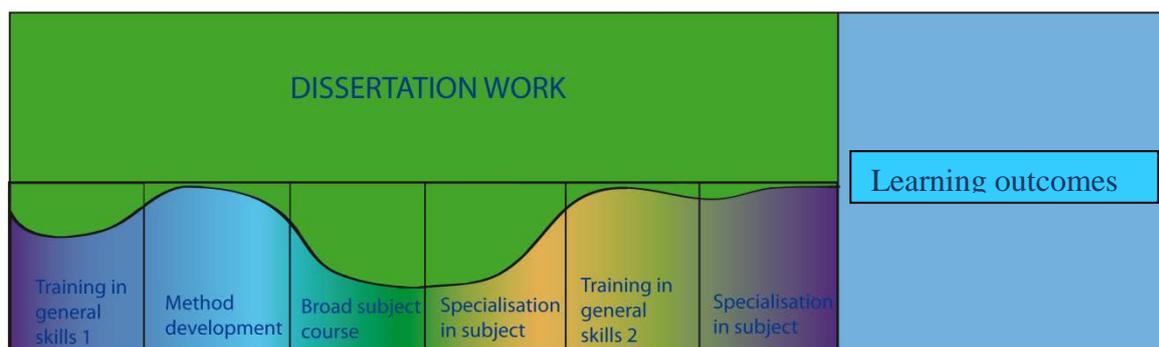


Fig. 2. Illustration of third-cycle education: the PhD student achieves the stated learning outcomes by completing a thesis and by following courses of various kinds. The type and extent of courses followed by an individual PhD student depend on his/her specific needs. Hence, the combination of courses usually varies from one student to another.

Thus, the legal regulatory framework for joint programmes leading to a joint degree differs from that applying to education programmes and first and second-cycle level.

### 3.2. Comparison: joint degree – double degree

Depending on its nature, third-cycle educational cooperation between SLU and other higher education institutions may offer doctoral students either a joint degree or a double degree:

#### Joint degree

In the case of cooperation based on a common interest in creating a long-term educational structure involving many PhD students over a long period, the programme may result in a joint degree. In these cases cooperation largely takes the form of educational cooperation, rather than a research project.

As regards higher education institutions with which SLU has long-term close collaboration in a broader sense, it may be possible to establish an agreement at university level allowing joint degrees also for individual PhD students. In order to reduce the administrative burden, the agreement in these cases should establish a general acceptance of the other institution's regulations, e.g. *"SLU accepts institution X's thesis defence regulations, and institution X accepts SLU's thesis defence regulations. It is up to the supervisors to decide the institution at which the thesis should be defended."*

#### Double degree

Educational cooperation may lead to a double degree where it is initiated on the basis of a common research interest, involving a limited number of PhD students focusing on a specific research project for a limited period. In these cases the cooperation is more in the nature of research collaboration than educational cooperation. Information about how educational cooperation leading to a double degree should be managed may be found on the [Dubbel examen](#) ("Double degree") page on SLU's internal website.

Joint programmes leading to joint degrees normally involve extensive administration. It is therefore essential to carefully consider whether to aim for a joint degree instead of a double

degree. Just as with conventional education programmes, SLU's Vice-Chancellor decides on the introduction of new joint programmes leading to a joint degree.

### **3.3. How to decide – a joint or a double degree?**

The questions below are intended to provide guidance in choosing between a joint and a double degree:

- What sort of cooperation is desired?
  - Mainly educational cooperation
  - Mainly research cooperation
- Will the cooperation involve a large number of PhD students?
- Will the cooperation last longer than four years?
- What sort of degree is demanded by the funding source?
- Is the department willing to accept extra administration?
- Is the planned cooperation in line with the faculty's strategy?
- Is the planned cooperation in line with SLU's strategy?
- Are the national laws and regulatory frameworks governing third-cycle education compatible, or are there insurmountable differences?
- Can you formulate common education outcomes/learning outcomes for the programme?

