



## Guidance Note: *Joint and Dual Awards*

Version 2.1 (11 October 2017)

*Providers should note that Guidance Notes are intended to provide guidance only. They are not definitive or binding documents. Nor are they prescriptive. The definitive instruments for regulatory purposes remain the TEQSA Act and the Higher Education Standards Framework as amended from time to time.*

### What do joint and dual awards encompass?

Joint and dual awards are typically offered through collaborative or cooperative arrangements between two or more higher education providers<sup>1</sup>, involving either a single course<sup>2</sup>, different courses, or variations on a single course (with common components). Many descriptors are used for such arrangements. These include: dual, joint, double, multiple, tri-national, collaborative, integrated, international, combined, concurrent, consecutive, parallel, simultaneous, overlapping, conjoint and common degree courses. Different countries, different institutions and different regulatory bodies have different understandings of these terms (see Knight, 2008, p.13).

TEQSA uses the terms 'joint award' and 'dual award' to distinguish between two types of collaborative arrangements for courses of study.

### Relevant Standards in the HES Framework

The Standards in the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015 (HES Framework) concerned with joint and dual awards include: the standards in sections 1.5 (Qualifications and Certification) and 3.1 (Course Design), as well as those in section 5.4 (Delivery with Other Parties). In so far as credit is granted for recognition of prior learning or credit transfer arrangements, the relevant Standards for granting credit and recognition of prior learning apply.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dual awards are also offered within the same institution by some providers e.g. PhD/MBA, BSc/BEc, BA/BEc. This guidance note focuses mainly on dual awards that involve an arrangement between two providers.

<sup>2</sup> A 'course' is sometimes known as a 'program', and an 'award' is sometimes called a 'qualification'.



## Joint awards

Joint awards involve a single course of study arranged and delivered jointly by two or more providers that leads to the award of a **single qualification** that is recognised within the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and is typically conferred jointly by the providers involved.

Joint awards involve close cooperation between the providers in the design of the course of study, curriculum development, course delivery, assessment of learning outcomes and on the requirements for awarding the qualification.

In the case of joint awards, following completion of the joint (single) course, students are issued with a single testamur, which states the name of both providers that are awarding the qualification.

In some countries, awarding one qualification from two or more institutions is illegal. This is not the case in Australia. However, the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015* (HES Framework) does require that the providers and persons authorised to issue the award are correctly identified on all testamurs (hence joint awards are also often called 'dual badged' or 'jointly badged').

For some joint awards, students may select a single provider to be enrolled in and this will be the provider that oversees conferral of the qualification and issue of the (jointly badged) testamur. In other cases, students may be enrolled at both providers. For example, arrangements may reflect an 'active' enrolment for the period spent studying at one provider and 'on leave' or similar status when the student is studying at the other provider.

The concept of joint awards does not encompass cases of a higher education provider formally recognising units/subjects or courses of study offered by another institution (including a Registered Training Organisation [RTO] delivering vocational education and training) for the purpose of enabling students to gain advanced standing or credit into a course of study leading to a regulated higher education award offered by the provider. This is simply recognition of prior learning.

Joint awards may be one aspect of collaboration with a partner institution as part of a wider mission or policy agenda such as facilitation of exchanges of staff and students, recruitment of international students and/or forging stronger research linkages.

Stronger research linkages are, in some cases, supported through the use of joint higher degrees by research (HDR). The Australian Government has developed *Principles for Joint Higher Degrees by Research between Australian Higher Education Providers* (May 2011 <<https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/principles-joint-higher-degrees-research>>). The Principles provide guidance to higher education providers (HEPs) entering into agreements for the management and delivery of joint awards of HDRs. Joint HDR awards are defined in the Principles as 'a *Research Doctorate, including a Professional Doctorate, or Research Masters... where the student spends a minimum time equivalent to the total of one year or one-third full-time candidature over the course of their award enrolled at each HEP*'. While the Principles do not form part of the HES Framework against which TEQSA regulates, they may provide useful guidance for providers that are planning to offer joint HDR awards.

## Dual awards

**Dual awards** involve one or more courses of study that leads to the award of **two separate qualifications**. Where the course involves an arrangement between two providers (a registered provider and another entity, which is also typically a registered provider), one of



the qualifications is typically conferred by each provider. A dual award may involve one AQF level, or two sequential AQF levels - for example, two Masters degrees (MBA/MA) or a Bachelor and Diploma qualification (BSc/Dip Ed). ‘Collaborative double-degree courses’ are a form of dual award.

