



rijksuniversiteit
 groningen

Joint Programmes

(Bachelor's & Master's)

Guidelines for Faculties and Academic Staff



Supporting innovative, cross-institutional education and international collaboration.

September 2026

By the Joint Programmes Working Group

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1. Introduction

These guidelines are intended to support faculties in the development and implementation of Joint Programmes at the University of Groningen. The University can establish partnerships with Dutch and international higher education institutions that lead to different forms of collaborative education and, depending on the nature of the collaboration, different types of degree awards. The guidelines begin by explaining the key concepts and terminology used in collaborative education, including the distinction between Joint Programmes, (including

Joint Degrees & Double/Multiple Degrees), and Dual Degree Programmes. They then describe the possible structures of collaborative degree programmes, including tracks and new degree programmes, and outline the considerations involved in selecting the most appropriate model. Subsequently, the guidelines discuss the strategic reasons for establishing collaborative partnerships and explain the institutional procedures required for obtaining approval, including the Planbrief procedure. They also address practical matters such as tuition fees, student registration, accreditation and quality assurance, cooperation agreements, and internal governance.

Finally, the guidelines identify a number of practical challenges and points for attention that faculties should consider when developing collaborative degree programmes. The appendices include a decision tree for selecting the appropriate programme model, an overview of common accreditation and implementation challenges, and recurring provisions found in consortium agreements. The information presented in these guidelines is based primarily on Dutch legislation, including the [Higher Education and Research Act](#) (Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek – WHW), as well as policies and procedures of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders ([NVAO](#)), the University of Groningen, and relevant European quality assurance frameworks. Because Joint Programmes can involve institutions operating under different legal and regulatory systems, the requirements described in these guidelines should be read in conjunction with the national legislation and institutional regulations applicable to the partner institutions. In some cases, bespoke arrangements may therefore be required to ensure compliance with all applicable legal and quality assurance requirements.

2. Definitions

Joint Programme

A Joint Programme refers to a programme that is jointly designed, coordinated, and delivered by two or more institutions through a joint curriculum. This can involve education between Dutch institutions or between Dutch and foreign higher education institutions. Such joint education is internationally referred to as 'Joint Programmes'. The 'jointness' refers not only to the extent to which the programme is jointly developed and delivered by all institutions involved, but also to shared responsibility for, among other things, quality assurance, education and examination regulations, selection and admission, marketing, management, and financing. The joint learning outcomes are dependent on the participation of all partners to be met (the programme cannot continue to exist if not all partners continue the partnership). There are two kinds of Joint Programmes:

1. **Joint Degree:** The Joint Degree is awarded through a single, joint diploma awarded by a single partner on behalf of the consortia.
2. **Double/Multiple Degrees:** The Double/Multiple Degree is awarded through two or more separate diplomas. Each institution offering the Joint Programme independently issues a diploma according to the local laws and regulations.

Choosing the Right Joint Programme Category

Joint Programmes can be made from programmes or tracks, the choice between the two depends on the alignment with learning outcomes of the potential host programme. A decision tree outlining this process can be found in [Appendix 1](#). The paragraph below expands on this decision tree with further details.

The first decision is whether the programme is considered a track or a new programme. This depends on how much the learning outcomes deviate from an existing programme:

- Track < 40% deviation
- New programme > 40% deviation

Tracks break down further into two types: an existing track (already offered in the UG, now proposed as a joint track) or a new track (one that doesn't yet exist).

Whether you've decided on a new programme, existing track, or new track, one last category remains; Joint Degree or Double/Multiple Degree. A Joint Degree is not always possible as certain countries may have strict national criteria on degree awarding, making a Double/Multiple Degree necessary for establishing a Joint Programme. This would depend on the specific partnership for the Joint Programme in question.