If the answers to these questions suggest that it is reasonable to aim at a joint degree to the educational cooperation in question, It is important to carefully consider the requirements laid down by Swedish legislation and SLU before too much planning is done. It is also important to monitor the work flow in Fig. 1 throughout (see p 5).

### **3.4. What is required for a joint degree and by whom**

The award of a joint degree based on a joint education programme is a complex process, since it requires that at least two higher education institutions coordinate their third-cycle education regulations. It is particularly complicated when international educational cooperation is initiated, since the education systems and legislation of at least two countries must be reconciled and complied with. The Swedish Parliament and Government have therefore decided via HEA and HEO to regulate the criteria to be met in order for joint degrees to be awarded by Swedish higher education institutions. Alongside those regulations, SLU has drawn up further leading to a joint degree. The fundamental requirement for educational cooperation of this kind is discussed below, followed by a list of the requirements set out in HEO and SLU, some of them accompanied by interpretation and applicability from an SLU perspective. However, it must be stressed that, in addition to these fundamental requirements, there is a need for a large measure of flexibility in respect of SLU's 'normal regulations' if educational cooperation of this kind is to be at all possible.

### **3.5. Joint degree – joint programme**

Under HEA and HEO, a prerequisite for award of a joint degree is that the programme is a joint one, i.e. an education programme developed and conducted jointly by the higher education institutions in question.

From an SLU viewpoint, it is important to exercise great care during the planning phase, so that all conditions necessary for a Swedish degree are met by the joint programme. Thus, a participating foreign higher education institution must ensure that the requirements for a corresponding programme in its country are met.

### **3.6. Swedish regulations governing issue of joint degrees**

Under HEO, SLU may award a joint degree only if:

- 3.6.1. *"the cooperation is based on a written agreement"* (ch 6, s 11 a; see below).
- 3.6.2. *"the student has completed a programme subject to an agreement pursuant to the same paragraph and also fulfilled the requirements for the award of a qualification at the higher education institution and at least one other higher education institution that has organised a component of the programme"* (ch 6, s 11 e(1)).
- 3.6.3. *"each higher education institution awarding a qualification included in the joint degree may confer the degree awarded by the higher education institution"* (ch 6, s 11 e(2)).
- 3.6.4. *"each qualification included in the joint degree and which is awarded by a higher education institution subject to the Higher Education Act (1992:1434) or by an independent course provider is a designated component for the same qualification as the higher education institution's, and every qualification included in the joint degree awarded by a foreign higher education institution belongs to the same cycle as at the higher education institution"* (ch 6, s 11 e(3-4)).

### ***SLU guidelines***

Before educational cooperation leading to a joint degree begins, anyone planning to take part in the cooperation must ascertain that the requirements set out under 2.4.1 – 2.4.4 above will be met.

### **3.7. HEO requirements for the written agreement**

As mentioned above, educational cooperation resulting in a joint degree must be based on a written agreement intended to assure legal security for students and governing certain fundamental conditions of the cooperation. Under HEO, the following must be evident from the written agreement:

- 3.7.1. *"Every component of the programme is arranged by one of the higher education institutions party to the educational cooperation"* (ch 6, s 11 b (1) (i)). The

agreement must describe the stated learning outcomes and how they are to be achieved by the PhD student.

3.7.2. *"Which components of the programme are to be organised by SLU and which by the other higher education institutions"* (ch 6, s 11 b (2) (i) and (ii)). The agreement must describe how responsibility for stated learning outcomes will be divided between the participating institutions. The PhD student can acquire specific knowledge or proficiency by:

- Thesis work
- Following courses

The agreement must therefore specify 1) that all principal supervisors have joint responsibility for the thesis work; and 2) the higher education institution responsible for ensuring that the PhD student acquires the knowledge and proficiency that is necessary and is not acquired by virtue of the thesis work. Individual courses are specified when they are the obvious means of achieving a specific learning outcome.

3.7.3. *"The components of the programme arranged by an institution other than SLU should also be based on a scientific footing and on proven experience and should be organised so that the programme maintains a high standard"* (ch 6, s 11 b(1)(ii)). The quality of all programme components must be of a high international standard.