Like joint awards, dual awards involve a formal relationship between the providers, particularly in relation to academic and student requirements. However, the relationship is inherently different in several respects, particularly in that components of the overall course are typically designed and delivered largely separately by the two providers, rather than jointly, or there are two separate courses, usually with some common components. The award of two qualifications distinguishes dual awards from courses that include a major specialisation, e.g. BA (Music), or a combined degree with one testamur, e.g. BA (Arts Law).

There is typically a mutual interdependence between the courses of study and the award of the qualifications in a dual award, e.g. mutual transfer of credit between the two providers. Because of this, and possibly other streamlining of requirements, dual awards may provide students with an opportunity to achieve two qualifications in a shorter time than if they were completed separately. However, because of the interdependence of the courses, the awarding of qualifications, while done separately by each provider, may be delayed until the requirements of both courses have been fulfilled. The content of the two courses may be cognate (e.g. BA/MA) or different (e.g. BSc/BEC).

In the case of ‘cotutelle’ awards, as defined under French law, two separate testamurs must be issued despite the fact that there is only one single course.

## Similarities and differences

**Table 1: Key similarities and differences between joint and dual awards**

Joint awards	Dual awards
May also be referred to as a ‘jointly-badged’ or ‘collaborative’ award	May also be referred to as a ‘collaborative double degree’ or ‘combined degree’
Single qualification awarded with (normally) a single testamur jointly conferred by two or more providers	Two qualifications conferred separately by the two providers, each with its own testamur from the individual provider concerned
Joint course of study – close collaboration in course and curriculum design, course delivery, and requirements for awarding qualification	Two courses of study, with varying extent of academic or administrative interdependence
Student may be enrolled at both providers or at one	Student enrolled at both providers
Duration of the course is not normally extended compared to an individual course	May provide students with the opportunity to complete two awards in a shorter timeframe than if completed separately
Physical and/or virtual mobility of students and/or staff and/or course content	Physical and/or virtual mobility of students and/or staff and/or course content
Facilitated through a MOU or formal agreement between two or more providers.	Facilitated through a MOU or formal agreement between two providers



## Regulation by TEQSA

TEQSA's jurisdiction covers all courses of study offered by registered higher education providers. Where TEQSA has jurisdiction over any course, it will hold the provider accrediting that course responsible for meeting the applicable Standards.

## Intent of the Standards

The intent of the Standards is to ensure high quality education and student experiences and credible qualifications, in the same way as the Standards apply to any other mode of participation, irrespective of arrangements between providers.

## Risks to Quality

While courses of study that lead to joint/dual awards offer a number of potential benefits to students, to providers and to the diversity and efficiency of Australian higher education, there are also potential risks to the quality of education and/or student experiences including:

- unclear or confused allocation of responsibilities between providers for delivery of the elements of the course(s) of study
- lapses in oversight and monitoring of student progress and students at risk
- inaccurate, misleading or insufficient information for students from different providers about joint/dual arrangements
- unresolved conflict of academic policies or cultural norms between the different providers involved
- excessive or inappropriate granting of credit between mutually interdependent courses of study, resulting in 'double counting' and:
  - credit granted for learning outcomes not achieved
  - employers and other stakeholders being led to believe that graduates have undertaken more study than is in fact the case
- premature commencement of a higher level course of study without sufficient academic or other preparation arising from a lower level of pre-requisite study e.g. in a combination bachelor/masters dual degree
- potential lapses of academic integrity across joint arrangements
- unmanageable workloads for students and/or insufficient opportunities for engagement with each area of study in dual-degree courses
- logistical difficulties for students in engaging with two courses or providers
- unintended adverse consequences for CRICOS registration and/or international students, or
- insufficient diligence in establishing and monitoring partnering arrangements.





## What TEQSA will look for

This part of the guidance note covers the full extent of the Standards, and corresponding evidence that TEQSA may require, in relation to joint and dual awards.

For new applicants seeking initial registration and course accreditation, TEQSA will require evidence to be provided in relation to all relevant Standards.

For existing providers, the scope of Standards to be assessed and the evidence required may vary. This is consistent with the regulatory principles in the TEQSA Act, under which TEQSA has discretion to vary the scope of its assessments and the related evidence required. In exercising this discretion, TEQSA will be guided by the provider's regulatory history, its risk profile and its track record in delivering high quality higher education.

TEQSA's case managers will discuss with providers the scope of assessments and evidence required well ahead of the due date for submitting an application.

