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Guidelines for joint and double degrees in doctoral-level programmes at SLU

1. Introduction

Cooperation on and cross-listing of doctoral courses with other universities can be designed with the aim that doctoral students who successfully complete their studies obtain a joint or double degree.

1.1 Definition of joint degree

A joint doctoral degree is based on one programme, one public defence of a thesis and one diploma.

The Swedish Higher Education Act (HEA) allows Swedish universities and university colleges to award joint degrees together with foreign or other Swedish higher education institutions (HEIs)¹, provided that the programme leading to the degree has been jointly developed and is jointly conducted by two or more HEIs. A joint degree should be documented in a single diploma awarded jointly by the cooperating higher education institutions.

1.2 Definition of double degree

According to a definition by the former Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, a double degree is the result of a programme that is developed or

¹ According to the HEA, a joint degree may be awarded together with “another higher education institution, an independent course provider entitled to award a qualification pursuant to the Act Concerning Authority to Award Certain Qualifications (1993:792), or a higher education institution outside Sweden that is not a physical individual.”

provided by two or more HEIs together and which leads to two or more diplomas, in practice one at each HEI offering the programme.

1.3 Signing agreements on cooperation in education

Regardless of the form of the cooperation, normal delegation rules apply to the signing of the agreement with the partner university. If several faculties are involved, the starting point is that the vice-chancellor signs the agreement. If several departments are involved, it is signed by the dean, and if only one department is involved the head of department signs the agreement. The mandate to sign agreements can be delegated as per the delegation of authority. SLU's legal counsel shall review the agreement before it is signed.

2. How to decide – joint or double degrees?

The following questions are intended as a guide when deciding whether to offer a joint or a double degree:

- What kind of cooperation is being sought?
 - a) Mainly educational cooperation
 - b) Mainly research cooperation
- How many doctoral students will be covered by the cooperation?
 - a) A large number
 - b) A few
- How long will the cooperation last?
 - a) Longer than four years
 - b) Not more than four years
- Is the department willing to take on extensive extra administration?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- Are national legislation and regulations governing doctoral education compatible, or are there invincible differences?
 - a) They are compatible.
 - b) There are invincible differences.
- Can you formulate shared educational goals/learning objectives for the programme?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- Is the planned cooperation in line with faculty strategy?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- Is the planned cooperation in line with SLU strategy?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No

If the questions have largely been answered with a, it is reasonable to aim for a joint degree, but if the answers are predominantly b, the aim should be a double degree.

3. Double degree

3.1 SLU policy for double degrees in doctoral education

If SLU collaborates with another (or several) HEI(s), doctoral students from that HEI may be admitted to doctoral education at SLU if the following conditions are fulfilled:

- The collaboration is based on a time-limited research project.
- It only concerns a few doctoral students, and they are part of the research project.
- Doctoral education at the other HEI is of sufficient quality, scope and stability.
- The joint programme is approved by the faculty's doctoral education committee.
- The HEIs involved conclude an agreement.

The programme must be carried out in a manner that is compatible with the national legislation of the parties as well as local guidelines of importance for the quality of the education. Examination of the doctoral student's knowledge and skills, through the thesis and the defence of it, must comply with the national legislation of all parties as well as with local guidelines. On completion of the qualification, the doctoral student will receive degree certificates from SLU and the other HEI (double degree).

An agreement on educational cooperation and double degrees must, at a minimum, regulate the following:

- a) If there is to be a joint thesis, an agreement must be reached on the form of publication and how to fund printing, distribution etc.
- b) If there is to be a joint defence of the thesis, an agreement must be reached on how and where the defence will take place to ensure that the Swedish principle of public access to documents is fulfilled.
- c) Which of the HEIs, that is which principal supervisor, is responsible for continual follow-up and progress of studies.
- d) Who is financially responsible if the original funding lapses.
- e) Who is responsible for resolving any conflict between the doctoral student and the principal supervisor.
- f) What to do if the student cannot complete the programme within the stipulated time.