3.7.4. *"To which higher education institution(s) organising components of the programme an applicant to the programme is to be admitted"* (ch 6, s 11 b(2)(iii)). PhD students who are to study for a joint degree from SLU and one or more other higher education institutions must be admitted at all the institutions.

3.7.5. *"That the higher education institution may admit applicants only to the component of the programme it will arrange"* (ch 6, s 11 b (2) (iv)). All participating institutions are responsible for the thesis work on joint programmes leading to a joint degree, and hence also for the entire third-cycle programme (see 3.7.2 above). SLU can therefore admit students to the entire third-cycle programme.

3.7.6. *"When a student who has been admitted to a component of the programme by another higher education institution is to be considered to be a student pursuant to section 11 c"* (ch 6, s 11 b(2)(v)). PhD students admitted at SLU and a participating institution to a joint programme leading to a joint degree will be considered to be students at SLU throughout their study period, irrespective of where they pursue their studies.

3.7.7. *"That students should be able to transfer credits for a successfully completed component of a programme at another higher education institution to the higher education institution without special review"* (ch 6, s 11 b (2) (vi)). Students at SLU will gain degree credits for passes awarded by institutions other than SLU without separate assessment provided (i) the content accords with the stated learning

outcomes; and (ii) an agreement on participation has been concluded between the PhD student and the supervisor.

3.7.8. *"What qualification the programme can lead to at each of the higher education institutions"* (ch 6, s 11 b (2) (vii)). In the interests of the students' legal security it is essential that great effort be made to arrive at correct degree titles at the various higher education institutions.

3.7.9. *"Other conditions required for the organisation of the programme"* (ch 6, s 11 b (2) (viii)). See below.

### ***SLU guidelines***

SLU's interpretations and guidelines for application of the HEO requirement of a written agreement are set out above after the relevant quotes from HEO (3.7.1 – 3.7.9).

### **3.8. Additional Swedish legal and SLU-specific requirements governing the written agreement**

In addition to the requirements set out in HEO for the written agreement governing a joint degree (see above), the written agreement must also govern the requirements set out in [Admission regulations for third level education programmes \(PhD education\) at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences](#) and in [Guidelines for third-cycle education at SLU](#) (see internal website). On the basis of these regulations, the agreement should govern:

#### **Education programme issues**

3.8.1. *Admission procedure, including:*

- *Announcement of places on the programme*
- *Application*
- *Entry requirements*
- *Applicant selection*
- *Admission decisions*
- *Employment as a PhD student (funding forms)*

3.8.2. *Clear rules governing the criteria for attaining a pass on each programme component, and for obtaining a degree.*

In order to ensure as far as possible that each student is able to obtain a degree on completing the programme, it is essential to be very clear about what is needed to obtain the degree. In the worst case, if one of the institutions involved does not consider it is able to award its degree to a student, SLU will not be able to award a joint degree to the student either. Under HEO (ch 6, s 9), anyone meeting the requirements for a degree at SLU is entitled, on request, to receive a degree certificate from SLU for a degree other than a joint degree.

3.8.3. *Syllabuses and follow-up*

- a) The PhD student must follow a general syllabus for third-cycle education in the subject in question.
- b) Planning and revision of the PhD studies must be documented in an individual study plan (ISP). The ISP specifies the programme components to be carried out at each institution, and how progress is to be monitored. If the joint programme partner has a three-year PhD programme, the planning must show how coordination between the three-year programme and our four-year programme is to be achieved.

Each ISP must contain a paragraph specifying some of the most important commitments of the supervisor and PhD student. This part of the ISP must be signed by the supervisor, PhD student and director of postgraduate studies. Both the supervisor and the student must comment on commitments that have not been met at the time of the annual follow-up.

- c) The written agreement specifies the higher education institution, and thereby determines which principal supervisor is responsible for ongoing monitoring of the student's progress under the education programme.

