

LERU Doctoral Studies Community

Proposal for a LERU Jointly Awarded Doctorate

1. Rationale: Added value of a LERU Jointly Awarded Doctorate

The League of European Research Universities (LERU) is as an association of leading research-intensive universities that share the values of high-quality teaching within an environment of internationally competitive research. LERU universities are committed to education through an awareness of the frontiers of human understanding; the creation of new knowledge through basic research, which is the ultimate source of innovation in society; and the promotion of research across a broad front in partnership with industry and society at large.

At the crossroads between education and research, doctoral training constitutes an intrinsic and crucial part of LERU universities' missions. Jointly awarded doctorates can have important benefits for institutions, for students and for regions.

From the institutional perspective, a jointly awarded doctorate between two LERU universities would enhance the institutions' attractiveness as places to study thus attracting excellent graduate students.

Jointly awarded doctorates will also promote academic and research collaboration within the LERU network.

An additional added value could be increased capacity to leverage research funding, fulfilling European principles on mobility and enhancing future Erasmus Mundus II applications.

It is recognised that while two LERU partner universities could set up an *ad hoc* jointly awarded doctorate, it will be a clear advantage to have recognised and approved procedures in place thus minimising administrative burden.

From the student perspective, a LERU jointly awarded doctorate will encourage both international student mobility and research as a career for high calibre students. Students will gain exposure to two different high-quality research environments, cultures and sets of resources and acquire additional research and transferable skills.

Students will also have access to additional sources of student financial support – including eligibility for scholarships at both participating universities.

A LERU jointly awarded doctorate should provide a head start in future career planning, professional development and employment prospects and the added value of international networking.

In addition, LERU jointly awarded doctorates should enhance knowledge exchange and sharing of research, learning and resources and demonstrate mutual recognition of LERU partner university qualifications.

In summary, the benefits of a LERU jointly awarded doctorate are many and diverse and clearly outweigh the challenges. Jointly awarded doctorates depend on strong research collaborations and bring important benefits to students, institutions and national/regional education systems. The goal should be to provide a quality jointly awarded doctorate that is respected and recognised worldwide by students, universities and employers. It is recognised that only a small number of doctoral students may follow this route but the concept is important for the future of European research and the benefit of all parties.

Because of these benefits, LERU wants to facilitate the possibility to confer jointly awarded doctorates among the LERU universities. It is not essential that all LERU partners participate in this initiative, which is intended to function on a voluntary basis. Partners may wish to join at a later stage.

The present paper constitutes a proposal for Jointly Awarded Doctorates within LERU for consideration at the Rectors' Assembly, University of Amsterdam, 18-19 November 2011. The proposal outlined below describes the principal objectives and principles of jointly awarded doctorates within the LERU network. The Rectors are asked to approve the proposal, allowing interested universities to go ahead with implementation. The Rectors are also asked to approve the MOU and MOA as templates on the basis of which interested universities will proceed.

2. History and background

In January 2011, the LERU Doctoral Studies Community held a workshop at the University of Edinburgh to explore a LERU Jointly Awarded Doctorate. The outcome of this workshop was the generation of a draft proposal and a template MOU and MOA.

These documents were discussed further at the Doctoral Studies Community Meeting in October 2011 at the University of Zurich. Nine of the universities present at the DSC Meeting were supportive of the initiative and are willing to proceed (Amsterdam, Barcelona, Edinburgh, Leuven, Lund, Milan, Munich, Utrecht and Zurich). Freiburg, Geneva and UCL agreed to follow up further before committing. Nine universities were not represented at the DSC meeting (Cambridge, Heidelberg, Helsinki, Imperial College, Leiden, Oxford, UPMC, Paris-Sud and Strasbourg) but have since been consulted.

3. Objectives of Jointly Awarded Doctorates

The principal objective in developing joint doctoral degrees is to strengthen postgraduate research training and research capacity at national and international levels. The concept that collaborative research and joint supervision of postgraduate researchers are an effective means of building academic cooperation between partner universities is also reinforced. There should be a synergistic dimension to the research carried out and training provided to make the mobility more than just a period of study abroad. Joint doctoral degrees should provide the postgraduate researcher with a widened research experience and enhanced generic skills.

The University of Edinburgh, who led on this initiative, has already established a jointly awarded doctorate model within the Universitas 21 network (www.universitas21.com). As LERU is a similar network of prestigious research intensive universities, the opportunity to extrapolate the U21 model to LERU is clear and was welcomed by the DSC.