4. Joint degrees

4.1 SLU policy for joint degrees in doctoral education

The Higher Education Ordinance (HEO) requires a detailed written agreement between the cooperating universities (see section 4.3 *The road to a joint degree in practice* for instructions on what the agreement should contain). In principle, the agreement means that one university – the lead university – makes the administrative decisions on e.g. admission, transfer of credits and examination, on

behalf of the other HEIs. Programmes designed to result in joint degrees entail considerable administration.

The agreement must specify the following:

1. Each programme component is to be carried out by one of the HEIs taking part in the cooperation.
2. Which programme components SLU will organise and which the other HEI will organise.
3. Programme components organised by the other HEI must be based on an academic or artistic footing and proven experience and be conducted in a way that ensures high quality.
4. Which of the HEIs a candidate will be admitted to.
5. Doctoral students admitted to the programme must be treated the same as regular doctoral students at the HEI throughout the programme.
6. The doctoral student must be given credit for programme components approved by the other HEI without a separate review at SLU.
7. The degree designation to be used.
8. Any other special requirements from funders etc., for example within the framework of the Erasmus Mundus programme (housing guarantee, organising language courses, etc.).

Programmes aiming at a joint degree must consequently only be set up if the specific strengths of the different partners mean that the quality of education will be strengthened. As far as possible, only equal and well-tried HEIs should be considered. Examples of such HEIs can be found within the NOVA and ELLS networks. Furthermore, all partners must be committed to creating a common long-term educational structure that includes several doctoral students over a longer period and which is not limited to a single research project. In other words, cooperation on a single research project is not enough.

When developing a joint programme, the legal rights of doctoral students must be ensured. The same rights and obligations must apply to the doctoral students on a joint degree programme as to those who are accepted to other programmes at the HEIs concerned. Consequently, the written agreement must regulate, in detail and unambiguously, all aspects that may affect the doctoral students' ability to ultimately obtain their degree.

4.2 National rules for joint degrees

The award of a joint degree based on a joint programme requires compatibility between at least two different HEIs. It is consequently a complex process. The complexity increases if cooperation is international as education and legislation in at least two countries need to be combined and observed. The Swedish parliament and government have therefore regulated the criteria that must be fulfilled for joint degrees to be awarded by Swedish HEIs (HEA Chapter 1, Section 17 and HEO Chapter 6, Section 11 a–f).

According to the HEO, SLU may award a joint degree only if the following applies:

- There is a written agreement that meets the requirements in HEO Chapter 6, Section 11b– d, specified below under “The agreement must ensure”.
- It is a joint programme, i.e. a programme jointly developed and implemented by the HEIs in question.
- All the conditions necessary for a Swedish degree are fulfilled by the joint programme.
- A HEI outside Sweden that is part of the cooperation must ensure that the requirements for an equivalent programme in its country are met.
- All programme components must be offered by the participating HEIs. The different HEIs organise different components, the contents of which is agreed by the HEIs together in the agreement.
- From a legal point of view, each HEI is responsible for its components: for the components run by SLU, Swedish higher education legislation applies, and for the components run by other HEIs, their respective legislation applies.

4.3 *The road to a joint degree in practice*

Anyone who plans/wishes to initiate educational cooperation that results in a joint degree must, at an early stage, consult with the head of department and the chair of the doctoral education committee concerned. They, in turn, can consult with the person in the “rektorsgruppen” that on delegation from the vice-chancellor is responsible for doctoral education at the university management level. The vice-chancellor then signs a statement of intent (*letter of intent*, see below). A justification for the choice of partner HEI(s) should be attached and include an evaluation of the potential partner HEIs based on the following criteria:

