Joining forces in joint programmes: challenges and chances

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Abstract
In some cases collaboration with an international partner university has turned out to be so fruitful that universities decide to set up a more structural collaboration: leading towards a double degree or a joint degree. In double degree programmes students obtain two diplomas from two different universities, after having spent part of their study programme in each of the universities. In joint degree programmes students obtain one single diploma that is jointly awarded by the universities.

Both TUAS and HU offer double degree programmes and have both recently been looking into ‘the rules of the game’ involved when offering such programmes. The audience of this presentation will be informed about procedures and specific requirements at TUAS and HU, about the challenges both universities have had to face to assure the quality of the programmes and value of the diplomas awarded, but also about the added value of these kinds of programmes. Finally, the presenters will share their ideas about developing joint programmes between the CARPE partners.
1. Introduction

In 1999 the ministers of Education of all EU countries committed themselves to developing a transparent European Higher Education Area, by introducing a three cycle system of bachelor – master – PhD in higher education, as laid down in the Bologna Declaration. At present the three cycle system is common practice in the higher education sector of most European countries. One of the objectives of the Bologna agreement is promoting international mobility - of students, staff and graduates – which is being sustained by the uniformity of degree programmes. This uniformity also makes it easier for study programmes to exchange the content of their courses, i.e. recognizing the study modules of international partner universities as replacement for part of their own study programme. This makes a valuable contribution to the implementation and expansion of (Erasmus) exchange as well as more intensified ways of cooperation: through double or joint degrees.

In the last decade, double and joint degree programmes have strongly gained popularity among internationally oriented programmes and universities. Universities mostly choose the double degree construction above the joint degree construction, the latter being more difficult to set up because of legal constraints. The CARPE partners TUAS and HU both offer double degrees and have been dealing with questions such as legal requirements and curricula comparison methods when elaborating the concrete details of their double degree programmes. The CARPE network, being a unique and ambitious network of European universities of applied sciences, seems to form a perfect base for developing joint educational programmes and has also nominated it as one of the aims of the collaboration.

Academics need to be aware though of the ‘double bottom’ when setting up a joint programme: there are many differences in rules and regulations at national and internal level. Looking into these aspects at an early stage will facilitate the process towards a concrete and realistic double or joint degree proposal. The authors of this paper want to share this information with CARPE colleagues at all levels, both academics as well as support staff, to offer them a solid pavement to reach their objectives on the level of joint programmes.

The structure of this paper is as follows: after a definition of joint programmes and double / joint degrees, the authors explain the added value of double or joint degree programmes. After this,
the history of double degrees at HU and TUAS is described and authors share some concrete examples of challenges the universities were confronted with. To conclude, the authors reflect on the challenges and chances for the CARPE network to offer joint programmes and give some concrete recommendations.

2. The definition of joint programmes and double and joint degree programmes

In this paper we apply the following definitions:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Joint programme: a jointly offered educational programme that may lead to a single, double or joint degree, depending on the agreement that is made on this between partner universities</th>
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<tr>
<td>Double degree programme: a joint educational programme in which students obtain two diplomas from two different universities, after having spent part of their study programme in each of the universities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joint degree programme: a joint educational programme in which students obtain one single diploma that is jointly awarded by the universities: so one diploma with two (or more) university names and logos on it. Also here a student has spent part of the study programme in each of the universities.</td>
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3. The added value of double and joint degrees

Developing joint programmes which are implemented in international cooperation is an important part of international activities of European higher education institutions today. A well-planned double degree programme may:

- bring optionality to studies and complement one’s specialisations;
- enhance the international experience and intercultural competence;
- increase goal orientation in study practices of both incoming and outgoing students;
- attract talent and increase the number of foreign degree students and completed degrees;
- act as a quality assurance (through benchmarking) for student and teacher exchanges;
- develop international content and quality of education;
- internationalise the higher education community;
- deepen other cooperation with partner higher education institutions; and
- improve student’s position in the (international) labour market and enhance workforce mobility.

The latter, improving position in the labour market, has recently been confirmed by the QS Global Employer Survey Report 2011 in which 60% of the graduate recruiters confirmed that they value an international experience.

In order to contribute to development of joint and double degrees through EU funding the Commission will support international HEI consortia to develop joint master degrees through Erasmus+

One of the aims of the CARPE network is to strengthen its members’ visibility at European level. Joint programmes under the auspices of CARPE would contribute to this aim.

