

ACADEMIC QUALITY



Quality Assurance Policy

University Position on Dual Awards in relation to Academic Partnerships

Endorsed by UCQS: 30 June 2021

Summary

This paper sets out a proposed institution-wide position on dual awards in relation to academic partnerships which was presented to the University Committee for Quality and Standards for consideration and approval (*endorsement received 30 June 2021*).

As the University seeks to implement a more strategic, managed approach to partnerships through the new Partnership Management and Approval Group and seeks to grow income from partnerships, parallel activity is underway to ensure the robustness of the underpinning quality and risk frameworks. As part of this underpinning activity, there is a need to provide clarification on the University's position on dual awards.

The enclosed proposal reflects the University's current position, which has not previously been formalised, and also aligns with the UK Quality Code's section on Partnerships.

The paper has been produced by the Head of Academic Quality and the Global Quality Officer, and has been endorsed by the Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life).

This paper does not apply to articulation or progression partnerships which result in a HWU award only, or to those Study Abroad or Visiting Student arrangements which result in credit but no award.

Awards associated with Partnerships

In February 2020, the Quality Assurance Agency UK published its updated Characteristics Statement on [*Qualifications involving more than one degree-awarding body*](#), which is a part of the broader UK Quality Code, specifically the Advice and Guidance on [Partnerships](#).

QAA identifies three types of awards which can be conferred when two degree-awarding bodies deliver a programme of study in partnership:

- Joint degree award
- Double degree award
- Dual degree award

Each type of Collaborative Partnership award is defined below and it has been agreed by the University Committee for Quality and Standards that Heriot-Watt will adhere to these definitions.

In each case, QAA specifies that both institutions should be involved in the design as well as the delivery of the programme: *The guiding principle is that a qualification involving more than one degree-awarding body is underpinned by a genuinely joint enterprise (from the earliest stages) and partnership between the degree-awarding bodies involved.*

QAA clearly indicates that the same principles apply to smaller amounts of learning as well as to degree programmes.

Joint Degree Awards

An arrangement under which two or more degree-awarding bodies together provide a programme leading to a single award made jointly by both, or all, participants. A single certificate or document (signed by the competent authorities) attests to successful completion of this jointly delivered programme, replacing the separate institutional or national qualifications

Double Degree Awards

The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same programme by two degree-awarding bodies who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. Double degree awards are typically made for joint degree programmes when the in-country legal or regulatory framework of the partner does not permit a single award certificate with crests and signatures of other HEIs. The certificate or transcript of the UK HEI should make reference to programme being delivered jointly with another partner.

Dual Degree Awards

Two degree-awarding bodies jointly designing a programme of study comprising a joint initial curriculum (or two parallel and equivalent curricula), followed by two separate blocks taken consecutively at each partner in turn, leading to two separate qualifications awarded individually by the two degree-awarding bodies.

Each degree-awarding body is responsible for its own award, but the two components form a single package, and the overall arrangement is a joint enterprise that requires elements of joint management and oversight.

A variation on this model is where two courses are arranged to lock together with overlapping curricula, but the student completes them consecutively, rather than involving an initial joint element.

These types of arrangement have aspects in common with articulation arrangements, in that the two learning experiences are paired, the curricula are aligned, and one partner recognises learning undertaken at the partner degree-awarding body as contributing to its own qualification.

QAA also defines “multiple awards”, ie awards involving three or more degree-awarding partners, as follows:

An arrangement where three or more degree-awarding bodies together provide a single jointly delivered programme (or programmes) leading to a separate award (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for dual/double awards, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

With all of these awards, QAA makes it clear that these awards should not be made for “recruitment type” of partnerships, whereby a dual award is agreed as part of the contractual arrangement and is designed to enhance the attractiveness of the offer to students. QAA guidance specifies that both/all partners must be involved in the joint design and delivery of the programme; awards should not be made where students simply study a year of a designated programme at the partner HEI:

The exact form of the contribution from each degree-awarding body differs in every arrangement, but arrangements of this type are premised on there being substantial contributions from each participating partner in the creation, management and decision-making related to the course and award.

QAA also specifies that the UK HEI must specify in certificates and/or transcripts that a single programme of study has led to two or more separate qualifications.

If UK degree-awarding bodies have not made clear in certificates and/or transcripts or record of achievement, or Diploma Supplement, where a single programme of study has led to the award of more than one qualification by independent degree-awarding bodies, the award of two or more separate qualifications could be misleading as to the study undertaken. There may also be consequences for students who may be misled as to whether they may obtain a second local degree in addition to a UK qualification.

University Position on Dual Awards

Heriot-Watt has previously made dual awards as part of Visiting Student/Study Abroad partnership arrangements which offer a tuition fee discount to applicants from the partner institution¹. These partnerships do not fully align with the QAA Characteristics Statement in that there is no joint collaboration between the institutions over programme design and delivery; rather, the programmes are designed and delivered entirely independently and exist entirely independently of the other.

In some arrangements, students come to HWU to undertake a full PGT Masters degree. It is entirely appropriate that the award is made independently of the partner HEI because the student has applied separately to HWU,

¹ These are often referred to informally as “recruitment partnerships” to differentiate them from the exchange/bilateral fee-neutral partnerships maintained by the Go Global team.

completed a full qualification at HWU rated at 180 SCQF credits and all that the partnership has offered is a tuition fee discount.

In other partnerships, typically at UG levels, a student is given advanced entry to Year 3 and exits with an Ordinary degree. A fully separate award is made by HWU (and by the partner), without any reference on the transcript or certificate to the partner organisation. The student in turn uses the credit towards a separate award at their home institution. This type of double counting of credits is avoided by many UK HEIs because there is an implication that the student has fully completed two separate awards in parallel, on which there has been no joint design or delivery.

Given the concerns within QAA and other UK HEIs over dual awards which have no collaborative design or delivery, Heriot-Watt University will not normally engage in partnerships which result in a dual award. Exceptions may be considered where there is both a business and an academic justification; in each case, it would be for the Partnership Management and Approval Group to determine the business considerations and for the University Committee for Quality and Standards to determine the academic considerations.