Dual Degree Programme

A Dual Degree Programme is an agreement between two separate, existing programmes (not the same curriculum) with mobility and course waiver agreements among partners. In this case, the learning outcomes are not necessarily joint in nature, but are likely similar and complement each other. Institutions are free to coordinate their education. A Dual Degree Programme applies when a student successfully completes two separate accredited programmes with different curricula, each with its own degree. In these cases, institutions have made agreements regarding the mutual recognition of credits, leading to the awarding of Dual Degrees. For example, because there is overlap in the curricula or a student can efficiently follow two curricula, either parallel or consecutive. Students completing the requirements of the two degrees can still obtain one of the two diplomas if one partner leaves the collaboration. The Board of Examiners of the Dutch institution assesses whether a student qualifies for credit recognition through exemption by reviewing the courses to be followed at the partner institution(s).

3. Structure of a collaborative degree programme

Track

A track can be either a Joint Degree Track or a Double/Multiple Degree Track. In the Netherlands, a joint track is a study programme as part of an existing, already accredited degree programme. This is permitted as long as the track programme does not deviate by more than 40% of the learning outcomes from the degree programme which the track is a part of.

The deviation threshold is determined by the Board of Examiners.

It takes less time to offer a collaborative degree programme in the form of a track under an existing degree programme (and ISAT code) than it is to establish an entirely new programme. If Joint Programme track is offered, then this is taken into account in the reaccreditation of the existing degree programme (the programme under which the track falls). It is important to ascertain how the partner university has arranged its own quality assurance and accreditation, and this information must also be provided during visitations. If the plan is to specifically establish a Joint Degree at track level, as opposed to a Double/Multiple Degree, it is best to consult with the Joint Programmes Working Group. Altogether, the official process (not including the preparation phase) of launching a track (whether new or existing) takes about one and a half year from start to finish.

New programme

If there is no existing programme that deviates less than 40% from the proposed collaborative degree programme, then a Joint Programme will be considered a new degree programme. This means there is no existing umbrella programme under which this collaborative degree programme can be offered as a track. In such cases, the procedure for a new degree programme has to be followed. This procedure consists of a 'macro-efficiency assessment' through the CDHO as well as a New Programme Assessment through the NVAO. The Higher Education Efficiency Committee ([CDHO](#)) will assess whether there is a demand from the labour market for the programme, whether there is a call to expand the national education system with this collaborative degree programme and whether there is room in the system for the programme. The committee will also assess whether there is a market for the new programme, both among the professional sector and among potential students. The CDHO advises the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, who will take a decision based on this advice.

When the Minister approves the programme, then an NVAO accreditation procedure will follow in the form of a [New Programme Assessment](#). In this procedure, the new programme will be assessed for quality and content. A minimum of six months is required to prepare an application for a macro-efficiency test and the assessment of the application by the CDHO and the Minister will take a minimum of eight weeks. A minimum of six months is likewise required to prepare an application for a New Programme Assessment by the NVAO. The NVAO will visit the University five months after the application is submitted and prepare a definitive report and decision based on the New Programme Assessment within two to three months. This means that the entire NVAO procedure takes about seven months from start to finish. Once the Minister approves the new programme, it must be registered in the Institutions and Programmes Register ([RIO - Registratie Instellingen en Opleidingen](#)) within ten months. If this is not the case, then the macro-efficiency assessment will have to be repeated. The RIO registration also requires a positive decision by the NVAO following their New Programme Assessment. Altogether, launching a new programme can take up to 3 years from start to finish, including the waiting time for the programme to start in the next academic year.

Collaboration between one and two-year Master's degree programmes

When a Joint Degree programme is offered, each of the participating institutions needs to provide a programme or track with the same student workload. When a Double/Multiple Degree programme is offered, then it is possible for one and two-year Master's programmes

to collaborate. The Dutch system recognizes one-year Master's programmes in the humanities and social sciences. These programmes are usually allocated two years in other countries. A commonly used model is to develop a collaborative degree programme between a University of Groningen one-year Master's programme and a two-year Master's elsewhere.