4. The history of double degrees at HU and TUAS

In 2007, the Business School of HU and a group of European and non-European universities decided to create a partnership programme aimed at offering chances for students from less developed countries to obtain a European Higher Education. Initially incoming students came for a full bachelor’s programme, but at a later stage this was turned into a double degree (exchange) programme, allowing students to obtain a degree after one year of studies at HU degree and giving Dutch students the opportunity of a remarkable international experience and obtain a degree at one of the non-European partner universities. Recently the Business School agreed on another double degree programme with two European partners. Both programmes are liaised with the bachelor’s programme International Business and Management Studies (IBMS) and are currently the only double degree programmes at HU.

At TUAS double degree programmes have a longer history. The first double degree agreements were signed in the early 2000s. They were mostly initiated by the Erasmus partner universities which wanted to deepen the cooperation and attract more exchange students and teachers by

\[1\] The Kofi Annan Business School (www.kabsf.org)
offering something more than simple exchanges. Most of the double degree programmes were introduced in the five international degree programmes which TUAS offered at the time.

Currently TUAS has two double degree programmes in the degree programme International Business, one in Hospitality Management, six in Information Technology, three in Electronics and one in Business/Business Information Technology. Some of these programmes are active and have led to student and teacher mobility in both directions. Others have been inactive and some are about to end because project funding is ending.

Both TUAS and HU have in recent years felt the need for formalizing procedures concerning double degree programmes. In 2012, the immediate cause for HU was to be able to guarantee the final level of graduates, both for incoming and outgoing mobility. At the time a lot of dispute and upheaval was going on after some cases of Dutch universities (of applied sciences) undeservedly awarding degrees to graduating students.

Even though double degree programmes were implemented at TUAS several years ago, before 2013 there were no common rules at the institution level, leading to a situation where TUAS campuses all had different processes related to double degrees. That is why TUAS decided to run an internal project which focused on institution-wide guidelines for the double degree agreement process.

At HU a Guideline for International Double Degrees was stipulated by the Executive Board in April 2012. At TUAS a double degree process guideline was approved by the TUAS board in February 2013.

5. Some examples of steps to take: experiences of TUAS and HU
To give an idea of what to encounter and expect when setting up double degrees, some of the steps to take towards the actual implementation of a double degree are described, divided into three categories: learning outcomes, programme structure and administrative matters.

5.1 Learning Outcomes: Curriculum composition and comparison
Both TUAS and HU prescribe that a double degree programme is based on a comparison between degree programmes involved. Curricula of the degree programmes are being compared
with each other and a proposal is made on the structure and content of the double degree programme, fulfilling certain quality criteria (competence orientation, clear assessment criteria, study load). HU requires that a yearly review and re-assessment takes place whenever changes in one or both study programmes have been introduced. Regular visits to and from the partner university make part of this process, involving both programme co-ordinators as well as members of the exam board.

5.2 Programme structure: thesis, internship/practical training, planning of exchange and compatibility of programme duration

At HU all double degree students wanting to obtain a bachelor’s diploma need to have their final assessment, i.e. the bachelor’s thesis and internship, or one of both, supervised and assessed by HU. It happens that students are staying abroad or already returned to their home university. In that case the supervision and assessment is done through e-mail contact, Skype or other forms of digital communication.

Also at TUAS a bachelor’s thesis must be included in the curriculum leading to a double degree. It is recommended that the thesis is elaborated according to the criteria of one’s home institution, but the guidance and evaluation may be realised in both partner institutions. This is also an excellent way of developing and deepening cooperation between colleagues and partner institutions.

A practical training period (internship) is included in both Finnish as well as Dutch UAS degree education leading to a Bachelor’s degree. All double degree students must complete a training period either during their exchange at TUAS / HU or during their studies at the home institution. It is essential to agree about details on completing practical training, such as information related to study credits, duration, training location, guidance and evaluation.

In most cases, TUAS students completing a double degree leave for exchange on their third study year but this may vary depending on the degree programme. At HU in one case students go abroad in their final (fourth) year, in another in the third year. Either way, at least for these two HEIs, students may leave for exchange only after completing the first study year. At the time of the curriculum comparison and composition, conclusions can be drawn about the best moment to
have students leave for exchange. A student completing a double degree completes a minimum of 120 ECTS credits at his/her home institution and at least 60 ECTS credits at the partner institution.

The extent (210 ECTS) of a 3.5-year-long Finnish BBA programme is rather rare elsewhere in the world. In most EU countries the study credit requirements for a Bachelor’s degree lasting three to four years are normally either 180 ECTS or 240 ECTS credits. The difference between the extent of the degrees means that a TUAS student may obtain a double degree from a partner institution by completing studies which may include either 30 ECTS more or less credits. However, a double degree student must always graduate from his/her home institution before he/she may apply for a degree certificate from the partner institution. Thus, a double degree student will always study at least the minimum amount of ECTS required for his or her home institution degree.

