



Erasmus+ - Key Action 2

Capacity Building within the Field of Higher Education

## TIGRIS Project

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***Framework for comparison between existing regulation and procedures  
in Kurdish HEIs for development of double diplomas and joint degrees  
and those in place within EU partners***

Work package	Title
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Activity	Title
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Useful for	<i>Working Package 1.1 (Relevant parts in legislation)</i> <i>Working Package 4.1 (tool)</i>

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## Existing regulations in Kurdistan

Two inquiries were made to the ministry with regard to the legal conditions for double and joint degrees: one by KUL in spring 2018 and one by UGOE and GII as part of an online survey in November 2018. The results of both inquiries are extremely limited. In the first inquiry, the ministerial reply was: “there are special rules for this type of degree according to universities and MoU that they sign with other universities around the world.” However, further inquiries of KUL regarding

- a reference of these special rules
- a brief synopsis of these legal rules
- any problems encountered by Institutions of higher education in practice which might benefit from a comparison with legislation in other European countries

yielded no answer.

The online survey produced even less result, the answer to the question what conditions and regulations were in place in order to increase the number and proportion of joint/double/multiple degree programmes at Kurdish Higher Education Institutions was “split-site PhD programs for Kurdish students.”

## Existing conditions and procedures for double and joint degrees in Kurdistan

We received replies from 8 of the 9 Kurdish universities (Erbil Polytechnic University opened the survey but did not answer it) and 7 answered that they did not have neither documented regulations nor procedures in place regarding the development of double and/or joint diplomas/degrees

1. Halabja University
2. Salahaddin University Erbil
3. Duhok Polytechnic University
4. Kurdistan Institution of Strategic Studies and Scientific Research (KISSR)
5. University of Raparin
6. Charmo University

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## 7. University of Sulaimani.

The result for these 8 universities could indicate that there are also no relevant regulations and procedures in place at the national level. In particular, the University of Sulaimani, running a Cotutelle project with UGOE without any regulations and procedures in place, stated that the Ministry does not provide outlined regulations.

Nevertheless, a more precise and elaborate reply of the Ministry would have been useful. Especially, since the information of SPU (see below) indicates that the Ministry grants approval for such degrees and hence must have a procedure as well as regulations in place to do so.

### Sulaimani Polytechnic University (SPU)

Only Sulaimani Polytechnic University (SPU) reported internal documented regulations and procedures.

SPU has the approval of the Ministry to open a double high diploma degree with the participation of the Cyprus International University. This degree will be vocational and will be for all those interested in governmental and private institutions except for the Ministry of Higher Education. The first semester is at the SPU and the second is at the Cyprus International University, after which a short research stay is offered and the student has supervisors from both universities.

In addition, SPU has PhD students studying the Split-Site system where students are required to stay one year and one and a half years in the other university outside Iraq to study thesis and work in laboratories.

### Split-Site PhD according to the Kurdistan Institution for Strategic Studies and Scientific Research (KISSR)

According to the Kurdistan Institution for Strategic Studies and Scientific Research (KISSR), Split-Site doctoral degrees can be offered by any public university in Kurdistan Region of Iraq as well as KISSR in collaboration with another international institution.

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As it is the norm in joint international doctoral education, the Split-Site PhD is based on an agreement between the Kurdish and foreign university and therefore is the result of a negotiation process.

From documentation provided by KISSR, the following procedures apply for a Split-Site PhD:

The process is initiated by the Kurdish supervisor who is charged to write a detailed proposal for the research project. Beside a description of the project, its methods and requirements, the proposal must include information about the potential benefits, direct or indirect, for the Kurdistan Region, study courses the candidate has to complete during the course of PhD studies as well as a detailed budget required for the project. It is to be noted that expenses incurred abroad (e.g. travel costs, expenses for the candidates, livelihood abroad, tuition fees, visiting costs of external supervisor etc.) must not exceed 50.000 US Dollar. In total, during the course of the PhD studies the candidate can spend up to 18 months abroad including a 3-6 month preparatory language course and a one-year research stay. Stays at both the Kurdish and the foreign university are mandatory.

The proposal written by the supervisor is to be submitted to the Scientific Committee of the Department, which approves or rejects the proposal. According to KISSR, only after the project is approved by the Scientific Committee of the Department the external (foreign) supervisor is officially involved by reviewing, possibly revising and agreeing to the proposal. The agreed and signed proposal is again to be submitted to the Scientific Committee of the Department.