4. Planbrief Procedure

For a Joint Programme to move forward, it must be approved by the Faculty Board and subsequently the Board of the University. This process is known as the Planbrief Procedure, and requires thorough preparation to maximise the likelihood of a favourable outcome from both Boards. The Planbrief Procedure may differ depending on whether the Joint Programme for approval is for an existing track, new track, or new programme. For a new programme, the Planbrief Procedure includes a request for both a new Joint Programme and a new degree programme. For a new track, the request is for a new Joint Programme and a new track. For an existing track, the request is made solely for a new Joint Programme. Applicants are advised to contact the Joint Programmes Working Group regarding further details of the procedure for their specific situation.

Faculty Board

Approval for a Joint Programme starts with a proposal submitted to the Faculty Board. When approved, the Faculty Board's education representative informs the Education Council. If there are objections, the proposal is discussed in the Committee of Deans, where other deans can indicate overlaps with existing tracks or programmes in their own faculties. If there are overlaps, the faculties must coordinate to avoid duplication. In line with the agreements made, the requesting faculty adjusts the proposal. Subsequently, the Faculty Board may discuss the plans with the Board of the University during the Administrative Meeting (BO) in September.

Board of the University

Each November, the Board of the University invites the faculties to submit faculty plans for degree programmes in reaction to the 'planbrief' (planning letter). Faculties' plans may include, among other things, Joint Programmes, Dual Degrees and tracks, that are to take effect in the Academic year starting in the following calendar year or in subsequent years, and concerns changes which require timely attention and effort (given the possible need for elaborate preparation, decision making, deadlines, and communication with students), and need to be incorporated into the administrative systems as of September of the calendar year in which the plans are submitted. For changes concerning current students, the transition period cohort + 1 applies. The International Strategy and Relations (ISR) department advises the Board of the University on the desirability of the programme and the status of the partners. The Board of the University bears the final responsibility for visitation and accreditation; the faculty is responsible for implementation.

Through the planbrief procedure, the faculty requests a go/no go decision from the Board of the University. To this end, the faculty must gather the following information:

- To what extent do the plans fit in with the UG's strategy?

- To what extent is there a demand from the labour market and can it be substantiated with figures (see especially the labour market prognosis for relevant types of programmes via the AIS database of the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market ([ROA](#)))?
- Which degree programmes within the UG are related to the proposed new degree programme? Which Faculty Boards were consulted via the Education Council meeting and what is their view on the plans? Are there possibilities for cooperation?
- Which degree programmes in the Netherlands are related to the proposed new degree programme?
- How will the faculty ensure sufficient academic and support staff for the intended programme, as well as finances?

How to Build a Compelling Case for Board Approval

A strong proposal goes beyond the formal requirements. It creates a compelling case that makes board approval flow easier and smoother. The following points of preparation are essential to consider in increasing chances of approval:

Alignment with UG Strategy. Where possible, make an explicit case for how the programme aligns with and advances the UG's institutional strategy. The stronger and more substantiated this link, the more convincing the proposal will be.

Partner consensus. Demonstrating a shared vision and active collaboration among all partners adds to the perceived viability of the programme. Highlight areas of agreement and any concrete commitments from partners.

Financial picture. Boards will want to see a realistic account of projected costs (including the costs of the preliminary work for the proposal), anticipated student numbers, and funding arrangements. While precise figures may not always be available early on, presenting a well-reasoned and realistic financial outlook is advisable.

Market need. It is helpful to demonstrate that genuine demand exists, both from prospective students and from the labour market, using concrete data where possible. Sources such as the ROA's AIS database, sector reports, or input from industry partners can be useful here.

Avoid duplication. Outline how the proposed programme differs from existing offers, both within the UG and at other Dutch institutions. This does not need to be exhaustive, but anticipating this question can strengthen the overall case for board approval.

5. Tuition fees and Registration

Overall Tuition Fee Rules

Dutch and European students are required to pay statutory tuition fees. Non-European students must pay institutional (university) tuition fees.¹

Students pay tuition fees to the institution of enrolment. The partner universities jointly determine how the tuition fees are distributed among them, this distribution is then implemented by the consortium, conditional on the Board of University acceptance.

