



Framework Policy on Joint PhDs

Approved by
Academic Council
26th June 2009

Following AB 22-05-2024, this policy is currently under review following the publication of new [IUA Guidelines for the Establishment of joint PhD degree award or double/dual PhD degree award with IUA Universities.](https://tinyurl.com/mvezwup2)
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The default position in UCC is Team Supervision (co-supervision) and a single award. Almost all of the benefits of a joint PhD can be achieved through co-supervision within standard UCC team supervision structures.

A strong strategic case is required for the approval of a joint PhD. This might include, as examples, a requirement by a funding body or research project; the development of a cohort PhD, or a significant inter-institutional agreement. PhD candidates are discouraged from pursuing ad-hoc arrangements.

Supervisory teams (and candidates) who have a strategic reason to pursue a joint award should familiarise themselves with the IUA Guidelines before contacting, Dr Orla Lynch, Dean of Doctoral Studies at dds@ucc.ie

Background

Increasingly, as UCC research capacity and activity and graduate education grow, there will be a demand for PhD students to come here to work with UCC staff as part of their PhDs, or for UCC students to go to other universities for some part of their PhD studies. In recent years there have been a number of arrangements, mostly on an *ad hoc* basis, which have been put in place to facilitate joint PhDs. We believe that a more formal and enabling policy should be developed to support the small number of joint PhDs that UCC might wish to approve. Here we propose a draft policy that sets out some of the major issues that might arise in formulating a policy on joint PhDs and in developing a template for a memorandum of understanding that might support such a policy.

What is a joint PhD?

A joint PhD, also called ‘cotutelle de these’ in French and ‘joint enrolment’ in Australia, stands for a doctoral thesis researched, written and defended under the joint responsibility of two partner institutions. In the context of this proposed policy, it means a formal agreement on co-operation between UCC and another institution either within or outside Europe. Typically, the terms of such co-operation are laid out in a contract signed by the Rectors/Presidents of the two institutions, the co-supervisors and the PhD student. What is envisaged here is that this framework policy would set out the broad policy framework which would underpin the proposed joint PhD scheme. It will then be necessary to define, in some detail, the conditions and agreement for each individual proposal coming forward which would be signed by both institutions, co-supervisors and the student concerned.

Why would UCC wish to do this?

There are a number of reasons why we may wish to develop such a policy and these are summarised below:

There is a strong ambition for UCC researchers to seek out the best specialists in the world and to enable their PhD students to work with them or in their laboratories where appropriate for certain disciplines, or spend time in their research group, to acquire skills, or use specialised equipment etc;

Researchers at UCC are engaged in a large number of international collaborations and programmes of research with movement of students to and from UCC for the purpose of graduate education, which demonstrates UCC PhDs ability to operate at the highest international level;

A small number of joint PhDs have existed in the past, some of which were on an *ad hoc* basis;

A number of universities in Europe and USA have approached UCC researchers to seek such an arrangement;

There may be possibilities under Erasmus Mundus and Marie Curie agreements for such an arrangement;

A number of UCC researchers have expressed their interest in establishing such an arrangement with others;

The opportunity to develop language skills (as well as cultural and social experiences) will enable the development of potential for dissemination of research in a number of languages.

It is important, however, to state that this proposal does not in any way seek to limit or constrain movement of students for shorter- term research exchange/visits etc., but rather to enable those researchers who wish to have joint PhDs with UCC or other institution where the extent of the time spent in the host university is significant and there is truly a joint research programme between the two collaborators/ supervisors. It is expected that the number of joint PhDs will be small.

What is the added value of a joint PhD?

A joint PhD carries a number of advantages. It stimulates and formalises cooperation between research institutions, particularly at an international level, leading to a greater exchange of knowledge. It provides a very important international dimension to graduate research training and an important opportunity for language and cultural experience/engagement. As a result the PhD student will be in a better position to benefit from external expertise in the course of his or her research project. Moreover, a joint PhD formally underscores the PhD student's (inter)national mobility during the research programme. The PhD degree certificate recognises the co-operation with any partner institution, thus making the most of the student's mobility during the research programme. This will prove to be an enormous asset in terms of career perspectives, both within the academic community and elsewhere.

Who could be eligible for a joint PhD?

Any PhD student enrolled at University College Cork may in principle apply to do a joint PhD, provided that prior permission has been obtained from his or her supervisor and that a co-supervisor has been found in the chosen partner institution with degree awarding powers. The same applies to any PhD student enrolled at an institution with degree awarding powers other than University College Cork on condition that a co-supervisor is found within UCC and that the student meets the entry requirements and both Institutions are mutually agreeable to the arrangement. The selection of collaborating institutions will be supervisor led and will be subject to a quality assurance scheme.

