



European Quality Link

International Association of Quality Assessment and Accreditation Agencies

EQUAL GUIDELINES ON COLLABORATIVE PROVISION



PREAMBLE

EQUAL is a European forum which works towards a common understanding, formulating opinions and guidelines about quality assurance and development in business and management education. It is an umbrella network acting primarily as a think-tank to promote quality enhancement and harmonisation.

To fulfil its mission, EQUAL provides the international business education community with white papers and guidelines. It supports research and projects on a variety of topics concerning advancements in business and management education, and disseminates best practices.

The present document sets out good practice guidelines for a business school or other awarding institution concerning its collaborative provision, which can take a variety of forms. This document presents similar requirements for both parties to the agreement. However, the onus is inevitably upon the institution that is at the initiative of a collaborative agreement to ensure and substantiate compliance to industry standards and to demonstrate high quality.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Collaborative provision is a general term and includes, but is not limited to, joint programmes, dual degrees, student exchanges, twinning agreements, franchising, validation and off-shore arrangements. These collaborative agreements can exist between two or more institutions.

Award is a general term covering all certificates, diplomas and degrees. It includes a whole award, dual awards, joint awards, specified credit toward an award, which is delivered and/or supported and/or assessed as part of collaborative provision.

Joint programmes are collaborative provisions where a programme is delivered and operated between two or more institutions and results in the awarding of a single degree. The award will be in the name of all schools involved in the agreement.

Dual (or multiple) awards are collaborative provisions where a programme is delivered and operated between two or more institutions and results in the awarding of two (or more) distinct degrees.

Student exchanges/study-abroad programmes are collaborative provisions where a student from one institution attends courses at another institution for a certain period. The award is typically delivered by the home institution.

Twinning or articulation agreements are a form of collaborative provision where an institution accepts students having completed courses in another institution into its own degree programme. They are typically considered 'transfer' students and may be exempted from courses or entry requirements at the second institution. The latter will be the awarding institution.

Franchising arrangements are a form of collaborative provision where a programme developed by and leading to an award of the awarding institution (the franchisor) is predominantly delivered and/or supported by one or more collaborative organisations (the franchisee/s). Typically, a franchisee may provide some or all the teaching and may use local teaching and administrative support staff.

Validation arrangements are a form of collaborative provision where a programme developed and run by an organisation is validated by another institution (the validator). The validator provides a quality assurance process and allows its name to be associated with the award, but is not involved in the delivery of the award.

An *off-shore arrangement* denotes educational provision leading to an award, in a country other than that of the awarding institution. Typically, the awarding institution provides the majority of teaching and may use their own or local administrative staff. Off-shore does not include multi-campus provision of the awarding institution whether located in the same or different countries.

An *exchange or study abroad programme* involves the obtaining of credits through study at an affiliated centre or partner institution over a specified period of time within the framework of a degree awarded by the Awarding Institution. NB: The following document does not deal specifically with exchange programmes which tend to benefit from a different set of quality guidelines.

ESTABLISHING COLLABORATIVE PROVISION

A. Strategic Intent & Governance

- A.1. A successful collaborative provision should be supported by strategic intent in all the collaborating institutions.
- A.2. Collaborative provision arrangements should explicitly fit a long-term portfolio development strategy.
- A.3. The arrangement should provide clear benefit for all institutions involved and be built on a clearly defined set of aims and prospective outcomes.
- A.4. Governance must be agreed and specified in the arrangement documentation. It should provide for coordination and responsibilities of the partners involved regarding management and financial organisation.
- A.5. All parties should aim to achieve an equivalence of standards across the collaborative programme, while allowing for local variations which add value to participants and which do not adversely impact the quality of the offering.

B. Due diligence, risk and contingency planning

- B.1. Institutions should undertake adequate due diligence to ensure the good standing of a prospective collaborative organisation and their capacity to fulfil the designated role in the arrangement. A formal investigative exercise should include verification of the following:
 - Legal status of the collaborating institutions and their capacity in law to contract within the framework of the collaborative agreement. This should also include consideration of specific local tax and regulatory requirements and any other pertinent national standards.
 - Degree-awarding powers in the case of dual and joint awards.
 - Financial sustainability and a stable and effective governance structure.
 - The existence of quality assurance policies and processes (see also Section E).
 - Adequate pedagogical and administrative resources to ensure the successful ongoing operation of the planned provision.
- B.2. A due diligence worksheet may be issued stipulating required documentation to evidence compliance in the above areas.
- B.3. Collaborative arrangements should be appropriately costed and budgeted.
- B.4. Collaboration agreements should be supported with policies that protect the interests of all stakeholders.
- B.5. Institutions should demonstrate that risk analysis relating to the arrangement informs the decisional process and demonstrate the identification and mitigation of major risks associated with the collaborative provision.
- B.6. Collaboration agreements must include contingency plans in case one of the partners can no longer fulfil its obligations or the collaboration agreement is dissolved prematurely in its entirety. This must include acceptable provision for the students in the case of default by one of the parties.