The Split-Site PhD is based on a mutual agreement between both universities. If a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) exists between the two universities engaging in joint PhD education, it serves as contractual basis for the project. If no MoU is signed, a separate contractual agreement has to be negotiated and signed by both parties.

The final proposal as well as the contractual agreement is then submitted to the Scientific Committee of the University Presidency, which has to approve of the project. If approved, the project is again submitted to the University Council by the Presidency, which again must approve of the project and finally announces the PhD position.

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After approval, an application and selection process is initiated involving the Scientific Committee of the Department, the internal (Kurdish) and external (foreign) supervisor amongst others, which finally select the candidate.

After selecting a candidate, within one month a separate agreement between the candidate selected and the University Presidency has to be signed detailing each party's rights and obligations. If signed, the candidate is enrolled as a PhD student at the Kurdish university.

According to KISSR, the funding of the PhD project is to be provided by the Kurdish university's annual budget and officially declared as scholarship expenses. However, funding by third parties is also possible but need prior official confirmation by the funding party.

In terms of quality assurance and according to KISSR, a regulation by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research is in place (in the documentation given as KRG-P4 year 2010). However, this regulation and its contents were neither provided nor detailed in the documentation.

The general admission criteria for PhD studies in Kurdistan are codified in the "Regulation for PhD studies in public universities in Iraqi Kurdistan Region for year 2016-2017" (Regulation No. 5 of the year 2016 issues by MHESR decree No. 8109 on 25 May 2016). According to KISSR, the criteria stated here also apply for candidates applying for a Split-Site PhD.

In general, applicants are required to hold a Bachelor's and Master's degree in the same field as the PhD studies. To be admitted to a doctoral degree, the candidate must have an average grade of 60% for the Bachelor's degree and 70% for the master degree according to the Iraqi grading system. Candidates must also prove English language proficiency equivalent to 5.0 IELTS (humanities) and 6.0 IELTS (e.g. for STEM, medicine). In addition, each candidate must pass a competitive selection process, in which candidates are assessed and graded by points gained in an entry exam and by the number of publications published. Prior grades are also factored in.

Foreign applicants (non-Iraqi citizens) are admitted via a parallel admission system with no competition if they meet the scientific requirements. As stated in the regulation for PhD studies in

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public universities in Iraqi Kurdistan Region, the aim of this step is to encourage international students to study PhD in Kurdish universities.

The average duration of a PhD is 3 years, which can be extended to a maximum duration of 4.5 years. Extensions are granted in sets of 6 months. Each extension needs approval. A first extension is to be approved by the College Committee, the second by the University Committee and the third by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

In order to obtain a PhD, a candidate must collect not less than 60 units (according to the contemporary Kurdish framework which is based on contact hours). For this, the candidate in his first semester has to complete successfully the courses predefined in the proposal with at least 60% in each of the subjects and an average of 70% of all the subjects. For the courses, a total amount of 13-15 units can be awarded. In addition, the candidate must successfully defend a PhD thesis in front of an examination committee. The doctoral thesis must be based on original research that is ready for publication. For the thesis, 45-50 units can be awarded. Candidates are also required to publish at least 2 publications stemming from their PhD research of which one publication has to be published in an international journal.

Unfortunately, in the documentation submitted no details were provided regarding the defence examination and its requirements. However, according to information provided by the University of Sulaimani (UOS), examination is regulated by the “Regulation for PhD study thesis defence examination” (Regulation No. 7 of year 2016 issued by MHESR decree No. 9893 on 22 June 2016). The exact contents of the regulation, however, is unknown due to not being made available.

However, further information regarding the general examination requirements and awarding of degrees can be taken from the Cotutelle project between UGOE and UOS:

- The examination is an oral examination according to the rules and regulations of both institutions;
- An examination at the Kurdish university is mandatory; however, two separate defence examinations at each university are possible;

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- The examination committee is jointly appointed;
- Both institutions confer their doctoral degrees according to the rules and regulation in force at their institution;
- The supervisors must not be appointed as member of the examination committee but have to be physically present during the defence examination;
- For the examination at the Kurdish university, the defence committee consists of at least 5 members of which 2 have examined the written thesis, 2 are external examiners (e.g. from a Kurdish or Iraqi university) and one from the home university.