- Strategy and policy – should be in good agreement with SLU and faculty strategy and policy.
- Reputation and quality – SLU distinguishes itself through its partners, therefore cooperation should strengthen and not weaken the SLU brand.
- The HEI's accreditation in the home country – information about the quality must be reliable.
- In-depth/formalisation of contacts with priority HEIs according to SLU strategies and strategic direction documents.
- Demand from doctoral students, teachers and researchers.
- Administrative processes and national legislation as these can affect how “unwieldy” the cooperation becomes.
- Administrative capacity – what resources are available for administrative support?
- Reciprocity – what each HEI gains from cooperation.
- It is advisable to review information, guidelines etc. regarding research at SLU and to contact SLU's legal counsel in good time when an agreement is to be drawn up. To create conditions for smooth cooperation, the following should be considered early on in the planning process:

- Important differences between the regulations of the partner HEIs (for example, requirements of a principal supervisor, follow-up of studies, format and scope of the thesis, structure of the defence of the thesis, requirements for the examining committee members, etc.).
- Procedure if key persons among the teachers of an HEI are no longer available.
- Procedure in the event of a conflict.

New cooperation initiatives intended to result in a joint degree must be approved by the faculty's doctoral education committee.

If funding for the joint programme is to be sought from various EU programmes such as Erasmus Mundus, the application – from SLU's perspective – can be submitted to the European Commission after consultation with the person in the “rektorsgruppen” that on delegation from the vice-chancellor is responsible for doctoral education at the university management level, and after the vice-chancellor has signed the letter of intent. It is only when SLU is the full partner/lead university in an EU programme that cooperation can lead to a joint degree; in cases where SLU is an associated partner, the cooperation will instead lead to a double degree.

SLU instructions for the agreement

Lead university

If a lead university is designated, its responsibilities should be specified in the agreement. The lead university can take responsibility for, for example, arranging the thesis defence, organising a doctoral award ceremony and compiling the diploma.

Funding and fee management

The agreement is intended to secure the doctoral students' right to a joint degree, without SLU taking on financial responsibility for those components of the programme that other HEIs are responsible for. Therefore, there should be secure sources of funding for the entire programme, and the agreement must also regulate how financial responsibility is shared between HEIs.

Agreement on which country's legislation should apply:

- a) *The programme as a whole.* Preferably linked to the HEI with the main responsibility for admission.

In the case of Swedish HEIs covered by the HEA, this means that a decision by an HEI on e.g. suspension only applies to the programme components that particular HEI organises. If a doctoral student, or a student who is to be regarded as a doctoral student, is also to be excluded from other programme components, this must be done in accordance with the rules applicable to the HEI that organises that component.

- b) *Individual programme components (courses).* The regulations on e.g. examination at the HEI responsible for a programme component must be

followed for that component. In other words, SLU regulations apply to programme components organised by SLU.

Attention needs to be paid to regulations for the thesis, especially if it is possible to do this at two or more HEIs taking part in the cooperation. It is then necessary to specify the division of labour between the partners.

Definition of *programme component*

Chapter 6 Section 11 b of the HEO stipulates that “the higher education institution shall ensure that every component of the programme is arranged by one of the higher education institutions party to the educational cooperation”. In doctoral education, planning often changes during a programme. Furthermore, the term “component” can be defined in different ways. This may include the entire programme, individual courses or parts of the thesis work. It can also refer to individual learning objectives. What is meant by “component” in educational cooperation should be defined in the agreement, but it should be open to change over time. Such changes must be made in writing and approved by both HEIs.

Confidentiality

The agreement must contain provisions to the effect that SLU is not prevented from following the Swedish principle of public access to documents, or is required to pay damages for doing so.

Admission process, application, selection and admission

The processes for publishing posts, application and selection must be in accordance with legislation and local regulations, see the Admission regulations for third-cycle (doctoral) education at SLU (SLU ua 2018.1.1.1-930).