However, regardless of the amount of tuition fees set by the partner country, the University of Groningen is required by Dutch law² to charge at least the statutory tuition fees. Nevertheless, this must be accessed with the help of the legal department of the University of Groningen.

Overall Registration Rules

If a collaborative degree programme involves only Dutch institutions, the following rules apply: the student pays tuition fees only to the first institution where they register; after paying, the student can register at the other participating institutions using a proof of payment of tuition fees; as a result, the student pays tuition fees to only one institution; the student must complete a substantial part of the programme at each participating institution.

If the partnership involves a Dutch institution and a foreign institution, additional requirements apply:

- Study Requirements: the student must complete at least 25% (one quarter) of the programme as a student at the Dutch institution;³ without this registration, the University of Groningen cannot award a degree or receive state funding.
- Registration at the End of the Programme: the student must be registered as a student at the University of Groningen during the final month of the programme in order to record the final assessment date; procedural arrangements must be made with the Student Information and Administration Department (SIA).

6. Accreditation and quality assurance

Accreditation Agencies and Their Role

All collaborative degree programmes involving a Dutch institution are subject to quality assurance. In the Netherlands, programme accreditation is conducted by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). The NVAO evaluates whether programmes meet national and international standards for higher education, including the

¹ For more information see: <https://www.rug.nl/education/application-enrolment-tuition-fees/tuition-fee/>

² See: *Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek* articles 7.45, 7.45a, 7.46.

³ The 25% requirement corresponds to the minimum share of the programme that must be completed at the Dutch institution to qualify for governmental funding. Less than 25% means no funding.

quality of teaching, learning outcomes, curriculum design, assessment methods, and quality assurance systems.

For programmes delivered in collaboration with foreign institutions, each national accreditation agency typically conducts its own separate quality assurance process in line with its country's requirements. However, if the partner institutions are members of EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) and eligible to apply the European Approach for quality assurance, the process can be simplified. Under this approach, a single EQAR registered agency can carry out the evaluation on behalf of all participating institutions, and the result may be recognized across multiple countries. However, it must be borne in mind that this only applies to standalone Joint Programmes and not to joint tracks.

Accreditation Procedures When Mutual Recognition Does Not Apply

If a partner institution is located in a country that is not part of the EQAR, the programme must usually undergo separate accreditation procedures in each country according to the national regulations of the participating institutions. For Dutch institutions, the programme must still be evaluated by the NVAO. At the same time, the partner university may need to obtain approval from its own national quality assurance or accreditation authority.

Joint Programme Accreditation

In case of a Joint Programme, where only one diploma is issued, the Dutch institutions involved are responsible for the programme and compliance with Dutch legislation, and they are accountable for the programme as a whole, including the components delivered by the other partner institutions. If it is not feasible to seek accreditation through the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, the programme should follow the standard NVAO accreditation process, providing NVAO with the additional necessary information about the partner university.⁴

The accreditation process evaluates whether the intended learning outcomes, curriculum structure, teaching methods, and assessment procedures are coherent and aligned across all participating institutions.

Dual Degree Accreditation

In the case of a Dual Degree where students receive two separate diplomas, the Dutch institution is responsible for ensuring the quality of the part of the programme delivered at its own institution. It also has to offer insight regarding the course units offered by the partner institution and whether these are quality ensured, that is meeting the criteria as defined in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG). Each participating university remains accountable to its own national accreditation system. When seeking

⁴ It should be noted that when a programme undergoes substantial modifications compared to its originally accredited design, it may be required to undergo a new accreditation procedure. There is no universally defined threshold for what constitutes a "substantial" change. As a general rule of thumb used in practice, the university often considers changes affecting approximately 40% of the programme to be potentially acceptable without triggering a new accreditation process. Nevertheless, institutions are advised to avoid major structural changes to avoid procedural delays.

accreditation, the programme must clearly specify how the jointly agreed upon courses or components are integrated into the shared curriculum.

