Policy on Research Supervision and Awards
in Collaboration with Other Institutions

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background
Across many disciplines academic researchers have traditionally collaborated, on a collegial basis, in the supervision of aspects of doctoral candidate’s work. This has particularly been the case where specific expertise is required for a minor, but possibly key, aspect of a project. This has occurred within and across institutions, nationally and internationally. If the input of an external expert is significant, they may have been proposed as an external supervisor, but that generally was the extent of the formal recognition of the external input, and of the student’s experience.

In recent years doctoral education has changed: candidates go to other institutions for laboratory rotations, to undertake graduate training, and to access expertise. Their experience is increasingly mobile and internationalised. In parallel, the workload of academic staff has also increased, while resources and flexibility in use of time have reduced. Another factor is that institutions have begun to enter arrangements under which they jointly deliver programmes (most commonly at Masters level); establishing joint degrees is an explicit goal in the Bologna process and EU funding is actively encouraging this model at doctoral level. As a result of these factors, doctoral candidates and their supervisors are increasingly seeking formal, institutional recognition of PhD programmes in particular that include physical movement between institutions and/or multi-institutional supervisory input. Institutional and national commitments to the concepts of joint and double degrees vary significantly: the IUA tends to favour joint (where one parchment is issued jointly) rather than double degrees (where parallel awards are made) with a view to avoiding double counting of credits, but European funding agencies tend to use the terms interchangeably.

The most commonly proposed model is that of a *co-tutelle*, with a joint award, although a joint supervision agreement could be entered into without necessarily involving a joint award.

1.2 Benefits and Risks
For research students, the benefits of supervision across institutions include a broad training experience, entitlement to access to the best expertise mix for the project and possibly recognition of their experience in a joint or a double degree thereby associating them with more than one University. The concern with respect to individual students is to ensure that interactions across institutions are well planned and that there is clarity of expectations in relation to supervision arrangements, fees, funding, timelines, examination and the award.
At an institutional level, the benefits of such engagement are also clear. They can enrich the research environment for graduate students, enhance opportunities for international engagement and strengthen links with strategic partners, promote research and interdisciplinary collaborations and help build the University’s impact.

However, there are very important considerations relating to management of risk, ensuring academic standards, potential dilution of the University ‘brand’, and the place of such partnerships in the context of quite targeted strategic plans for clustering, networking and internationalisation. Negotiation of, and implementation of, joint PhD awards also consumes considerable time and resources, possibly to limited benefit. The dangers of a very open policy are that: ad-hoc arrangements could be entered into where student or supervisor expectations will not be met, students may not be adequately protected, the University becomes associated with an institution with which it would not wish to be linked, the funding is not satisfactory or the approach not sustainable.

The conclusion to be drawn is that there is a need for a University policy, including a framework and related guidelines/criteria, to ensure that DCU research students and staff continue to benefit from jointly engaging in research with collaborators in other institutions, but that risks and costs are appropriately managed.

1.3 Purpose of the Policy

It is intended to have a policy led rather than a reactive approach to joint supervision and joint awarding arrangements. The policy underpins a shared understanding across the University about the extent to which it is desirable to formalise co-supervision arrangements with other institutions, and brings clarity to the context in which DCU supports joint supervision and joint award arrangements for research degrees.

Such a policy shall prevent situations in which considerable work is carried out by academics to make arrangements with other institutions that the University will not support, and shall ensure that those proposals that are developed are well planned and work well for the student and their supervisor(s).

The policy shall ensure clarity in the terminology around this whole issue, which, as shown above, is often loose with distinct terms frequently used interchangeably. Internally at least we shall reach a shared understanding of terms.
2. DCU Policy for Joint Research Supervision and Awards

Agreements with other institutions in relation to research supervision are mooted in a variety of ways ranging from those reflecting personal collaboration, to those developed in the context a funding proposal or of an existing or new strategic relationship. Agreements can be initiated through a formal approach to or from another institution, or at School/Unit, Faculty or individual DCU supervisor level.

This policy is built upon a framework of categories of collaboration and guides colleagues to the most appropriate type of collaboration to reflect their particular circumstance and the type of agreement or approval required, when appropriate.

2.1 Aspects of the Framework

a. **Informal Collaboration** (research award by one institution)

These refer to collaborations where researchers engage in informal discussion with students, provide feedback, or comment on aspects of a student’s work, but the interactions are not so extensive as to justify appointment to the role of supervisor. The informal basis upon which the interaction is taking place shall be made clear to external colleagues (in respect of a DCU research student) so that misplaced expectation regarding publications, IP ownership, registration or fees shall be avoided.

b. **Formal Collaboration** (research award by one institution)

These refer to collaborations in which supervisors from more than one institution are formally appointed. A co-supervision arrangement with a partner university and student is entered into in cases where the student spends more than 1 month in an academic year in the partner university (in the case of a DCU student), or in DCU (in the case of an external student). This shall be drawn up at the time of registration, or at the beginning of the collaboration. The agreement shall cover the subject of the research, a schedule of time at each institution, supervisory arrangements, material costs, administration of funding, fees, IP ownership and insurance. The agreement shall be signed by the relevant Executive Dean of Faculty in DCU, or by the Dean of Graduate Studies if part of a funded collaborative programme.

c. **Joint and Double Awards** (more than one institution awards research degree)

These refer to collaborations where a student is jointly supervised in more than one institution, spends time at each of the institutions and is awarded either a joint research award (in which one parchment is issued jointly by the partner institutions or two parchments are issued with a clear reference in both that the respective degree is awarded

\[1 \text{ also referred to as Dual awards}\]
alternate not cumulated) or a double award\(^2\) (where each institution makes an award in parallel).