The evidence required for particular types of application is available from the Application Guides on the TEQSA website.

Providers are required to comply with the Standards at all times, not just at the time of application, and TEQSA may seek evidence of compliance at other times if a risk of non-compliance is identified.

TEQSA will need to be satisfied that joint and dual awards meet the requirements of the HES Framework in the same way as any other course of study. In so doing, TEQSA will have regard to the specific risks associated with particular arrangements.

Assessment of joint and dual awards by TEQSA is likely to occur in the following circumstances:

- a sample course of study as part of an application for renewal of registration (for providers with self-accrediting authority)
- an application for accreditation or renewal of accreditation of a course of study
- a compliance assessment resulting from identification of risks or concerns.

TEQSA will need to be satisfied in particular that registered providers assume responsibility for the oversight and management of the arrangement, both jointly and separately, as required by the HES Framework for their particular arrangement. This includes rigorous approval of courses through the academic governance processes of each provider involved in formally issuing a qualification and/or offering a course of study (see Section 5.1 of the HES Framework), and quality assurance of joint arrangements (Section 5.4) by management reporting to governing bodies. TEQSA will also need to be satisfied that granting of credit does not disadvantage students or affect the standing and integrity of qualifications awarded. Further, TEQSA need to be confident that information provided to students is consistent with the needs of student cohorts, and is accurate and not misleading.

When assessing joint or dual awards involving a provider(s) from outside of Australia, TEQSA will have regard to differences across a range of issues that may pose challenges in establishing such awards to ensure a quality learning experience for students. These include differences in: regulatory systems, the self-accrediting status of a partner, academic calendars, credit systems, teaching approaches, examination requirements, language capacity and language of instruction, academic workload requirements, entrance and exit requirements, course fees and funding, and course completion requirements.



Because of the variety of possible arrangements, providers are advised to consult with a case manager at TEQSA when contemplating such arrangements for the first time, and especially when involving overseas partners. Where an application is to be submitted to TEQSA for accreditation, this consultation may occur in the context of the pre-submission discussions.

## Resources and references

Australian Government, (May 2011), *Principles for Joint Higher Degrees by Research between Australian Higher Education Providers*,  
<<https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/principles-joint-higher-degrees-research>>.

European Consortium for Accreditation (2014), *Assessment framework for joint programmes in single accreditation procedures*,  
<[http://ecahe.eu/w/images/e/e6/Assessment\\_framework\\_for\\_joint\\_programmes\\_in\\_single\\_accreditation\\_procedures\\_-\\_ECA.pdf](http://ecahe.eu/w/images/e/e6/Assessment_framework_for_joint_programmes_in_single_accreditation_procedures_-_ECA.pdf)>.

European Consortium for Accreditation (2010), *How to assess and accredit joint programmes in Europe*, <<http://ecahe.eu/w/images/c/cb/Eca-publication---how-to-assess-and-accredit-joint-programmes-in-europe-final.pdf>>.

European Consortium for Accreditation (2010), *The recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes*, <<http://ecahe.eu/w/images/4/47/Eca-Publication---the-recognition-of-qualifications-awarded-by-joint-programmes--2010.pdf>>.

Knight, J. (2008), *Joint and Double Degree Programmes: Vexing Questions and Issues*, The Observatory on borderless higher education, September,  
<[http://ecahe.eu/w/images/c/cc/Joint\\_and\\_double\\_degree\\_programmes\\_-\\_vexing\\_questions\\_and\\_issues\\_-\\_september\\_2008.pdf](http://ecahe.eu/w/images/c/cc/Joint_and_double_degree_programmes_-_vexing_questions_and_issues_-_september_2008.pdf)>.

TEQSA (2016), *Explanations of terms in Part A of the HES Framework 2015*,  
<<http://www.teqsa.gov.au/explanations-hes-framework-terms>>.

*TEQSA welcomes the diversity of educational delivery across the sector and acknowledges that its Guidance Notes may not encompass all of the circumstances seen in the sector. TEQSA also recognises that the requirements of the HESF can be met in different ways according to the circumstances of the provider. Provided the requirements of the HESF are met, TEQSA will not prescribe how they are met. If in doubt, please consult your TEQSA case manager.*

Version #	Date	Key changes
1.0	September 2013	
2.0	19 August 2016	Updated for the HESF 2015 and made available as beta version for consultation. Replaces previous information paper on 'TEQSA's approach to the assessment of joint and dual awards'.
2.1	11 October 2017	Addition to 'What will TEQSA look for?' text box.