Consortium Agreement

All Joint Programmes must be supported by a formal consortium agreement between the partner institutions. This agreement defines the framework for the collaboration and clarifies the responsibilities of each institution.⁵

The renewal of such agreements is possible and decided by the coordinators of the programmes themselves. However, keep in mind that you always need to check with the Knowledge and Security Advisory Team when renewing or setting up a new contract.⁶

The agreement should include, inter alia:

- the intended learning outcomes of the programme
- the structure and internal coherence of the curriculum
- the distribution of teaching responsibilities among partners
- the modes of assessment used across institutions
- procedures for student admission, progression, and graduation
- arrangements for internal quality assurance
- financial arrangements and agreements
- graduation requirements as determined by the Board of Examiners

Internal Quality Assurance

In addition to external accreditation, Joint Programmes must include effective internal quality assurance mechanisms. These mechanisms ensure continuous monitoring and improvement of the programme.

Internal quality assurance typically includes:

- regular programme evaluations
- student feedback and course evaluations
- periodic curriculum reviews

⁵ For the most up to date template, write to : Jointprogrammes@rug.nl

⁶ See [here](#) for more information about the Knowledge security advisory team.

- coordination between partner institutions
- oversight by academic committees or programme boards.

For Joint Programmes, partners must ensure that quality assurance procedures are aligned across institutions so that the programme maintains consistent academic standards regardless of where the teaching takes place.

This type of information is also relevant and is typically consistent with the Consortium Agreement,⁷ which is a formal contract between project partners that defines their roles, responsibilities, governance structure, and the rules for collaboration, including the management of intellectual property, data sharing, and decision-making processes. A Consortium Agreement is a structured, project-specific form of collaboration agreement with detailed rules, while a cooperation agreement is a more general framework for collaboration that can vary widely in detail and formality.

6. Partnership Review

In addition to the accreditation procedures above, a specific protocol for new partnerships may apply. If the collaboration involves a new partner that is also not a strategic partner, additional steps and requirements must be followed. These requirements focus on assessing the nature and quality of the partnership and should be reviewed by the ISR (International Strategy and Relations) Department. This review step may also include a knowledge security review depending on the scope, subject and partners involved in the programme. Please contact the Joint programmes Working group for more information on this.

7. Certification

Diploma certificate

For a Dual Degree programme each of the degree awarding universities offer its own degree certificate. In case of a Joint Programme, either resulting in a Joint Degree or a Double/Multiple Degree in case no national arrangements have been made yet to award a Joint Degree, a diploma certificate is awarded which contains the official names of the degree and - in case appropriate - the track as registered in the national database of the degree awarding universities (e.g., for the Netherlands / University of Groningen e.g. degree name: European Studies; track: Euroculture. European Politics, Culture, and Society in a Global Context). The degree name and track name might differ between countries and universities. Any additional information required by national legislation, e.g. name of the law, registration number, etc. The document is signed by the authorities as stipulated in the national legislations involved. In the Netherlands this is the chair and the secretary of the Examination Board, in other countries this might be the president / rector magnificus / dean / director of studies / head of department. For the Netherlands the student to whom the degree is awarded signs as well. This is not always compulsory in other countries.

⁷ See also: Appendix 2.