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## Existing conditions and procedures for double and joint degrees in the European partner universities

We here represent the conditions and procedures at the individual partner universities as reported by the partners. The overview provides a good picture since all partners have documented regulations and procedures in place.

### Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (UGOE)

At UGOE, double/joint degree programmes must be based on a well-balanced curriculum incorporating modules of both institutions. Modules of 6 ECTS length are recommended, resulting in 5 modules per term. However, variations are possible if they fit in the 30 ECTS-rule per term or 60 ECTS per academic year. The curriculum shall be agreed upon by the responsible academics and the faculty or faculties in charge.

All programmes end with a thesis. The bachelor thesis accounts in general for 12 ECTS.

The master thesis comprises a workload of 20 to 30 ECTS incl. eventually an oral presentation of the master thesis.

Regarding the duration of stay at the host institution, it is preferred that half of the study programme is done at each partner institution. However, if the academics agree on joint supervision and assessment of the thesis, the last semester counts as period abroad.

Parallel to the curriculum the institutions negotiate on the agreement.

For the double degree, each institution decides for themselves whether the student fulfils the requirements. After successful completion of all initially agreed requirements, two doctoral degrees (double degree) will be issued which refer to each other and may only be used in conjunction.

In addition to the requirements mentioned, a joint degree arises out of a very close relationship of the departments involved; ideally, the joint degree is the outcome of a pre-existing fruitful collaboration on a research programme. The curriculum, the degree and degree requirements are

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designed jointly. After successful completion of all initially agreed requirements, both institutions issue a Joint degree (i.e. one single parchment).

UGOE is able to deliver double/joint diplomas under the legislation of Niedersächsisches Hochschulgesetz (§8) (Lower Saxony Higher Education Act). An additional legal basis is the partnership agreement, which sets out the terms and conditions of the programme as agreed between the partner institutions and builds the guideline for the examination regulation.

The faculty proposes the new study program to Student and Academic Services (SL) with a written outline (21 months prior to intended start of the program). After institutional decision making (e.g. Fakultätsrat / Faculty Council) and after general consent of the presidential board, the examination regulation will be prepared. The examination regulation is a university bylaw and needs to be approved by the university senate after approval of the Central Committee for Teaching and Learning, the Legal Office and the team Academic Programme Development and Degree Programme Regulations.

Finally, all degree programmes need to be authorized by the ministry of education of Lower Saxony regarding offered places and final examination regulation. A separate check by the accreditation agency (or internal accreditation) will be required.

### [RU Groningen \(RUG\)](#)

RUG has a 20-page guidelines document for collaborative degree programmes. These guidelines are intended to help faculties establish collaborative degree programmes. RUG can enter into partnerships with other Dutch and foreign universities and the resulting collaborative degree programmes can lead to different types of degree certificates.

The guidelines explain some of the definitions involved in a collaborative degree programme, after which they describe the different types of partnerships that can be established. These match the choices available to all the partners in a collaborative degree programme. They then discuss the reasons for establishing a partnership and examine the roles, responsibilities and tasks of the various individuals and institutions involved and specifically go into registration and tuition fees for

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collaborative degree programmes, as well as accreditation and quality assurance, and finally address a number of important points for attention.

The information in these guidelines is based on various legal documents, reports published by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), and on the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW). A list of the applicable sections of law is included, as well as a list of useful contacts and a roadmap for establishing a collaborative degree programme. The information in these guidelines is based on Dutch law. In the Netherlands, successful graduates of higher education programmes are entitled to a degree by law and the degree certificate is awarded as proof of this. Other countries may have different laws and it is important to take account of this. Made-to-measure solutions may be required for different situations.

