



University of  
Staffordshire

# DUAL AWARDS - POLICY AND GUIDANCE FOR TAUGHT PROGRAMMES

Quality Assurance and Enhancement  
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# Dual Awards - Policy and Guidance for Taught Programmes

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The following policy and guidance outlines University of Staffordshire's approach to dual award degrees with other awarding HEIs, to ensure its collaborative provision meets its obligations to maintain the academic standards of its courses and provide positive experiences to all its students.
- 1.2. The approach to dual award provision outlined in this document builds on the obligations and expectations set on degree-awarding institutions under the Office for Students' [Conditions of Registration](#); the [UK Quality Code \(June 2024\)](#) and related [Advice and Guidance](#); and the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) '[Qualifications Involving More than One Degree-awarding Body](#)' [Characteristics Statement](#) (2020). It also aligns with University of Staffordshire's academic regulations and quality assurance framework.
- 1.3. The provisions in this policy and guidance refer to dual awards, defined as arrangements where two degree-awarding bodies jointly provide a single programme of study leading to two separate qualifications (QAA 2020: 8). The University does not currently undertake multiple awards with more than one other degree-awarding body; authorisation to develop such provision would require approval by Partnership Committee and Quality Enhancement Committee as well as the subsequent production of dedicated procedures. This policy does not cover validated, franchised or non-credit bearing collaborative programme either; these are dealt with in separate policies in the university's quality assurance framework.
- 1.4. The University recognises that dual degree arrangements will vary according to country, partner and course-specific needs. Exceptions to the principles outlined in this document will require approval by the University's Partnership Committee and, where academic considerations are involved, by the Quality Enhancement Committee. Additional approval by Academic Board will be necessary where regulatory changes are concerned.
- 1.5. This document focuses on undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision. Separate provisions apply to doctoral degrees in acknowledgment of the specificities of postgraduate research.

## 2. Definitions

- 2.1. The defining feature of qualifications involving more than one degree awarding body is that they are the outcome of genuine collaborations which create distinctive courses that cannot be replicated by one body working independently.
- 2.2. This policy and guidance relates to the provision of dual awards with partner organizations that have their own degree-awarding powers. Dual awards are defined as arrangements where two degree-awarding bodies jointly provide

*"a course of study comprising a joint initial curriculum (or two parallel and equivalent curricula) (...) leading to two separate qualifications awarded individually by the two degree-awarding bodies. (...) Students who successfully complete both courses receive separate (...) certificates (...) granted by each of the awarding bodies involved. Each degree-awarding body is responsible for its own award, but the two components form a single package, and the overall arrangement is a joint enterprise that requires elements of joint management and oversight. Each degree-awarding body generally delivers a substantial proportion of the course leading to the qualification they award. (QAA 2020: 8).*

- 2.3 The QAA recognises that, in dual award arrangements, “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 courses of study had been taken consecutively” (QAA 2020: 8). The particularities of the dual award student journey including related student support considerations must be explored and agreed in depth by both parties.
- 2.4. A dual award differs from a joint award, defined in the QAA Characteristics Statement for Qualifications involving more than one degree-awarding body as a single programme of study awarded by more than one higher education institution through one degree certificate signed by all the awarding parties (QAA 2020:7). University of Staffordshire does not currently enter joint awards due to their higher risk and additional demands concerning institutional expertise, regulations, and resources. The development of joint award provision would require strategic university approval and a review of this policy and guidance to factor in their specificities as well as the University’s approach to its deliver.
- 2.5 The QAA recognises in its Characteristics Statement, ‘Qualifications involving more than one degree- awarding body’ (2020: 5-6) that dual awards have developed through a varied range of arrangements, which may not always reflect the patterns for such awards developed, defined and embedded within the European context. They may emerge from long-standing collaborations and reflect the need to take account of other organisations as they mature and develop. Delivery may involve one partner more than another and mobility between partners may not be an essential part of the arrangement, but the design and development of the course, aspects of its management and oversight, and the ultimate decision-making on student achievement are all carried out jointly by both degree-awarding bodies.