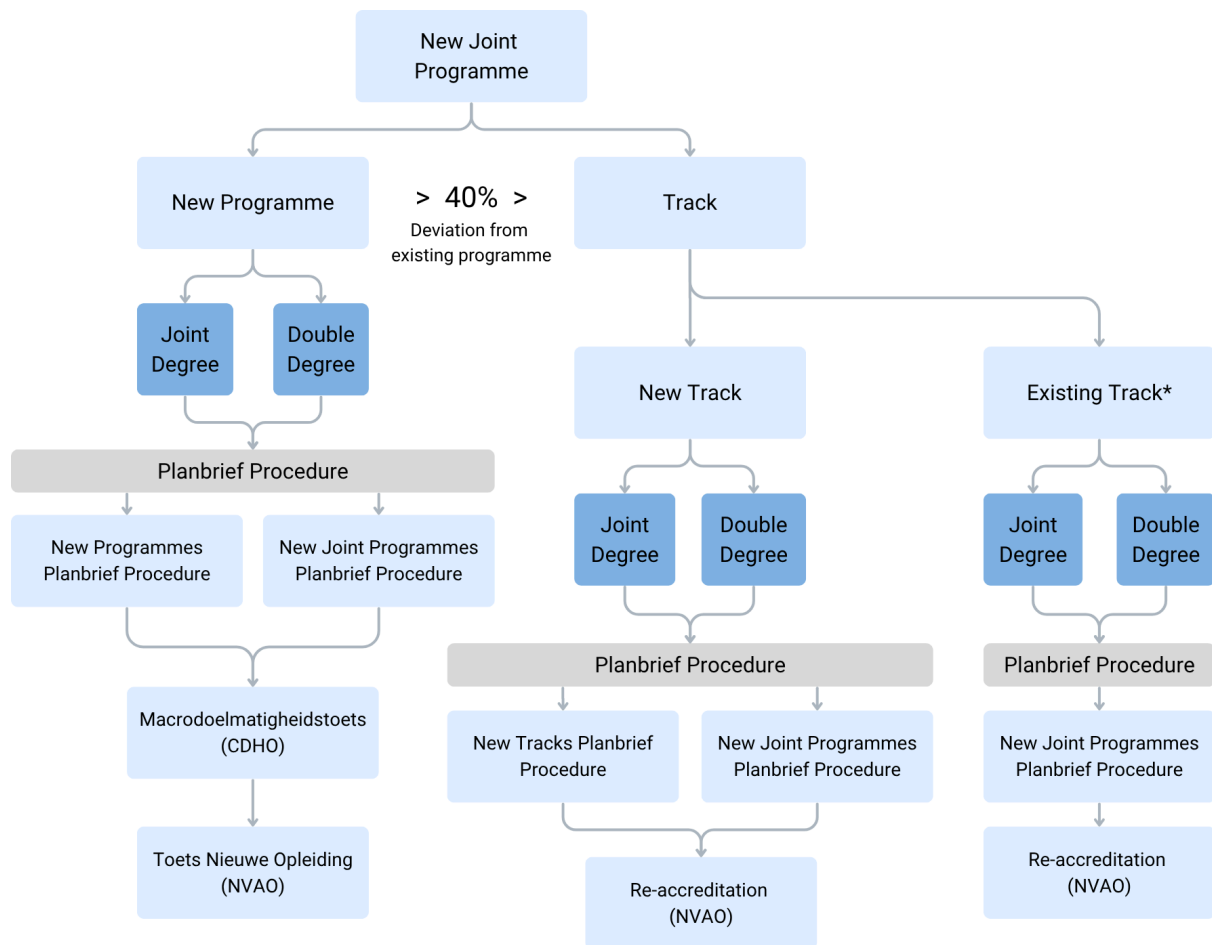
In a situation where a Joint Programme results in Double/Multiple Degree only, each of the degree awarding universities is responsible for issuing its degree following national rules and legislations.

Diploma Supplement

According to Dutch national legislation (WHW) higher education institutions are obliged to provide the Diploma Supplement as an annex to the degree certificate regardless whether a single, Dual, Double/Multiple or Joint Degree is issued. It is required to apply the UNESCO-CEPES / Council of Europe / European Commission format. For a Double/Multiple or Joint Degree, information asked for needs to be included for all degree awarding institutions, that is the official name of the institution, name of the degree and when appropriate the track, etc. It also includes an overview of all course units making up the degree programme, to be organised by the provider. In addition, the grades obtained by the student are included as awarded by the providers involved. Grade transfer has to be avoided and should only take place when legislation requires this. For reasons of grade transparency the relevant local/national grading scales, preferably including the grade distribution expressed in percentages for a representative group of students have to be included.

Appendix 1

Joint Programmes decision tree



*For an up-to-date procedure on existing tracks please contact the Joint Programmes Working Group.