Instead of a description of procedures, RUG provided an example for a typical roadmap of a new joint degree which looks as follows:

1. Discussion with internal stakeholders
2. Underpinning choice of partner (exclusively accredited Master's degree programmes) in consultation with department International Strategy and Relations
3. Submit proposal including underpinning choice of partner to Faculty Board
4. Draw up a cooperation agreement (Letter of Intent, cooperation agreement) conform checklist and standard contract with the partners whereby the Faculty Board states its intention to establish the programme
5. Send the cooperation a concept agreement for a check
6. Further development of the programme including a financial section
7. Draw up a definitive application file (contract letter of the Examination Committee and underpinning choice of partner) and send by Faculty Board to the Board of the University
8. The Board of the University decides
9. Prepare application dossiers
10. Macro-efficiency assessment by the CDHO (Commission on Efficiency of Higher Education, which advises the Minister of Education): a minimum of six months is required to prepare an

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application for a macro-efficiency test, and the assessment of the application by the CDHO and the Minister takes a minimum of eight weeks

11. New Programme Assessment by the NVAO (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders): the NVAO's approval is required within 10 months of the CDHO assessment result otherwise the CDHO procedure will have to be repeated. Accreditation by the NVAO
12. The faculty ratifies the partnership in a cooperation agreement, to be signed by the Board of the
13. University of Groningen and the boards of the partner institutions
14. Registration of the new programme in the CROHO register (Central Register of higher education programmes)
15. Evaluation and extension after three years
16. Progress is monitored in the annual Curriculum Monitor
17. The faculty evaluates the programme after three years"

#### KU Leuven (KUL)

A joint or double doctoral degree can be awarded by KUL if the PhD researcher performs the research for the thesis in partnership with other national or international institution. In order for a joint or double degree to be awarded, a partnership must comply with the following requirements and minimum stipulations:

1. the PhD researcher conducts research for the thesis for at least 6 months at the KU Leuven and at least 6 months at the other institution,
2. 1 person per institution is appointed supervisor,
3. the public defence of the thesis takes place in front of a jury which includes, in addition to the supervisors, at least one professor from each of the institutions concerned.

Application to prepare a thesis in partnership requires an application file. Together with the supervisor, the PhD researcher requests authorisation from the doctoral committee to prepare a

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thesis in partnership. This is usually done at the same time as the application for authorisation to enrol as a PhD researcher, or else at the latest one year after the doctoral period begins.

The supervisor documents the way in which the partnership will operate. The supervisor also submits a proposal as to whether the KU Leuven shall act as a main or partner institution.

The doctoral committee then evaluates the application, and it can decide:

1. To approve the application with the main institution as
2. To approve the application on condition that the KU Leuven is the main institution.
3. To approve the application with the other institution as the main institution provided that one or more additional conditions are met.
4. Not to support the partnership thesis.
5. Not to give permission for the candidate to enrol as a PhD researcher.

KUL directs for further more detailed information to a specific website which the Kurdish partners may visit: <https://www.kuleuven.be/english/research/phd/jointdegree/index>.

#### Masaryk University (MU)

According to the Czech law, it is possible for Czech institutions to establish joint or double/multiple degree programmes. Since 2018, the accreditation rules changed and instead of accreditation of the programmes, the universities can apply for institutional accreditation and within this accreditation it is a responsibility of each university to accredit its own programmes, including joint/double degree programmes.

According to the level (BA, MA or PhD) all joint/double degree programme must meet the regular requirements for university degree programmes in terms of ECTS and quality. All the regulations regarding final exams, committee etc. must be kept in the joint programmes as well.

MU has internal regulation how to establish a joint/double degree programme. It starts from the Partner Agreement through accreditation process and enrolment of students and ends with the Diploma and Diploma Supplement. Some of the documents are in English. MU also provided a link

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to the respective website: <https://czs.muni.cz/en/partners/joint-degree-programmes/joint-degree-programmes>.

## Conclusions

We firstly see that most Kurdish universities are by far not prepared for double or joint degrees. Since these degrees have to be considered the “crown of internationalisation”, it seems futile to focus on them at this stage of internationalisation in the Kurdish HE system.

Nevertheless, if any Kurdish partner wants to establish such a degree, the examples of the four European partner universities provide ample information on how to proceed and they all share commonalities:

- Their internal regulations and procedures are based on the national (and in Germany due to federalism of course the Federal state) law;
- All have established procedures involving the decision-making bodies of the respective faculties;
- They either have to seek external accreditation in case of programme-level accreditation policies or internally in case of institutional accreditation in the respective country. It might be worth adding that the institutional accreditation is the model of the future, not the least because of serious reduction of costs compared to individual programme accreditation;
- None has to rely on additional European-level regulations.

The information received from the Ministry might be incomplete considering the information provided by SPU.



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