The PhD student must spend a minimum of 6 months (up to a maximum of 2 years over the duration of a 4 year programme) at the partner institution for thesis research work, during one or several periods. This minimum period may be increased if requested by the partner institution. It is envisioned that the joint PhD arrangements would be entered into by all ideally at the beginning of the PhD research, but no later

than 6 months from the start of the PhD programme. The period of six months may be allowed as this recognises potential financial constraints, but does not void the commitment from the host institute supervisor to continue supervising the PhD for the entire period of the PhD study. This minimum period is in line with international practice. All support for the cost of travel to and from institutions will have to be provided by the student or scholarship scheme, as appropriate. The difference between a joint PhD and joint supervision is that a student is registered in both institutions for the duration of the PhD and receives a joint award from the two Institutions. Current regulations allow for an external supervisor to act as co-supervisor for a students registered at UCC. The award of the PhD in this case is made solely through UCC and the Institution where the external supervisor is based does not receive any student fees. Joint supervision is also practiced where the partner institution does not have degree awarding powers.

What is the difference between incoming and outgoing PhD students?

From UCC's perspective, outgoing PhD students are those whose primary enrolment is at UCC. In this case UCC is the home institution. The institution with which a PhD student enters into an agreement and where he/she spends at least 6 up to 24 months in order to conduct research in the guest institution. For incoming students UCC is the guest institution. The joint PhD memorandum of understanding supports this diversity on an individual student basis.

How is the contract drawn up for a joint PhD?

The procedure leading to a contract for a joint PhD can be different for incoming and outgoing PhD students. Incoming PhD students use the documents provided by UCC, whereas outgoing PhD students will use the documents provided by the guest institution. All partnerships of this type will be subject to a detailed Memorandum of Understanding with associated annex detailing the management, academic standard of the award as well as the fees payable to each Institution. The development of a standard MoU to cover such arrangements will be explored with the Academic Secretary, allowing sufficient flexibility for some variation in agreements. Such a contract/MoU would serve to ensure that all parties are clear about expectations and entitlements. A sample template from the Free University of Brussels is included in Appendix 1.

What are the registration/enrolment procedures for a joint PhD?

As a joint PhD is a project being undertaken by a student straddling two institutions the PhD student must also be registered/enrolled at both institutions. A joint PhD student - just like any other PhD student – will be bound by the university regulations, with the institution of the originator taking precedent in any conflicting matters. All partnerships of this type would be subject to MoU with associated Annex detailing the management and academic standard of the award.

All students must pay fees. The level of fee levied may vary, by way of waiver, by agreement of the Head of College. The level of fee levied for inward students will be set to facilitate the joint PhD. In the case of EU students, the level of fee levied must not exceed that sum in the host institution, with the difference (from the UCC fee) being made up either by the research grant or a waiver to a maximum number per college. In the case of Non-EU students individual

arrangements will have to be entered into, having regard to the funds available and such waivers available to Non-EU students. The level of fee levied for outward students will be set to facilitate the joint PhD. In the case of EU students going out from UCC the level of fee levied must not exceed the UCC fee level, with the difference (from the host fee) being made up either by the research grant or a local arrangement of the host institution. In the case of Non-EU students individual arrangements will have to be entered into, having regard to the funds available and such waivers available to Non-EU students.

All other costs associated with the joint PhD, e.g. bench fees, consumables etc, must be met by the research grants or support. There may also be opportunities in the Erasmus Mundus scheme in support this.

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus_mundus/index_en.php

The student's fees liability must be clearly outlined in the specific MoU.

In which language is the doctoral thesis written and defended?

The doctoral thesis in a joint PhD and therefore the thesis (and all progress reports, where appropriate) is written and defended in the language approved in the MoU/contract by all parties. Both the Graduate Studies Regulations and the supplementary university/faculty/school regulations should be respected. The PhD student must provide a summary in a second language if this is required by the either university/faculty/school regulations.

What is the procedure for the examination in a joint PhD?

In principle the examination in a joint PhD takes place at the home institution, unless the MoU/contract specifies otherwise. The examination board for a joint PhD will follow the host regulations with provision for supervisors to attend the *viva voce*. Each of the two partner institutions will appoint at least one member of the examination board. The composition of the examination board must not conflict with the examination regulations of the partners. The language of the thesis and examination should be approved in the MoU.

What about the diploma/parchment at the end of a joint PhD?

A joint PhD may lead to either of two types of parchment/ diploma, both conferring a PhD (doctoral) degree: a joint degree or a double degree. A joint degree certificate, stating one joint PhD degree and the discipline, is awarded if there is full equivalence between the PhD degrees of both partner institutions.

If there is no degree equivalence at the two partner institutions the resulting diploma is a double degree, stating the two titles. This may take the form of one certificate or two separate certificates each giving one degree. If there is one certificate this will in principle be drawn up by the institution where the thesis defence takes place; if there are two certificates, each institution will draw up its own certificate. It is acknowledged that there is a distinction in nature between a joint award and a double award. In order to prevent confusion the University may wish to indicate its preferred award.

For more information on setting up a Joint PhD
please contact:

Head of Graduate
Studies Office