### **3. Strategic context**

- 3.1 University of Staffordshire is committed to maintaining and developing collaborative educational partnerships with international universities, colleges and other organizations. They provide opportunities for students in many countries to engage with innovative teaching and learning experiences and study for University of Staffordshire awards in their home country. Delivery in partnership also enhances the university’s learning and teaching practices, as each partner brings their own perspectives and expertise to the programmes.
- 3.2. Dual degrees involve substantial resources and a higher degree of risk and oversight than validated or franchised provision. Their development must be strategically aligned with the University’s academic and international partnership strategies and ensure a positive student experience.
- 3.3 The University will normally only consider proposals for dual award courses from partners with which it already has a successful collaborative relationship. In exceptional cases the University might develop dual award programmes with new partner institutions that have a track record of successful delivery in the general subject area and academic level in question. All proposals for both existing and new partner providers will require prior strategic approval from the Strategic Course Approval Board (SAB) to engage in dual award activity with the proposed institution before any operational arrangements and specific courses are considered. Proposals submitted for strategic approval must include full financial costings.
- 3.4 The approved university due diligence process for new partnerships must be followed in all cases. The partnership and course approval will examine any capacity-building or support needs that either party might have for the successful delivery of the dual award. The approval schedule for new partners will factor in due time to: undertake comprehensive financial costings, including set-up, academic and operational costs; map the respective resources needed for the proposed dual award activity; and build academic and operational alignment. In the interim period, staff and student exchanges should be explored where feasible to strengthen mutual knowledge and links.

### **4. Criteria for Establishing Dual Awards**

- 4.1. The development of dual award provision should be jointly planned by the School and the relevant function within Business to Markets, as part of the School's business development. This is to ensure strategic alignment with institutional and school priorities and institutional capacity for its delivery.
- 4.1 As part of its due diligence processes, the University will satisfy itself that any potential dual award partners have the legal authority to develop, deliver and award this type of collaborative provision.
- 4.3 Dual award courses must be in a subject area where the University has appropriate subject expertise and academic capacity.
- 4.4 Dual award arrangements will be considered for student cohorts rather than individual candidates, so as to ensure strategic impact, viability, and a positive student experience. Any exceptions require approval by SAB following consideration of the academic, regulatory and business case.
- 4.5 Dual award courses will be taught and assessed in English.

## **5. Key principles of The University of Staffordshire Dual Awards**

- 5.1 University of Staffordshire defines dual award provision as a combined package of study leading to two separate qualifications awarded by two separate awarding bodies. While a dual award course may be based on an existing course either at the partner or at the University, it must be a truly joint initiative co-designed and co-developed to offer a unique learning experience that no individual institution could offer outside the dual award partnership. 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 course of study had been taken consecutively (QAA 2020: 8). The dual award course might also require physical co-delivery from University of Staffordshire and/or student mobility. The dual award proposal submitted for strategic approval should articulate these points explicitly in relation to the proposed student journey.

### **5.2 Responsibility for standards of dual awards**

- 5.2.1 The UK Quality Code, its related Advice and Guidance and the QAA Characteristics Statement for Qualifications Involving More than One Awarding Body establish that the collective responsibility for collaborative awards (and the need to accept the academic standards of the other partner(s)) does not remove or diminish the responsibility of the individual awarding body to ensure that its own academic standards are maintained.
- 5.2.2 University of Staffordshire remains responsible for the standards of any award issued in its name and for ensuring that any award meets the required UK Higher Education descriptors and benchmarks.

### **5.3. Respective involvement of partners in dual awards**

- 5.3.1 The QAA Characteristics Statement (2020) requires that each partner must make substantial contributions to the creation, management and decision-making related to the course and the award. Ongoing and effective joint arrangements for assessment, course design/development, and management must be in place. For assessment this will include attendance at Award Boards; leading on the assessment of modules for which the partner concerned has primary responsibility; and being engaged, usually through moderation activity, in the assessment of modules delivered by the other partner. For course design there should be joint activity in the initial course design and development and in all ongoing course monitoring, review and enhancement activity. Joint course management structures must be established and run to a schedule agreed between the partners.

- 5.3.2 Each partner involved in University of Staffordshire dual awards must also be involved in course delivery. One partner may have a greater commitment than the other/others with regard to delivery, and this commitment may vary over time. This will be agreed at the point of course approval or re-approval. The Programme Specification will detail the volume of credit delivered by each partner at each level. Each partner will generally deliver a substantial proportion of the course leading to the qualification they award, as required by the QAA Characteristics Statement. The use of third parties to deliver, including any changes to delivery arrangements already in place, must be agreed by all parties and approved through the Quality and Enhancement Committee before such activity starts.
- 5.3.3 Delivery may be via face-to-face or distance learning modes, or a combination of these (blended learning), and may not necessarily require students to attend both institutions in person. Creative and innovative course design, enabling students to engage pro-actively with all partners, will often be a feature of University of Staffordshire dual awards. For example, a course may utilise the virtual learning environment (VLE) extensively to deliver synchronous and asynchronous content, including the use of interactive on-line forums and blogs, video streaming and lecture capture, virtual seminars and webinars etc. This will maximise both opportunity and engagement with the different partners.

