

Guidance note for single student cotutelle arrangements

The guidelines for cotutelle arrangements below set out the process and principles under which cotutelle arrangements should be developed.

Context / Background

Jointly supervised PhDs (widely known as cotutelles) offer PhD students the chance to be jointly supervised by NU and a university in another country, resulting in a dual degree award; a PhD from NU and a doctorate from the partner university.

Purpose

A cotutelle agreement is normally entered into to achieve the following benefits:

- a) to enhance bilateral international research collaboration and to recruit outstanding international research students;
- b) to promote graduate research mobility to and to improve the opportunities for doctoral research students to undertake international study;
- c) to enhance access to technologies and equipment for both institutions and to improve dialogue between academics and field experts;
- d) to enable students to access a wider range of funding mechanisms that may be otherwise unavailable to them;
- e) to facilitate access to supervision from specific scholars with expertise relevant to the project being undertaken.

Approval process

Academic Board agreed at its meeting on 5 April 2017 the introduction of a two stage process for the approval of cotutelle agreements – the first stage being approval of the partner organisation (due diligence), the second stage being academic approval of the intent to collaborate. The two stages may operate concurrently.

A cotutelle agreement is a model of collaborative provision and as such falls under Chapter B10 of the QAA Quality Code 'Managing Higher Education Provision with Others'. Due diligence of potential partner institutions is an essential part of the process along with academic arrangements. Please contact the Graduate School as early as possible to discuss your requirements.

Individual student cotutelle arrangements may be initiated by either the PhD supervisors or by prospective research students. In the case of the latter, the PhD supervisors of the collaborating universities must confirm the applicant's eligibility for joint supervision and acceptance of the student's proposal in writing. The primary supervisor at NU should then take the lead in developing the agreement not the prospective student.

Stage 1

Approval of partner institution (due diligence)

The purpose of due diligence is to examine whether the prospective partner university is an organisation with which the University would wish to work and be associated with, from a financial, reputational and academic quality perspective. The partner(s) must have the capacity in legal, financial and resources terms to enter into a productive and sustainable relationship. The extent of due diligence should be proportionate to the risk involved.

Due diligence checks can take several weeks to complete. It is important therefore that the proposer contacts the Graduate School to discuss cotutelle arrangements usually well in advance of when the applicant intends to commence his/her studies.

Step 1

- a) The proposer should check with the Graduate School at an early stage if the proposed partner has already been approved for collaborative arrangements with the University and arrange for completion of a Single Student Cotutelle Development (SSCD) Form.
 - i. Where a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) exists, the proposer should complete Clauses 1.1, 1.8 and 1.9 only of Section A and all of Section B before seeking approval from the Faculty Executive.
 - ii. In the absence of an established MoU, Sections A and B must be completed in full before seeking approval from the Faculty Executive.

Step 2

- a) If the University and the partner institution have not collaborated before, due diligence should be completed by the proposer to ensure that the partner institution can fulfil its role in the arrangement.
- b) All sections of the due diligence checklist are to be completed. This process will provide valuable information to help ensure that both the partner and the development are appropriate and satisfy University requirements and QAA expectations. By undertaking this analysis at an early stage, it will help the proposer and the University determine whether the proposal is worth pursuing.
- c) The proposer is responsible for liaising with the partner institution to collate the details required to complete Form SSCD and should sign the form to confirm that the information is correct.
- d) The FAPVC (Research & Innovation) signs to confirm of behalf of the Faculty that the proposal aligns with Faculty strategy, and that the Faculty takes responsibility for the ongoing monitoring of the cotutelle arrangement.
- e) The proposer should send the completed Form SSCD to the Graduate School who will arrange to forward it and any associated documents to the PVC (Research & Innovation) for overview.

Step 3

- a) The completed form will be considered by the PVC (Research & Innovation) who, if satisfied with the information provided, will approve the partner organisation and agree Approval in Principle for the cotutelle arrangement to proceed to Academic Portfolio Group (APG). Where there are any areas of concern, the FAPVC (Research & Innovation) will be asked to provide further information or clarification.
- b) The approval of new cotutelle partner institutions will be reported to GSC.
- c) Where a project is to be advertised that refers to joint supervision, the cotutelle partner must have been approved before advertisement takes place.
- d) The partner may have their own approval requirements, which need to be met before proceeding to Stage Two.

Stage Two

Academic approval of the intent to collaborate and drafting of the legal agreement

Individual student cotutelle agreements can only be initiated once the partner institution has been approved by the University.

Proposers should note that individual cotutelle agreements, particularly with new institutional partners, can take a considerable amount of time to finalise as they require detailed involvement and negotiation

between administrative and/or contract teams at each partner university, and often complex funding, contractual and visa arrangements.

