



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

Research  
Services.

## TUoS Framework for Research Collaborative Provision

### 1. Introduction

Collaborative provision is defined as an arrangement:

- which is delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with another organisation ("partner organisation").
- which can lead to Sheffield granting an award.
- where achievement of the award outcome is dependent on some form of contribution of the other organisation.

The past 12 months have seen a huge increase in the number of requests for collaborative awards and co-supervision; from 2 or 3 arrangements per year on average 2 years ago, to requests for 21 arrangements, spread across all Faculties.

An increased focus on this area of work, combined with improved collaboration with Learning and Teaching Services, and Global Engagement, has highlighted a number of concerns:

1. Maintaining the academic standard of the Sheffield PhD award, irrespective of the route by which it is achieved.
2. Understanding and agreeing the strategic rationale for undertaking collaborative provision.
3. Ensuring that proposed collaborations are a good fit with the existing collaborative research portfolio i.e. maintaining consistency in structure where appropriate, maximising opportunities with existing, approved partners, and minimising overlap with existing programmes.
4. Appropriate consideration, governance and approval routes.
5. Communicating effectively with academic departments, thus facilitating academics to initiate accurate negotiations with potential partners.
6. A lack of standard models available and guidance about the most appropriate model across a range of circumstances, in keeping with the statutory requirements of external bodies such as UKVI and HESA.
7. The requirement for coordination across Professional Services (central and departmental), thereby providing a seamless service to academic colleagues.
8. Maximising efficiency within the PGR support team in Research Services, which also supports quality assurance, standard programme development and DDP administration.

In order to address these concerns a discussion was held at Doctoral Academy Committee (DAC) in March 2018, and following input from Faculty PGR Leads and the DVP for Research, a clear set of policies was agreed. The discussion was informed by the QAA Quality Code (Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others, and the Characteristics Statement), and by competitor research conducted by RS (Appendix 1).

## 2. Future policy

It was reiterated that **dual research degrees are not supportable** by the University of Sheffield and that all collaborative awards should be in the form of **joint awards**. In circumstances where a joint award is precluded by legal restrictions in place within the partner country, a **double award** may be considered, however in such instances the accompanying certification must be appropriately phrased according to QAA guidelines.

Given the associated reputational risk of collaborative awards, it was agreed that programmes must meet the criteria below to be considered for approval of a collaborative award:

- Proposed partners for collaborative awards must be leading research universities of the **same academic standing or higher** as Sheffield, and the awards conferred must be consistent with UK national academic standards.
- The collaborative arrangement should demonstrate **strategic benefits** and align with strategic priorities.
- The proposed partner should be selected based on shared aims, ethics and interests, and the resulting collaboration should be sustainable\*, mutually beneficial and enhance Sheffield's national and international reputation.
- The collaborative arrangement should not contravene the Sheffield regulatory framework and should adhere to the principles outlined in the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes.
- The student experience for those undertaking the proposed collaborative arrangement should be of at least comparable quality with that of a standard Sheffield doctoral candidate, in terms of administrative, academic and pastoral support.

\*This refers to financial sustainability thereby to student recruitment; it is proposed that **collaborative awards are reserved for cohort programmes only**, with the notable exceptions of H2020 European Joint Doctorates (EJDs), and other arrangements which leverage European research funding, for which individual collaborative award agreements may be permitted.

**In all other instances, it is proposed that the most appropriate collaborative arrangement is that of the split-site PhD (see appendix 1).**

With regard to governance, the following protocol has been agreed:

- For each potential programme submitted, the Programmes Team in Research Services will initially advise regarding the most suitable model of collaboration, in line with the guidance agreed.
- Should the model and programme specifics meet the criteria outlined above, the Faculty PGR Lead will review the documentation for Approval in Principle.
- For those proposals that are beyond the scope of the criteria, Approval in Principle is sought from the Deputy Vice President for Research and Innovation.
- All such approvals must be met, and the relevant Programme Approval sought, including due diligence of potential partners, prior to finalisation of collaborative agreements, programme marketing and recruitment of students. This is likely to require at least 6 months lead-in time from the initial collaborative proposal.

## **Appendix 1.**

### **Types of Collaborative Arrangement**

#### **1.a Institutional Collaborative Awards**

The following definitions have been taken from guidance issued by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)<sup>1</sup>. In each instance a specific fee structure would be negotiated to take account of periods of residence at each of the partner institutions.

##### **(i) Joint award**

An arrangement under which two or more degree-awarding bodies together provide a programme leading to a single award made jointly by both, or all, participants. A single certificate or document (signed by the competent authorities) attests to successful completion of this jointly delivered programme, replacing the separate institutional or national qualifications.

##### **(ii) Double award and multiple awards**

In some jurisdictions there are legal or regulatory impediments to the award of a single, joint certificate. In these circumstances, students completing a programme that is otherwise wholly joint are awarded two (or more) certificates, one from each degree-awarding body involved. Each certificate should refer to the existence of the other(s) and make clear that they refer to the completion of a single, jointly conceived, programme. Like joint awards, a student cannot meet the requirements to receive one award and its associated certificate without the other(s). Multiple degrees refer to instances where more than two degree-awarding bodies are involved.

##### **(iii) Dual award**

This arrangement generates two separate qualifications awarded individually by the two degree-awarding bodies. The qualifications may be at different levels. A distinguishing feature of this type of arrangement is that the overall study period and volume of learning is longer than for either of the individual awards separately, but typically shorter than if each of the programmes of study had been taken consecutively. Students who successfully complete both programmes receive separate institutional or national certificates, one for each of the two separate qualifications, granted by each of the awarding bodies involved. Each degree-awarding body is responsible for its own award.

<sup>1</sup> Characteristics Statement - Qualifications involving more than one degree-awarding body (2015).  
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Joint-Degree-Characteristics-15.pdf>

## **1.b Collaborative, single-award**

Collaborative award programmes often require significant administrative input if they are to be implemented successfully, and therefore can take some time to establish. They may also draw low numbers of students. Collaborative, single-award arrangements may be a more cost-effective approach, whilst also securing the benefits of collaborative partnerships.

In the arrangements detailed below, a student is co-supervised by an academic at another institution, or in some cases by a supervisor in industry. The primary supervisor is assigned by the home university, and the student examined wholly by the home university according to their normal procedures, receiving a standard award if successful.

### **(i) Split-site PhD**

This is the most collaborative of the three single-award models; students spend a significant period of time, likely a minimum of 12 months, at each of the partner institutions. Since each of the arrangements would be specific to the scope of the project, an individual agreement would be needed for each student, although the nature of the single award would mean that these agreements would be much more easily negotiated relative to collaborative award agreements. Fees would take account of the length of time spent at each institution.

### **(ii) Remote Location PhD**

Students spend the majority of their research project at a partner institution with infrequent visits of no longer than 8 weeks to the degree-awarding institution. An overarching agreement should be in place between the institutions, but no individual student agreement is needed, and no additional funds are transferred to the partner university. Sometimes called a 'long-distance PhD', an example of such an arrangement is the Joint Supervision Programme (JSP) operating at Sheffield.

### **(iii) Co-supervision**

In this final arrangement, the student does not spend any significant continuous period at the partner institution, and the co-supervision is conducted via remote means, such as Skype, email etc. There may be a transfer of funds to the partner institution for the supervisory provision, and a co-supervision agreement may be implemented to provide clarity on roles and responsibilities. Some universities offer a parchment supplement to students, which details the contribution of partner institutions to the student's research.