It is acknowledged that there is a distinction in nature between a joint award and a double award. In cases where an inter-institutional agreement is entered into, the University’s preference is for a joint research award but DCU shall consider a double award in exceptional cases. Legal frameworks and differing quality assurance regimes may be impossible difficult to reconcile, there may be no degree equivalence at the two partner institutions, or legal constraints on the issuing of a joint award may exist. It is of note however that the double counting of credit for work may preclude double awards under some national QA systems.

Joint awards must be underpinned by a formal agreement, signed by the DCU Registrar following internal approval processes. In addition to those issues listed in section 2.1 b (the subject of the research, a schedule of time at each institution, supervisory and review arrangements, material costs, administration of funding, fees, IP ownership and insurance), agreements for a joint award shall also regulate enrolment and the evaluation of the candidate’s doctoral degree dissertation.

Approval for a joint award must be given prior to initial registration. Proposals for retrospective approval for a continuing student shall not be considered.

2.2 Guidance / Criteria

a. Informal Collaboration

DCU is supportive of collaboration between our researchers and those of other institutions. In the spirit of collegiality this may include informal discussions with research students of collaborators, and provision of expert opinion on an aspect of their work. Equally DCU recognises that DCU students benefit from informal discussions with colleagues in other institutions and feedback on work presented at conferences etc.

If such interaction is not extensive (ranging from minutes to perhaps 10 hours of work in any year) then no formal arrangement is necessary. It is not expected that the engagement be recorded as a workload for the DCU academic (in the case of an external student). It is a matter for the DCU supervisor and research student to consider, in line with ethical research practice, whether the input is reflected in authorship of specific papers.

Should the interaction grow beyond approximately 10 hrs of work in any year, a DCU supervisor may consider that an invitation to become an external supervisor be extended to or sought of a collaborator. This is subject to the normal Faculty based process for changes

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\(^2\) This award could take the form of one certificate stating the two titles or two separate certificates each giving one degree
in supervision, and may require an underpinning agreement, as described in section 2.1b Formalised Collaboration.

b formalised Collaboration

It is appropriate to nominate an external supervisor where a DCU supervisor and student have extensive engagement on the project with a researcher in another institution, resulting in a significant workload for that researcher (e.g. more than 10hrs in a given academic year). In addition, in contexts where the DCU student spends lengths of time (> 1 month in an academic year) at the other institution a formal co-supervision arrangement with the partner university and student is required. If a shared award is intended, then the criteria in section 2.2c Joint and Double Awards of this policy should be considered.

DCU academic staff are encouraged to accept invitations to act as external supervisors where they have extensive engagement on a project with a research student in another institution. However, it is recognised that this represents a non-trivial workload for the academic, and should only be undertaken with the support of their Head of School/Unit, cognisant of the overall workload of the individual, and a desire to ensure that DCU students are not disadvantaged as a result of the arrangement. In addition, in contexts where an external student spends lengths of time (> 1 month in an academic year) in DCU a formal co-supervision arrangement with the partner University and student (which should be drawn up at the time of registration, or at the beginning of the collaboration) is required. Visiting students should be registered in DCU, under the agreements, as a research student visitor.

c Joint and Double Awards

DCU recognises legitimate drivers for engagement with other institutions in the joint awarding of research degrees. However, it also recognises that joint degrees tend to involve a very heavy administrative overhead, and have associated risks for both students and the University.

DCU research awards are of the highest standard and, in the vast majority of cases, it is preferable that DCU registered students graduate with a DCU-only award.

Joint awards shall only be considered in the following contexts:

- where there is an existing formalised strategic partnership in place in which awarding of joint degrees forms part of the MOU underpinning the partnership. This does not include situations where a simple letter of intent or equivalent is in place with an institution.
- where DCU would be favourably positioned for prestigious funding that is contingent on the issuing of joint awards with a particular partner institution.
• where the instigation of a joint award is a significant step in the process of developing a formalised partnership with a particular institution / country, in the context of an approved internationalisation strategy.

A joint award, even in these contexts, shall not necessarily be the preferred or guaranteed option. Joint degrees represent the ultimate form of research programme integration and institutional partnership, and are expected by funding agencies to show “efficiency and integration of practice, rather than just being an amalgam of different practices and procedures across partner sites”\(^3\). Given this, the expense and time investment, the benefits of making a joint award have to extend beyond the individual student and/or their supervisor. DCU shall not support a joint award proposal aimed simply at reflecting an individual student’s experience. It is also not an appropriate mechanism to incentivise or reward collaborations between individuals or research groups.

As for all joint awards, requests for a joint research award with a given institution requires that the due diligence process in respect of that institution be carried out and approved. Academic, financial and legal issues are particularly relevant in this context.

Joint awards shall only be considered by DCU in cases where: i) the research student registers for at least one year in DCU and ii) the candidate spends a minimum of 6 months at any other institution party to the award.

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**Policy on Research Supervision and Awards in Collaboration with Other Institutions**

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\(^3\) **ERASMUS MUNDUS Quality Assessment Project, Quality Handbook: Summary, EU Commission Dec 2010**