C. Codifying the collaboration

- C.1. There should be a written and legally binding agreement setting out the rights and obligations of the parties and signed by the authorised representatives of the collaborating institutions.
- C.2. The written agreement should set out arrangements for provision management by explicitly defining roles and responsibilities. It should provide adequate oversight and stipulate areas of accountability for all parties.
- C.3. The written agreement should include an exit clause which may be activated because of stipulated termination events or insolvency by one or more of the collaborating organisations.
- C.4. For all parties of the collaborative arrangement, an up-to-date and authoritative record of each institution's collaborative awards should form part of the institution's publicly available information.
- C.5. The awarding institution(s) should inform professional, statutory and/or regulatory bodies of any collaborative agreements involving a programme they have approved or recognised.

D. Responsibility for, and equivalence of, academic standards

- D.1. The institution awarding the degree is responsible for the academic standards of all awards granted in its name and for ensuring that any collaborative organisation maintains these standards.
- D.2. The academic standards of these awards should meet the same expectations of quality from the awarding institution with regard to providing a comparable learning experience.
- D.3. In the case of dual or joint awards, each of the awarding institutions is responsible for ensuring coherency and equivalency between its academic standards and those of the arrangement.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ON-GOING PROVISION MANAGEMENT

E. Assuring academic standards and the quality of programmes and awards

- E.1. The collaborative arrangement must provide for rigorous and appropriate quality assurance processes that allow for the differing contexts and constraints within which the institutions operate.
- E.2. Institutions must ensure ongoing active management of risks emanating from the provision throughout its duration (resources, financial, etc.)
- E.3. The collaborative arrangement must make provision for appropriate and timely programme review and revision processes.
- E.4. The collaborative arrangement must be able to demonstrate that academic and administrative staff from the collaborating organisations who are engaged in delivering and/or supporting a programme are appropriately qualified for their role, and that the collaborative organisation has effective measures put in place to monitor and assure the proficiency of such staff.
- E.5. The awarding institution is ultimately responsible for regular performance monitoring and maintaining a record of continuous improvement actions and outcomes.
- E.6. All institutions engaged in the collaborative award are responsible for ensuring an equivalence of assessment standards. A formal body comprised of academic representatives from the institutions involved should ideally be constituted to achieve this.

E.7. Where applicable, the awarding institution is responsible for ensuring that the outcomes of assessment for a programme (in whichever language is used for assessment) meet the specified academic level of the award. The awarding institution should ensure that a collaborative organisation involved in the assessment of students fully understands and follows the requirements approved by the awarding institution for the conduct and standard of assessments.

F. Information for prospective and registered students

F.1. Collaboration agreements must set out the minimum level of information that prospective and registered students are guaranteed to receive about the programme.

F.2. Collaboration partners should be required to provide students with a full and accurate description of all aspects of the intended learning experience. This should include information on:

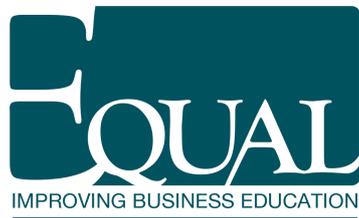
- Intended programme learning outcomes;
- the curriculum content as well as the minimum and expected time until graduation;
- the contribution of each collaboration partner to the educational provision;
- the presence of any constraints emanating from the collaboration agreement that may potentially infringe on the students' learning experience (e.g. related to international mobility, availability of specialization options, international recognition and transfer of credits);
- the national and international accreditation pertaining to the collaborating institutions and/or programme;
- the appropriate channels for communicating concerns, complaints and appeals, making clear the responsibilities of all contracting parties and the channels through which students can contact the awarding institution directly.

F.3. Upon request, students should receive information on:

- the contingency planning that has been put in place for the case that the collaboration agreement is dissolved prematurely;
- any tangible risks that may negatively affect the benefits from programme participation (e.g. prospective loss of an accreditation seal).

For further information (list non-exhaustive):

1. [Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education \(2001\)](#)
2. [Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education \(2005\)](#)
3. [Good Practice in Transnational Education - A Guide for New Zealand Providers \(2007\)](#)
4. [INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice \(2007\)](#)
5. [Quality Assurance in Transnational Higher Education \(ENQA, 2010\)](#)
6. [ECA Practical Guidelines for Joint Programs on the Consortium Agreement](#)



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