5.3 Administrative matters: enrollment and tuition fees

Incoming double degree students coming to HU and TUAS on an exchange basis are awarded a special status in order to be recognized as degree seeking students.

The way tuition fees and enrollment of incoming double degree students at HU are arranged depends on whether the double degree programme is based on an exchange agreement or unilateral mobility. In case of exchange - while strictly demanding reciprocity over a period of 3 years – students only pay tuition fees at their home university. In case there is unilateral mobility, incoming double degree students need to pay the regular fee for degree seeking students.

Dutch law does not explicitly mention legal requirements that apply to enrollment and tuition fees concerning double degree students. This has led to clarification demands of the HEIs towards the Ministry of Education and Culture, but has not led to concrete results yet. Joint degrees requirements - formally possible as of 2010 - are more clear, but a more difficult and intensive (accreditation) process, therefore most universities still opt for double degrees.

Also in Finland there is some confusion about the law related to joint programmes. The Universities Act and Polytechnics Act, the Finnish legislation documents aimed at Higher Education are quite vague on this topic. The difficulty arises from the tuition fees that Finnish
universities and universities of applied sciences are not allowed to charge at the bachelor level. Students from partner universities do not pay tuition fees at TUAS, but some interpret the law so that it includes also double degree students who must pay tuition at their home university. The Ministry of Education and Culture, however, encourages the Finnish HEIs to create joint programmes.

6. Paving the way towards double or joint degrees within CARPE

The International Institute of International Education (IIE) did a survey on joint and double degree programmes in 2011 and asked the HEIs involved to rate the major challenges when setting up these partnerships. This table gives a good overview of all aspects to consider.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ensuring sustainability</td>
<td>2.85</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Securing adequate funding</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Curriculum design</td>
<td>2.57</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Legal issues</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Recruiting students</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Securing support from national or international organizations/gov’t</td>
<td>2.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Accreditation</td>
<td>2.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Academic calendar differences</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Institutional support</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Credit transfer agreement</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Communicating with partner</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Fee structure agreement</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Language issues</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Degree duration agreement</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Double counting of credits issue</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Negotiating MOU</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Challenges to Setting up Joint or Double Degree Programs (1 = Not Challenging, 4 = Very Challenging). Source: Survey on International Joint and Double Degree Programs 2011
In this chapter the authors will give some recommendations that in their opinion should be considered and worked on before proceeding to the next steps.

First of all, the authors of this paper suggest that rather than immediately develop a joint degree, it would be good to start with a double degree programme. Since, apart from the question whether a joint degree would add more value to a students’ CV than a double degree, in all CARPE countries double degrees seem to be possible, while joint degrees seem to be more restricted by legal requirements\textsuperscript{vii}.

A second recommendation would be to create a CARPE working group for double degrees and to make sure that for the planning and implementation of a double degree programme the participants have working hours and commitment to a long process. If it is decided that the programme should be planned, it is essential that the persons in charge have been named and the required working time resources have been reserved for the process at all partner institutions.

Thirdly, it is recommended to pay close attention to the national legislation related to double and joint degrees: even though legal issues and accreditation are not the first and most challenging aspects in Table 1, the authors of this paper consider these aspects to be challenges which should be looked into by priority. This guarantees that there will not be insurmountable obstacles in the implementation of double degree programme in the future.

A fourth recommendation would be to consult – in addition to CARPE partners’ own guidelines - guidelines and good practices of other HEIs. The Joiman\textsuperscript{2} network (Joint degree management network) and the Consortium for International Double Degrees\textsuperscript{3} for example offer instructions and information to HEIs wanting to develop joint programmes. It is not necessary to invent the wheel again, as many issues have been tackled already.

A fifth and last recommendation would be to collect information about which partners and which degree programmes are interested in developing double degrees and then to gather representatives of these programmes to a CARPE workshop during which issues related to basic degree requirements in each programme (such as number of ECTS, compulsory courses, practical training, thesis work, national legislation to take into account, etc.) would be discussed.

\textsuperscript{2} https://www.joiman.eu/ProjectResults/default.aspx
\textsuperscript{3} http://www.cidd.org/
Even though double degrees are usually issued by only two partners, all five CARPE partners could contribute in the educational programme. Only after this the work related curriculum composition, formal agreement, implementation and finally evaluation (in accordance with each partner’s quality assurance process) can begin.

Epilogue

In this article we have tried to give an impression of the issues CARPE colleagues can expect to encounter when working towards the development of a double degree. Not to discourage them, but rather to invite them to and make them aware of the importance of involving international relations and legislation experts in the first steps towards a double degree proposal. We look forward to continuing this discussion within CARPE, with those interested in a double or joint degree project!

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