4. Terminology

Joint doctoral programmes can take several forms; the double degree model and fully-integrated joint doctoral programmes. The LERU DSC has agreed to support the latter as a jointly awarded doctorate within the LERU network, i.e. a degree for which there is a single award between partner Universities recognising each other's quality assurance, standards, and examination procedures. This is a clear move away from the model of double (co-tutelle) degrees which support the award of two (or more) degrees from partner universities upon joint supervision of the same piece of research. The objective is to award research students a single joint doctoral degree for a programme of collaborative research undertaken at two institutions, thus fostering stronger academic links between the partner institutions.

Several LERU partners offer only jointly awarded doctorates and some offer both joint and double degrees. However, it was agreed by the DSC that within LERU, a jointly awarded doctorate would be the preferred model.

The following definition of a LERU **jointly awarded doctorates** was agreed:

A jointly awarded doctorate is a qualification conferred upon a student on completion of a collaborative programme established by LERU partner institutions. It is characterised by:

- Meeting the academic requirements of both universities
- Agreement regarding the nomination of a lead university (This concept will be one of the pillars of the LERU agreements. The lead university's rules and regulations apply on a "by-default" basis enabling the doctoral candidate to know which governance structure prevails should difficulties arise)

- Joint supervision of students between nominated and qualified staff at LERU partner institutions
- A single degree awarded for one doctoral thesis
- Parchment(s) issued which indicate that there has been joint supervision.

The above definition, has also allowed the LERU DSC to agree the wording of a mutually satisfactory generic overarching **Memorandum of Understanding** for jointly awarded doctorates. It is important to agree high level priorities before the legalities of individual student-specific agreements can be examined. This model allows flexibility between institutions and nations with regard to rules and regulations.

A **Memorandum of Understanding** (MOU) and **Memorandum of Agreement** (MOA) templates have been customised for a LERU joint doctoral programme. The following documentation is proposed:

1. An overarching, generic, multilateral non-legally binding **Memorandum of Understanding** for a jointly awarded doctorate.
2. An individual student-specific bilateral **Memorandum of Agreement** template detailing, as a minimum, arrangements for:
 - admission
 - registration
 - payment of fees (tuition, examination, research costs)
 - social security and insurance
 - duration of study at each location
 - coursework
 - intellectual property
 - supervision
 - language of thesis
 - examination of the thesis
 - graduation

The MOU provides a multilateral, over-arching framework for universities to create tailor-made programmes of study for each student, taking individual research needs into account and enabling research collaboration with another LERU university. Each collaborative student programme established under the terms of this MOU will be the subject of a separate bilateral Memorandum of Agreement entered into between the two LERU institutions concerned. This will detail student-specific supervision, coursework, thesis, examination and graduation arrangements. The template Memorandum of Agreement lists the areas to be agreed between academic supervisors and between the two universities while allowing room for customisation, modification and flexibility - it is recognised that "one size does not fit all." The participation of individual students in a jointly awarded doctorate between partner universities will be agreed on a case-by-case

basis. This allows flexibility, enabling different requirements in different disciplines and between specific partners to be taken into account and.

5. Additional considerations

5.1 Legislation

One of the main considerations is addressing the different models of collaborative programmes acceptable by different universities. Most LERU universities do not want to offer two degrees for one piece of work and jointly awarded doctorates are the preferred model. Even within the LERU universities offering joint awards, some universities are required to offer a separate certificate, one from each partner for jointly awarded degrees. Others are permitted to put both logos on a single degree certificate. However all certificates/parchments must clearly state that the degree was jointly supervised and name both partners.

5.2 Selecting partner institutions

Partner institutions are normally selected on the basis of being of equal or similar research status, with a like-minded ethos and high level standards of quality assurance. LERU partners are pre-selected on this basis and should all be approved to jointly supervise Doctoral students.

5.3 Intellectual property

Intellectual property issues vary widely between institutions and must be agreed in advance and stated in the bilateral MoA.

5.4 Funding

Funding arrangements (including self-funding elements) to support the joint Doctoral student must be clearly defined in the Memorandum of Agreement. Accepting students as participants on the programme is dependant, amongst other things, on appropriate supervision and funding. Supervisors are free to participate in a jointly awarded doctorate project or not depending on whether they think it is academically appropriate, financially possible and will attract quality students. It is noted that reciprocity of students is preferred by some but not all partners and this would be negotiated in the MOA.