#### 3.8.4. *Supervisor issues*

- a) Specification of each supervisor's role(s) and division of responsibility.

#### 3.8.5. *Doctoral thesis and thesis defence.* The written agreement must specify:

- a) the requirements as to thesis content, and the form in which it is to be published.
- b) how and where a public defence of the thesis will take place – the defence may be held in accordance with the regulations of another higher education institution, provided the general requirements set out in HEO are met (ch 6, ss 33 – 35).

#### 3.8.6. *Procedure for independent continuous quality control of the education programme at each participating institution.* In Sweden the National Agency for Higher Education is responsible for national quality evaluations, but the agency has not yet decided how these evaluations are to be performed.

#### 3.8.7. *If things do not go according to plan.* The written agreement should describe the procedure to be followed if the third-cycle programme cannot be completed within the timetable, and who will be responsible for resolving any conflicts between a PhD student and his/her supervisor.

### **Administrative issues**

#### 3.8.8. *Agreement on which country's laws are to govern:*

- a) *the programme as a whole;*

- b) *each programme component (course)*. The regulations of the higher education institution responsible concerning tests and examinations, for example, must be complied with during the programme component in question. In other words, SLU's regulations on, e.g. tests and examinations, must be complied with during courses organised by SLU.

*The written agreement should also stipulate that the regulations of the relevant higher education institution always take precedence over the provisions of the agreement (if a conflict between them arises during a programme component).*

### 3.8.9. *Degree issues and degree certificate:*

- a) *The higher education institution responsible for administration of degree issues and degree certificates.*
- b) *Form and content of degree certificates and diploma supplements (DS)*. SLU's policy is that the degree certificate must be issued in the form of a joint document. There are no particular requirements as to the form of this document, provided the HEO requirements as to content<sup>7</sup> and SLU's visibility requirements are met. DS should accord with the model formulated jointly by the EU Commission et al., and must be issued automatically and without cost to all students.

3.8.10. *Intellectual property*. The written agreement must include guidelines on the treatment of rights such as intellectual property rights, etc.

## **3.9. Joint degrees in practice – areas requiring particular clarification**

### **3.9.1. *Funding and fees***

Under Swedish law, a PhD student may only be admitted if the university considers that funding can be assured for the entire programme. It is therefore necessary to ascertain that reliable funding is available for all four years, and that the written agreement stipulates how responsibility for funding is to be divided between the participating institutions. Note that third-cycle programmes are only three years long in many European countries, but are four years in Sweden. The written agreement must therefore assure the student's right to a degree without SLU risking having to fund programme components that in fact fall within the responsibility of another higher education institution, and vice versa.

It is also desirable for the written agreement to specify how costs arising in conjunction with thesis work are to be funded (travel, conference fees, printing and distribution of the thesis, etc.).

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<sup>7</sup> HEO, ch 6, s 10.

### **3.9.2. *Ladok***

All students must be registered in the *Ladok* study documentation system. When a degree is awarded, an entry is made showing that the degree is a joint degree.

### **3.9.3. *Responsibility for student service and study guidance***

Responsibility for student service and study guidance (including contact persons at participating higher education institutions/departments, responsibility for accommodation issues, the institution/department to which the student can turn if he/she has any complaints) should be specified in the written agreement.

### **3.9.4. *Responsibility for transferring credits between higher education institutions***

The institutions should establish procedures for transferring information on credits awarded between them. The agreement must always clearly state whether the institution or the students are responsible for transferring this information.

## **4. References**

*Higher Education Act* (1992:1434).

*Higher Education Ordinance* (1993:100).

Bill 2008/09:175. *Gränslös kunskap – högskolan i globaliseringens tid* ("Limitless knowledge – higher education in the era of globalisation").

*Gemensamma examina* ("Joint Degrees" (white paper) Ds 2008:80. Author: Lennart Johansson, 2008.

## **5. Further information**

For further information visit SLU's joint degree page [Gemensam examen](#) (currently in Swedish only) on the internal website.