## **6. Dual Award Course Agreements**

- 6.1 A legal agreement, providing details of the agreed management, regulatory and quality assurance arrangements, must be signed by both parties following approval of a dual award course and prior to its commencement. Agreements will normally be signed for no longer than a five-year period unless a different timeframe has been determined and agreed at partnership and/or course approval stage due to partner legal or regulatory requirements. Agreements can be updated earlier where needed (e.g. major sector or institutional changes, student performance, experience or feedback, external examiner reports). No students can be admitted to a course before the signed agreement is in place.
- 6.2. Agreements must outline high-level aspects of the combined student journey, identify where it differs from each institution's standard degree experience, and account for any specific student support required.
- 6.3. Arrangements must be put in place to ensure that students are able to complete their courses of study and be granted the relevant awards in the event that one or more of the partners withdraws from the agreement.
- 6.4 Where a student meets the requirements of one party but not the other, the candidate will be able to receive the award they qualify for.

## **7. Dual Award Course Approval Procedures**

- 7.1. Institutional authorisation to enter a dual award arrangement must be sought via the University's standard processes. For provision with a new partner, the first stage is strategic approval of the partnership. For provision with an existing partner, strategic approval for the new courses should be sought from the Strategic Course Approval Board (SAB). These steps should be completed sufficiently in advance to factor in the greater academic, resource and operational implications of developing dual award programmes in comparison to validated or franchised provision.
- 7.2. Once strategic approval for the dual award arrangement is obtained, new partnership proposals will follow the University's partnership approval policy and procedures. Individual dual award courses, for both new and current partners, will be developed and approved through the University's design sprint process. The course development team and participating stakeholders will include appropriate expertise in the design and management of collaborative provision. The design sprint process will establish whether the dual award course as an entity delivers and assesses course outcomes at the appropriate level for the proposed award while maintaining university academic standards. A validation panel will consider the course proposal(s) and

recommend approval, where appropriate, to Quality and Enhancement Committee, to then be noted at Academic Board.

- 7.3 It will sometimes be appropriate for a conjoint approval process to be undertaken involving both awarding bodies. This must be approved by the Chair of the Quality Enhancement Committee in advance. Where separate approval processes are followed, both parties should be informed of the date and outcome of the other's event(s) and receive a copy of the relevant course approval reports/committee minutes. In all cases, University of Staffordshire must be able to assure itself that both the university and the partner institution have approved the dual award course and that all associated conditions have been signed off, before any students can be admitted and the course can commence.
- 7.4 In recognition of the complexities of a proposal involving two awarding bodies, the course design sprint for dual award programmes will be required to pay particular regard to the roles and responsibilities of the institutions involved, recognising that the national requirements of both parties must be met. Items for consideration must include:

## **7.5 Teaching and Assessment Responsibilities**

- 7.5.1 The teaching and assessment responsibilities of both parties should be clearly outlined in the dual award course approval documentation – including provisions regarding assessment storage in order to meet University of Staffordshire's regulatory obligations. Lead responsibility for each module must be defined within the Programme Specification.
- 7.5.2 Through the dual award course design sprint process, the University must ensure that the dual award is a genuinely joint venture, with both partners active in delivery of the course. In doing so the University will ensure that the core/option split does not result in a student engaging only with one partner. The course design sprint considerations must ensure also that each partner delivers credit at the level of its award. Delivery can be virtual face-to-face, or a mixture of the two.
- 7.5.3 All partner teaching staff must be approved by the university following due policy and procedures before they start to teach on a university course. Where an alternative approach is requested (e.g. in recognition of the standing and experience of the partner involved), this must be approved by Partnership Committee prior to the commencement of the course design sprint.
- 7.5.4. University of Staffordshire will appoint an External Examiner – or several where needed- to the course leading to the university's award. While all formal communication with the External Examiner(s) will be made by University of Staffordshire, both institutions will contribute to the responses to External Examiner reports. Where an External Examiner is also appointed by the partner, joint appointments may be explored. Such arrangements must be approved by Quality and Enhancement Committee on the recommendation of the validation panel and be reflected in the collaborative operational framework. External Examiners appointed to dual award courses must be provided with a detailed induction to each course including full details of the regulatory framework -see section (b) below.
- 7.5.5. Each partner is expected to have lead responsibility for the assessment of the components of the course that it delivers.
- 7.5.6. In order to ensure effective oversight of assessment, each partner will have the opportunity to review and comment on the assessment materials that the other provider/s develop. University of Staffordshire will normally require that its School staff review and approve the form and content of proposed examination papers, coursework tasks and other assessments developed by the partner that contribute towards its award before their submission to the university's External Examiner.
- 7.5.7 Both partners should engage in moderation activity on those elements of the course that are the lead assessment responsibility of the other. University of Staffordshire will also normally require that its staff see a sample of examination scripts and a proportion of summative coursework marked by the partner for modules contributing to its award to verify the standard of marking.