The HEO Chapter 6 Section 11b allows for several ways of admitting applicants to doctoral programmes. This gives certain flexibility when reconciling the legislation that applies to different HEIs. Which one to choose depends on e.g. whether the partner HEI is Swedish or not, how many partners are included in the cooperation and whether SLU is the lead university. The following are all options:

5. All partner HEIs, including SLU, admit applicants to the programme components they organise.
6. The lead university admits students to the entire programme. The partner HEIs make no decisions on admission.
7. The lead university admits students to the entire programme. The partner HEIs admit students to the programme components they organise.

Supervision

Each HEI is responsible for ensuring that the supervisors fulfil the requirements. The responsibilities of the supervisors at the examining HEIs must be clarified and regulated in the agreement. A doctoral student's right to change supervisors should also be included in the agreement (HEO Chapter 6, Section 28).

General and individual study plans

The HEO, as well as SLU guidelines, contain requirements for individual as well as general study plans which should be referred to in the agreement (HEO Chapter

6 Sections 26 and 29). When establishing joint programmes at the doctoral level, a new doctoral education subject is normally not set up, but the programme must be accommodated within an existing subject at SLU. The envisaged mobility plan with periods of stay at the different HEIs should also be mentioned.

Forms of financial support and insurance

The types of financial support that will be available should be stated in the agreement. According to SLU's admission regulations for doctoral education, doctoral employment is the normal form of financial support. Certain other forms of funding are allowed within the limits specified in the admission regulations. Funding through scholarship may be allowed for more than one year if the exemption requirements are met (HEO Chapter 5). The agreement shall also specify what insurance cover the doctoral student has.

Defence of the thesis and publication

The processes for thesis defence, the examining committee and award of a thesis grade must follow legislation and local regulations, see Guidelines for doctoral education at SLU (SLU ua 2018.1.1.1-4677). There must be agreement on the form of publication, how academic affiliation is to be handled as well as on how to design, publish and finance any thesis. As regards ownership of the research findings, the intellectual property rights of academic staff (*lärarundantaget*) must be explained in accordance with SLU regulations. Co-authorship should be discussed and, if necessary, agreed upon. In addition, these processes need to be compatible with the national and local regulations that apply to the other HEI concerning the defence of the thesis, examining committee and grades.

Credit transfer

The HEO Chapter 6 Section 11 b states that for a joint degree, students must be able to transfer credits for a successfully completed component of a programme at another HEI without special review (HEO Chapter 6, Section 11 b). For a double degree, the HEIs individually examine the programme components and decide on any transfer of credits.

Responsibility for transfer of study results between HEIs

The HEIs must establish a procedure for the transfer of information on study results between them. It should always be stated in the agreement if the HEI or the doctoral student is responsible for the transfer of such information.

Degree requirements and diplomas

The degree requirements according to SLU regulations must be fulfilled. For other participating HEIs, their respective national regulations apply.

The agreement must state the designation of the degree that the programme will lead to. Furthermore, the agreement should state which form of certificate is to be issued upon successful completion of a programme. Usually, a joint certificate is issued. See HEO Chapter 6 Section 11d–f on joint degrees, and HEO Chapter 6, Section 10a on diplomas. An appendix, a *diploma supplement*, describing the

programme and its place in the educational system must be attached to the certificate. The diploma supplement should follow the model jointly developed by the European Commission and others and should be issued automatically and free of charge to all doctoral students. If the programme is to lead to a joint certificate, the agreement must also state which HEI is to administer this.

Responsibility for communication, student services and study guidance

Responsibility for information and communication with the doctoral students, both before and during the programme, must be clarified. Contact persons at the participating HEI(s), responsibility for housing issues and the HEI/department to which doctoral students can address any complaints should also be mentioned.

Quality assurance and quality development

The agreement should state which HEI has the main responsibility for systematic quality assurance and quality development of the doctoral programme.

Development and student influence

The agreement should clarify how the programme may develop over time, how student influence can be achieved and how any changes must be decided and documented.

Cancelled cooperation

The agreement should state the grounds on which educational cooperation can be interrupted. If cooperation is terminated, the individual doctoral student has the right to continue their doctoral studies at SLU.