Appendix 2

Recurring provisions in the Consortium Agreements

1. Purpose and Scope

Every agreement begins by defining the objective of the cooperation and specifying the nature of the partnership, such as the establishment of a joint or Double/Multiple Degree Programme.

2. Governance and Management

Clauses regarding governance establish specific bodies to oversee the programme, usually identifying a Coordinating Institution (frequently the University of Groningen) and committees such as:

- Management/Coordinating Committee: responsible for executive decisions, academic supervision, and overall operation.
- Programme Coordinator: a central academic point of contact at each institution.
- Board of Admissions: dedicated to evaluating and selecting candidates.

3. Student Admission and Selection

Provisions consistently state that candidates must meet the admission requirements of all involved institutions. Common requirements include:

- Joint Application Procedure: a centralized process managed by the programme coordinator.
- Language Proficiency: almost always requiring proof of English proficiency as the language of instruction.
- Admission to the track shall fall under the responsibility of the Faculty Board and shall be based on the same admission requirements and criteria as those applicable to the corresponding degree programme. Selection for the track can be arranged separately but coordination with the admission to the degree programme remains necessary for Joint Programmes at track level. Where international partners participate in admission, selection, or examination processes, the agreement should be drafted carefully to ensure that the statutory responsibilities of the Faculty Board and the Board of Examiners under Dutch law remain with the competent Dutch authorities and are not transferred to a non-Dutch entity.

4. Degree Awarding and Certification

This critical section specifies how students will be graduated:

- Diploma: detail on whether separate diplomas (Double/Multiple Degree) or a single joint certificate (Joint Degree) will be issued.
- Diploma Supplement: a commitment to provide a document describing the nature of the Joint Programme and the student's achievements.
- A credit conversion system must be agreed to for partners that don't use ECTS

5. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

IPR clauses are standard and typically divided into two categories:

- Background Knowledge: each party retains ownership of information and IP they owned prior to the agreement.
- Foreground (Results): generally, ownership belongs to the party that generated the results, or is shared if created jointly .

6. Confidentiality and Data Protection

Agreements include obligations to keep sensitive information confidential, often extending several years after the contract ends. Compliance with the GDPR and other personal data protection laws is a standard requirement.

7. Liability, Insurance, and Force Majeure Liability

Each institution is responsible for its own tasks and personnel, with financial liability often capped at the institution's share of the project budget. Mandatory health and liability insurance coverage for students is a recurring provision. As well as, clauses excusing non-performance due to unforeseeable events beyond a party's control.

8. Financial Management and Tuition Fees

These types of agreements clearly define how fees are collected and distributed among partner institutions, either through a centralized system managed by a coordinating institution or via reciprocal fee waivers at the students' home universities. They also establish strict procedures for administering, allocating, and reporting scholarship funds, particularly in programmes such as Erasmus Mundus, ensuring transparency, proper financial oversight, and compliance with international funding regulations.

9. Quality Assurance

Provisions for continuous monitoring, student feedback, and internal/external evaluations to ensure high academic standards and accreditation compliance. Any new Joint Programme must also meet national criteria beyond the joint accreditation criteria such as labour-market need and non-duplication, depending on the path chosen.

10. Duration, Termination, and Amendments Term

These provisions set out the basic rules governing the partnership, including a fixed duration period (5 years is the standard at the UG) during which it remains in effect. It also outlines termination conditions, allowing either party to withdraw by providing advance written notice, usually within a period of six to twelve months. Importantly, the agreement includes provisions to protect the interests of currently enrolled students, ensuring they can complete their program without disruption even if the agreement ends. Additionally, any amendments to the agreement must be made in writing and formally signed by authorized representatives of both parties.

11. Dispute Resolution and Governing Law

Almost all agreements prioritize amicable settlement through negotiation. If unresolved, a specific governing law (often the law of the country where the incident occurs, Dutch law or the law of the coordinating institution's country) is applied.

12. Signing

The document is signed by the President of the UG.