- 7.5.8 The membership of the Award Boards for both awards must be defined at course approval. Separate Award Boards can be set up by each institution. Where joint Boards are agreed and appointed, they should be co-chaired and must have representatives from both partners. Any joint board will report to the standard University of Staffordshire structures.

## **7.6. Regulatory Issues**

- 7.6.1 As a dual award leads to two separate qualifications by two awarding bodies, each partner's award will be governed by their own regulations. It is recommended that a document is developed, identifying and outlining how respective regulations for the delivery of the dual award align; in no way should this combined overview of the regulatory framework for the course(s) compromise the spirit and rigour of university regulations.
- 7.6.2 Where separate regulations apply, and the assessment criteria and marking schemes vary between partners, a conversion scale must be developed to convert marks between the marking schemes of the two institutions. A procedure for the application of the conversion scale should also be defined. The conversion scale and procedure must be presented at course approval, with evidence that it meets University of Staffordshire regulatory requirements.
- 7.6.3 University of Staffordshire's award classification will be determined using the results of the university modules only. There should therefore normally be at least 90 credits of university modules at both levels 5 and 6.
- 7.6.4 Partner modules might contribute to the amount of credit needed to achieve the award (up to the required credits for the University of Staffordshire qualification) but will not be used in the classification calculation.
- 7.6.5 Partner modules contributing to the University of Staffordshire's award will be detailed in the university transcript with a mapped mark; a conversion scale must be developed to convert marks between the two institutions. However, the transcript will make clear which modules have contributed to the University of Staffordshire's award classification.
- 7.6.6 Full procedures to handle student complaints in a dual award set up must be developed and presented as part of the course design sprint with evidence that they meet university requirements and are comparable to those used for its own provision. Registry agreement is required throughout their drafting and approval so as to ensure compliance with regulatory bodies and the Office for the Independent Adjudicator of Higher Education. It is expected that student complaints are handled in the first instance by the awarding body responsible for the delivery of the provision in question according to their own process. Subsequent stages would need to be handled collectively by both parties. Complaints regarding the course as a whole need to be dealt with by both parties from the outset according to the agreed procedures.
- 7.6.4 Full details of the management of student appeals must be agreed as part of the dual award course approval process. The procedures must be presented as part of the course design sprint with evidence that they meet University of Staffordshire's regulatory requirements and are comparable to those used for its own provision. Registry agreement is required throughout their drafting and approval so as to ensure compliance with regulatory bodies and the Office for the Independent Adjudicator of Higher Education.
- 7.6.5 Procedures for dealing with cases of academic and non-academic misconduct must be agreed as part of the dual award course approval process. The procedures must be presented as part of the course design sprint process with evidence that they meet university regulatory requirements and are comparable to those used for its own provision. Registry agreement is required throughout their drafting and approval so as to ensure compliance with regulatory bodies and the Office for the Independent Adjudicator of Higher Education.

## **7.7. Admissions**

- 7.7.1 Admissions onto the dual award course will be in line with the standard University of Staffordshire's admissions policy. This will be confirmed at the point of course approval and defined within the course documentation.
- 7.7.2 The responsibility of each awarding body in the admissions process must be agreed at course approval.
- 7.7.3 If students are admitted onto the course with advanced standing, each partner must ensure that such students will have contact (which may be face-to-face or virtual) with both of them to reflect the nature of the dual award. Admissions processes must reflect this requirement

## **7.8 Course Management**

- 7.8.1 Each awarding body should identify those staff at their institutions responsible for the management and oversight of the dual award course(s). Where more than one course is offered under dual award arrangements with the same partner, a university academic lead will be designated at approval stage to oversee internal consistency in addressing academic matters across the dual award portfolio; the expectation is that a similar co-ordinating post will be designated at the partner university.
- 7.8.2 Details of how the course will be collectively managed by both institutions should be provided in the course approval documentation. The following groups will be established for each dual award partner:
- A Strategic Management Group, organised by the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships and involving the relevant Executive Dean(s) and Associate Dean(s) Students and/or Associate Dean(s) Curriculum from University of Staffordshire and equivalent staff at the partner.
  - A Course Management Group(s) comprising the Academic Lead(s), ALT(s) and relevant Course Director(s) for the provision at the University of Staffordshire and the equivalent academic leads at the partner, along with a student representative. There will be a Course Management Group for each subject area, organised by the relevant Academic Leads from both partners. This Group(s) is responsible for maintaining the academic standards of the dual award programme(s), ensuring it operates in accordance with the approved programme specification as well as any agreed operational schedules providing a distinctive, well-coordinated collaborative learning and teaching experience. It also oversees and enhances the quality of students' learning opportunities, ensuring that issues requiring improvement are addressed, and good practice is shared.