Step 1 Principles

- a) It is expected that the request for a cotutelle arrangement and its subsequent agreement would normally be made either prior to admission, or by the end of the student's probationary period (as defined by at least one or the participating universities).
- b) The cotutelle agreement is expected to last for the duration of the student's registration, unless otherwise specified.
- c) Students must satisfy the agreed academic requirements of both Northumbria University and the collaborating institution with regards to registration, supervisory arrangements, training, progression and progress review, thesis submission and examination as outlined in the cotutelle agreement form and in line with the Handbook of Student Regulations applicable.
- d) Whilst at Northumbria, students will be managed according to Northumbria University research student procedures, probation and progress monitoring procedures and timescales. Where parallel processes exist in the collaborating institution, student will need to comply with those. Supervisors at the collaborating institution will be recorded by Northumbria University as 'external supervisors' without pay.
- e) Whilst at Northumbria, students are bound by Northumbria University Research Degree Regulations, the research degree enrolment terms and all applicable academic policies.
- f) When resident at the collaborating institution, health and safety, complaints, discipline and other procedures of that institution will apply.
- g) Students must spend a minimum of one year (full-time) and no more than three years (full-time) at each institution. The periods of time spent may be allocated in accordance with academic need and not necessarily taken in full academic years (however, please note that visa compliance rules may apply). The pattern of residence at each institution should be agreed in advance.
- h) For each year, fees will be paid to one of the co-signing universities. The University hosting the student will pay the stipend during the period the student is in attendance at that institution.
- i) English will be the language used during registration, for the written thesis and defence of the thesis at Northumbria, though the collaborating institution may additionally require a thesis to be written and defended in the language of that country.
- j) It is assumed that the student will own the copyright of the thesis, but the two Universities will have joint ownership of the IPR and share proceeds of any commercial exploitation 50:50.

Step 2 Approvals

Once the wording of the student cotutelle agreement has been drafted and finalised to the satisfaction of NU and the partner institution, Legal Services will:

- arrange for the cotutelle agreement to be signed by the NU supervisor and student.
- arrange for the cotutelle agreement to be signed by the FAPVC (Research & Innovation).
- ensure that appropriate colleagues at the partner institution sign and return the student cotutelle agreement to NU.
- forward copies of the fully signed student cotutelle agreement to all relevant parties.

It is the responsibility of the Graduate School to keep a record of cotutelle agreements, both in the individual student record, and separately in the record of all Cotutelle agreements.

Stage 3

Application, Offer and Admission

- a) The prospective research student may formally apply for admission to both NU and the partner institution at the initial setting up of the cotutelle agreement or the student can wait until the cotutelle agreement is agreed and then apply.
- b) Applicant Services will liaise with the student to ensure that timely application is made for a Certificate of Acceptance of Studies (CAS) where required.
- c) Graduate School will ensure that the student has also received an offer from the partner university. A copy of the NU formal offer letter should be forwarded to the partner university by the Graduate School and NU should receive a copy of the formal offer letter from the partner university.
- d) The student must complete the registration procedures for both NU and the partner university and is required to be registered as a PhD student at NU for the full duration of the programme of study. Students will be included in the statistical information on student numbers compiled by both universities.
- e) The Graduate School may produce bespoke offer documentation, specifying any amendments to the standard terms and conditions of registration.

Stage 4

Monitoring and review

- a) The principal supervisor is responsible for overseeing the day to day operation of the cotutelle arrangement, and for the overall management and direction of the student's degree as specified in NU's PGR Regulations.
- b) The cotutelle arrangement will be reviewed at least annually by the Faculty PGR Director.

Stage 5

Assessment

Joint decisions will be made about the length of the thesis and the arrangements for the oral examination that satisfy the requirements of both institutions.

The examination process may be as follows:

- a) Two examinations, one at each institution, in accordance with the requirements and regulations of each institution which, where successful, in both examinations, result in the award of a PhD or equivalent doctoral qualification from both partners;
- b) A single examination at the lead institution (i.e. where the student submits and spends the majority of time) that takes account of the requirements for both institutions which, where successful, results in the award of a PhD or equivalent doctoral qualification from both partners;

In all cases every care should be taken to ensure that a single thesis (bearing the logo of both institutions and specifying the cooperation agreement) is submitted to both Universities.

It is recognised that potentially, but rarely, the student could have two different recommended examination outcomes. In these circumstances, the student will need to satisfy the academic requirements laid down by each institution in order to receive the degree from that institution. Appeals would be conducted according to the appeals procedure for the institution awarding the result against which the student is appealing.

Step 1 Appointment of Examiners

- a) The standard NU process for the appointment of examiners should be followed noting that the supervisor at the partner institution cannot act as external examiner.
- b) The internal examiner and external examiner should be notified in their letters of appointment of any special conditions that will apply to the thesis or oral examination e.g. the provision of a summary of the thesis in a different language or the attendance of an observer at the viva from the partner institution. They should also be informed that their examiners' reports may be shared with the partner institution in order for that institution to make their doctoral degree award.

Step 2 Oral examination and award of degree

- a) In most circumstances student will be examined solely under the NU PGR Regulations with an internal examiner from NU and an external examiner conducting the viva held in Newcastle upon Tyne. In these arrangements an observer is present at the oral examination from the partner institution to ensure that the partner institution's assessment requirements are met. The observer will not have an input into the NU examiners' report. In exceptional circumstances students may be required to undertake two examinations, in close succession, particularly where the regulations of the partners differ significantly.
- b) Once a student has been successfully examined under NU processes, including any corrections or revisions required, and has been recommended for an NU award, the partner University is free to make their doctoral degree award (or not) under its regulations on the basis of this examination. The University does not offer joint degrees (one parchment with all Universities' names on it). However, the University can provide a statement if required to accompany the NU degree parchment indicating that the degree was obtained under co-supervision.

Process for managing a cotutelle request

Please refer to the process map applicable.

An annual report may be submitted to Graduate School Committee for review and evaluation of the effectiveness of such schemes.

Further information

In October 2015 the Quality Assurance Agency published a Characteristics Statement 'Qualifications involving more than one degree-awarding body' which forms a component of Part A (Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards) of the Quality Code:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Joint-Degree-Characteristics-15.pdf/>

Chapter B10 of the Quality Code: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Pages/Quality-Code-Chapter-B10.aspx#.V3U5_hBwaUk/