5.5 Academic standards and quality assurance

An advantage is that QA procedures are mutually recognised within LERU. For jointly awarded doctorates, QA is also less complex than for taught programmes (e.g. differences in credit structures are less important). Several basic important principles were agreed:

- Each university provides at least one supervisor, and the normal rules of the lead institution are applied to the processes of student monitoring and assessment, unless otherwise stated in the MoA. Copies of annual reports are provided to the other institution for consideration.
- Supervisors (at least one from each institution) should hold an actual or virtual meeting with the student at least once per year to discuss the student's progress, the

research generated and how the project is evolving. These procedures are in addition to local supervisory practice provided by the student's current place of research.

- Local institutional rules apply with regard to research good practice, health & safety, ethics approval, computing etc.
- The doctoral candidate shall spend a substantial research period (not less than one year) in both of the partner institutions.
- Should the student require to spend a period of time outside either university for research work, site visits or attendance at conferences, then the regulations of the lead university apply. This includes requirements for travel insurance, risk assessment and health & safety whilst away from either university.

5.6 Recruitment, selection and admissions of students

The recruitment and selection of candidates is one of the most important steps in the management of jointly awarded doctoral projects. Partner institutions must decide at the outset whether they wish to carry out joint advertising, recruitment and selection, e.g. both supervisors review applications and select candidates, and also what selection criteria are going to be used. Alternatively, the decision may rely solely on the lead institution's selection process followed by final approval by the other institution. It is preferable if joint selection processes are in place utilising available technologies such as video-conferencing if necessary.

If the applicants are eligible to apply for sources of funding at each institution, they will have to satisfy any eligibility criteria for the award of a scholarship and minimum doctoral entrance criteria, language proficiency etc.

In terms of the actual admission process, each institution must arrange for the admission of a student in accordance with their own procedures and students normally have to complete two application forms for admission. Ideally, prior to issuing formal offers of admission, the individual student-specific MoA covering each student's studies must be completed, approved by the relevant University committee and signed by the student and relevant members of staff. The formal offer of admission from the partner Universities should refer to the MOA agreement which will form part of the terms of their contract with the universities. It is recommended that a copy of the lead university offer letter is forwarded to the partner university and vice versa.

Additionally, students studying in an overseas country are required to act in accordance with the laws of that country as appropriate, in particular those concerning visas and overseas students. Each institution should provide appropriate support for immigration as they would for any other student.

Finally, it is important that each student completes the matriculation procedures of both universities in order to be officially considered a fully matriculated student for the total duration of their period of study, giving them access to the same rights as other doctoral students. It will be specified at matriculation that this is a LERU jointly awarded doctorate project between the lead and partner university. Students will then be included in the statistical information on student numbers compiled by both universities.

Sometimes students realise the advantages of joint doctorates after they have commenced studies at one institution. This approach should not be actively encouraged as a MoA has not been agreed at the start and problems might arise.

5.7 Examination

Arrangements for the doctoral examination should be agreed prior to admission as these are different between partner universities. The lead university should host and take responsibility for the examination process. This normally consists of one single examination e.g. that of the lead institution or a combination of processes satisfying regulation of both institutions such as having additional examiners, hosting viva voce examinations using video-conferencing or supplying examiners' reports to committees at appropriate time points. In any case, the examination committee contains representatives of both universities.

5.8 Graduation

A student graduating via these schemes is awarded their degree at one appropriate graduation ceremony. The degree parchment reflects the joint nature of the award. The important thing is the awarding of one degree, less important is whether there are one or two pieces of paper/parchments. Both institutions are entitled to include details of successful graduands in their alumni databases.

5.9 When things go wrong

Jointly awarded doctoral programmes come with added challenges for both the doctoral candidates and the supervisors and it has to be recognised that joint doctoral programmes will not suit all candidates. Measures and support mechanisms must be in place and clearly defined to prevent or address difficulties arising due to:

- The student's progress being inadequate
- Breaches of rules and regulations
- Students' complaints
- Health & Safety issues
- Accidents or research misconduct

All parties must be clear on how to proceed should such situations arise. For example, the complaints and appeals procedures of the lead institution could apply, should this be necessary, unless otherwise stated in the student-specific agreement. The aim should always be to ensure that the doctoral candidate can carry out his/her research in the most supportive and safe environment and help both partner institutions to provide the best student experience and to get the most out of the research conducted.