## **7.9 Student Support and Engagement**

- 7.9.1 Provision for student support and engagement should be comparable to that in place for students on-campus at University of Staffordshire. Any specific needs of collaborative cohorts arising from the particularities of a dual degree must be identified and accounted for. The provision and the responsibilities of each awarding body for this, must be clearly outlined in the course approval documentation as well as in the course information provided to students.
- 7.9.2 The use of virtual learning environments, and the respective responsibility of each party for these, should also be agreed at course approval. Designated staff at each partner must be able to access VLE information provided by the other on their collaborative provision in order to meet regulatory requirements regarding oversight and storage of course information.

## **7.10 Information**

- 7.10.1 All information relating to the dual award course must be approved by both parties before being issued to students. Any amendments to course information must also be approved by both



parties, in accordance with their procedures. Course information must make reference to both awarding bodies and clearly outline the respective responsibilities of each.

- 7.10.2 The format of course documentation will be agreed by both parties. Where feasible University of Staffordshire templates should be used. Any bespoke templates should be agreed as part of the course approval process. The content of such documents must be comparable to those used for on-campus awards at University of Staffordshire.
- 7.10.3 There will be one Programme Specification for the dual award, which will include:
- Lead responsibility for each module
  - The volume of credit delivered by each partner for each level. The University credit structure should be used where possible, with any use of alternative credit structures being agreed by the Quality and Enhancement Committee.
- The Programme Specification should follow the University of Staffordshire template unless a bespoke template is agreed by the Quality Enhancement Committee.
- 7.10.4 Module descriptors are required for all modules contributing to the dual award. For modules contributing to the university award, these should follow the University template unless a bespoke alternative is agreed by the Quality and Enhancement Committee. Partner modules that form part of the dual but do not contribute to the University of Staffordshire award can be presented using the partner's module template.
- 7.10.5. Respective arrangements for the storage of course-related documentation and assessment - including SU access as required- will be agreed by both parties to meet their respective regulatory requirements. These provisions will be outlined in the partnership agreement at high level and in the collaborative framework in operational detail.
- 7.10.4. All publicity relating to the dual award must be approved by University of Staffordshire in accordance with the University's procedure.

## **7.11 Student Records**

Students will normally be registered with both awarding bodies. Both parties must also agree as part of the course approval how student records will be kept. The status and rights of students in relation to both degree-awarding bodies must be made clear.

## **7.12 Quality Assurance**

- 7.12.1 Arrangements for course monitoring and review must be agreed at course approval. These will normally follow university procedures, however, where the partner has its own monitoring and review processes, a joint process may be agreed. The procedures must be presented at course approval, with evidence that they meet university quality assurance requirements. Any bespoke arrangements must be comparable to university procedures.
- 7.12.2 Both parties must approve course amendments which have an impact on their awards before they are introduced. Both parties must review amendments to ensure that they do not impact adversely on the requirement for each to have an active role in course delivery.
- 7.12.3 All curriculum amendments impacting on the University of Staffordshire award must be submitted to University of Staffordshire for approval in accordance with the University's Course amendment procedure. Amendments which do not have an impact on the University of Staffordshire award should be reported to the university for information.
- 7.12.4 For any module approvals subsequent to the initial course approval procedure, University of Staffordshire will accept the detailed module approval processes undertaken at module level by its partners for those modules or components that the partners are delivering.

### **7.13 Certificates and Transcripts**

- 7.13 University of Staffordshire will issue both the certificate and the transcript to a student who successfully completes its award. The transcript will note that the course leads to a dual award together with the location of study and language of instruction. It is expected that this will be mirrored on partners' certificates and/or transcripts. The format and content of all certificates and transcripts for dual award courses must be agreed by the university.

### **7.14. Collaborative Operational Framework**

- 7.14.1 A collaborative operational framework for the dual award will be prepared and presented at course approval and referred to in the legal agreement. This document will detail the points above as agreed by both parties, together with any other aspects of the student journey and its operationalisation that might arise during the dual award development, approval and review.
- 7.14.2 The collaborative operational framework will also establish the communication and oversight mechanisms agreed by both institutions.

