



Information Paper: *TEQSA's approach to the assessment of joint and dual awards*

September 2013



Purpose

There is a plethora of terms used to describe higher education programs offered in collaboration by two or more providers. These include: dual, joint, double, multiple; tri-national; collaborative; integrated; international; combined; concurrent; consecutive; parallel; simultaneous; overlapping; conjoint; and common degrees. Different countries, different institutions, and different regulatory bodies have different understandings of the terms (Knight, 2008:13).

This document provides definitions of 'joint' and 'dual' awards and outlines TEQSA's approach to the assessment of such awards.

Definitions and characteristics

Joint awards involve the awarding of a single qualification which is jointly conferred by two or more providers and recognised within the Australian Qualifications Framework. Joint awards involve close cooperation among the providers in curriculum development, design, organisation, course delivery, and assessment of learning outcomes as well as requirements necessary for awarding the qualification.

The certification documentation for joint awards normally takes the form of a single testamur, but may also involve two separate testamurs, each recognising that the qualification was undertaken through a joint program. For example, in the case of 'cotutelle' awards (a unique class of a joint PhD program, as defined under French law), two testamurs may be issued because of legislative or regulatory provisions in other countries.

In some countries awarding one qualification from two or more institutions is illegal. This is not the case in Australia. The Threshold Standards contemplate multiple awards offered by a higher education provider (HEP) in conjunction with another entity. Importantly, they require that all HEPs or person/s authorised to issue the award are correctly identified on the testamur.

In some joint awards, students may elect an institution to be enrolled in and this is the institution which oversees conferral of the testamur. In other cases, students may be enrolled at both institutions. For example, arrangements may reflect an 'active' enrolment for the period spent studying at one institution and 'on leave' or similar status when the student is studying at the other institution.

The definition of joint awards does not include a HEP 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 HEP.

Joint awards may be one aspect of collaboration with a partner as part of a wider mission to facilitate staff and student exchanges, recruitment of international students and/or stronger research linkages.

Stronger research linkages are, in some cases, supported through the use of Joint HDR Awards. The *Principles for Joint Higher Degrees by Research between Australian Higher Education Providers* (May 2011) ('the Principles') were developed by the Australian



government to provide guidance to HEPs entering into agreements for the management and delivery of joint HDR awards. Joint HDR awards are defined in the Principles as “a Research Doctorate, including a Professional Doctorate; or Research Masters involving at least two-thirds of the student load for the course as research work, and where a student spends a minimum time equivalent to the total of one year (or one-third of full-time candidature) over the course of the award enrolled at each HEP.” The Principles are at:

http://www.innovation.gov.au/Research/ResearchBlockGrants/Documents/Principles_Joint_HDR.pdf (accessed 30 August, 2013). While the Principles do not form part of the Higher Education Standards Framework against which TEQSA regulates, they may provide useful guidance for HEPs planning to offer joint HDR awards.

Dual awards involve a registered HEP and another entity offering a course of study which results in two separate awards being conferred from two institutions. A dual award may involve one AQF level, or two sequential AQF levels - for example, two Masters degrees or a Bachelor and Diploma award. ‘Collaborative double degree programs’ are a form of dual award. Dual awards may provide students with the opportunity to complete two awards in a shorter timeframe than if completed separately.

TEQSA’s role

TEQSA regulates against the Threshold Standards within the Higher Education Standards Framework. The Threshold Standards apply to all a registered higher education provider’s (HEP’s) activities, regardless of delivery site and place and cover arrangements with third parties.

HEPs regulated by TEQSA are directly responsible for ensuring the academic standard of any award offered or conferred by them, whether or not this is in collaboration with one or more other providers. Provider Registration Standard 4.5 requires that:

The HEP protects academic integrity in higher education through effective policies and measures to: ... ensure that the awarding of multiple awards, including higher education awards offered in conjunction with another entity, protects the integrity of the higher education awards offered by the HEP.

TEQSA’s role is to effectively regulate to assure that these responsibilities are upheld so that joint and dual awards deliver quality student experiences.

TEQSA’s jurisdiction

TEQSA’s jurisdiction covers courses of study that lead to a ‘regulated higher education award’. Section 6 of the TEQSA Act defines ‘regulated higher education awards’, as including: (a) Australian higher education awards and (b) overseas higher education awards, if those awards relate to courses of study provided wholly or mainly from Australian premises.

In cases where a **joint award** is offered by a registered HEP with an overseas entity not registered in Australia, TEQSA will consider whether half or more of the course is provided overseas and will also have regard to the regulatory principles of risk, proportionality and necessity when determining whether or not regulatory action is necessary.



Similarities and differences

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

Joint Award	Dual Award
May also be referred to as 'jointly badged' or 'collaborative' award	May also be referred to as 'collaborative double degree' or 'combined degree'
Single qualification and (normally) single testamur jointly conferred by two or more providers	Two Qualifications and two testamurs conferred separately by two providers
Joint program of study – close collaboration in course and curriculum design, course delivery, and requirements for award qualification	Two programs of study
Student may be enrolled at both institutions or at one institution	Student enrolled at both institutions
Duration of the course is normally not 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 providers. May also involve separate individual student agreements between the HEP and the other institution/s	Facilitated through a MOU or formal agreement between two providers

Assessment by TEQSA

Courses of study leading to joint or dual awards will be assessed against the provisions of the Threshold Standards, in particular the Provider Course Accreditation Standards and the Qualification Standards.

Normally, assessment of joint and dual awards will occur in the following circumstances:

- a sample course of study as part of an application for renewal of registration (for HEPs 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.

When assessing joint or dual awards involving provider/s from outside 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.



Further information

Further information about TEQSA's approach to regulation of joint and dual awards can be obtained by contacting the relevant case manager or by directing an email enquiry to: enquiries@teqsa.gov.au.

References

Knight, J, 2008, *Joint and Double Degree Programmes: Vexing Questions and Issues*, The Observatory on borderless higher education, September.

European Consortium for Accreditation, 2012, *Assessment framework for joint programmes in single accreditation procedures*.

European Consortium for Accreditation, 2010, *The recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes*.

European Consortium for Accreditation, 2010, *How to assess and accredit joint programmes in Europe*.