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**Practical Experiences with Double Degree Programs and Recommendations towards the Installation of a Joint/Double Degree Program in Occupational Therapy at Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences**

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<p>Kansainvälisten kaksoistutkintojen ja yhteisten tutkintojen kehittäminen ja toteuttaminen voi olla haasteellista. Siitä huolimatta ne ovat tärkeä osa kansainvälistymistä ja kansainvälistä yhteistyötä korkeakoulujen välillä. Yhteisellä ohjelmalla tarkoitetaan opintoja, jotka kaksi tai useampi korkeakoulu tarjoavat yhdessä. Opinnot voidaan toteuttaa yhdessä tai useammassa maassa.</p> <p>Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on koota yhteen tietoa kaksoistutkinnoista sekä siitä, millaista lisäarvoa kaksoistutkinto-ohjelma tuottaa. Opinnäytetyön tuloksia hyödynnetään toimintaterapian kaksoistutkinnon suunnittelussa, kehittämisessä ja hallinnoimisessa.</p> <p>Aineisto kerättiin haastattelemalla kolmea asiantuntijaa, joilla on pitkä kokemus liitetoiminnan kaksoistutkinnosta Metropolia Ammattikorkeakoulussa. Haastattelun taustalla käytettiin Suomen Opetusministeriön vuonna 2014 julkaisemaa ohjeistusta yhteis- ja kaksoistutkinto-ohjelmien suunnittelemisesta ja toteuttamisesta. Haastateltavat toivat esille hyviä ja haasteellisia näkökulmia kaksoistutkinnoista ja kertoivat, millaisia asioista kannattaa ottaa huomioon. Haastattelut nauhoitettiin, litteroitiin ja analysoitiin hyvää tutkimuskäytäntöä noudattaen.</p> <p>Yhteis-/kaksoistutkinto-ohjelmat ovat haastavia ja vaativa, mutta toiminta on myös kannattavaa ja palkitsevaa ohjelmassa osallistuvilla opiskelijoilla ja oppilaitoksilla. Opinnäytetyössä listataan asiat, jotka tulisi huomioida jokaisessa kaksoistutkinto-ohjelmaan kuuluvissa oppilaitoksissa ja asiat, jotka tulisi huomioida oppilaitosten yhteistyössä. Yhteistyön laatuun kannattaa panostaa, koska se vaikuttaa kaikkiin vaiheisiin ja jokaiselle tasolle.</p>	
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<p>The development of joint and double degree programs can be a challenge. Nevertheless, it is an important part of internationalization. A joint program is considered to be a program offered jointly by several higher education institutions which can be located in either the same country or in different countries. This bachelor thesis aimed to gather real-time information on experiences with double degree programs at the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. The objectives included investigating what the added value of joint/double degree programs was perceived to be and what experts in such degree programs recommended to consider when designing, implementing and managing a joint/double degree program. The underlying literature reviews on the topic were carried out with due consideration of legal and official guidelines documented in various publications as well as international reports and recommendations. The information collected can be valuable when implementing, developing and managing a joint/double degree program in Occupational Therapy at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, which commissioned this research project.</p> <p>In order to satisfy the key objectives, three interviews were conducted with the Dean of the Unit of International Degree Programs, the Head and the Coordinator of the International Programs. Thus, all interviewees were involved in double degree programs at Metropolia at the time of the research. The questions that investigated the nature of this research correlated with a paper that the Finnish Ministry of Education published on the design and implementation of joint/double degree programs in 2014 (Opetushallitus. 2014) and corresponded to the main topics and aspects the paper provided.</p> <p>The answers to the interview questions were based on the interviewees' expertise and included their experiences on the topic. The approach used when analyzing the data collected was to treat the answers as if they were describing internal reality, such as meanings and feelings. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data was then developed with due theoretical sophistication and methodological rigor.</p> <p>Referring to the results of this thesis, it was concluded that designing, implementing and managing joint/double degree programs is challenging and demanding but also worthwhile and rewarding for both the institutions and the students involved in the program. Deriving from this research, the impact of the quality of cooperation within each individual institution and of all partner institutions unitedly, at all levels and at any stage of the processes of designing, implementation and management a joint/double degree is the basis for the success of the program and, more so, determines the intensity of its workload. Although conclusions drawn are useful, the information delivered cannot be seen as a final implementation plan.</p>	
Keywords	joint/double degree programs, experiences, added value, considerations, occupational therapy

## Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Joint/double degree programs	5
2.1	Joint versus double degree programs	5
2.1.1	The general background leading to the justification of joint/double degree programs	7
2.1.2	Joint/double degree program development	9
2.1.3	Joint/double degree program management	11
2.1.4	Quality assurance and recognition	13
3	Primary objective and research aim	15
3.1	Methodology	16
3.2	Study design	17
3.3	Data analysis	18
3.3.1	Data Collection	19
3.3.2	Developing and analyzing data	19
3.3.3	Quality in qualitative research/Reliability and validity	21
3.4	Ethical review on the research, its aims and objectives	22
4	Results	24
4.1	Why a double degree?	24
4.2	Co-operation within the consortium and an individual higher education institution	24
4.3	Program resources	27
4.4	Agreements	29
4.5	Student Admissions	30
4.6	Learning outcomes, content and structure of a degree program	34
4.7	Organizing the degree program	37
4.8	Degree and degree certificate	44
4.9	Information about the marketing of the degree program: prospectus, website	47
4.10	Quality assurance, program monitoring and evaluation	50
4.11	Added Value	51
4.12	Considerations	53
5	Conclusions	56

6	Discussion	65
6.1	Research limitations	66
6.2	Reliability and validity	67
6.3	Suggestions for further studies	68
	Literature	69

## 1 Introduction

The development of joint and double degree programs can be a challenge. Nevertheless, it is an important part of forming international cooperation and activities within higher educational institutions.

The Finnish Ministry of Education refers to a 'joint degree program' as a program, which is jointly developed and provided by more than one higher education institution. The Ministry also refers to it as a program, which confers one or more degree certificates (Opetushallitus. 2014).

The term 'Joint Degree' is also referred to as a program like a 'Double Degree', which confers two or more degree certificates, in recommendations by the Finnish Ministry of Education. (Opetushallitus. 2014).

According to the recommendations of the Finnish Ministry of Education, a 'Joint Degree' may also be seen in international contexts to refer to a program in either a joint degree or a double degree setup, conferring only one certificate. (Opetushallitus. 2014).

This bachelor thesis aimed to gather real-time information on experiences with double degree programs at the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. The information collected can be valuable to the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences when implementing, developing and managing a joint/double degree program in occupational therapy, which was desired by Metropolia at the time of this research project.

Interviews and literature on existing designs and implementations of joint/double degrees, as well as official and legal guidelines for the design and implementation of joint/double degrees constituted for the basis for this thesis.

The joint/double degree program in Occupational Therapy could provide students with a broad overview of the field of Social and Health Care on an international level. Emphasis would also be given to self-development, improving communication and language skills and performing effectively in today's multicultural world.

A joint/double degree refers to a program which is jointly developed and which would be provided by more than one Higher Education Institution (Opetushallitus. 2014). Therefore, one or more degree certificates are conferred to students graduating from such a program.

Students will gain practical skills and general knowledge in all fields implemented in the equivalent national degree program's curriculum, as well as the partner universities' curricula, because each partner institution may have different program setups.

The central objective of this thesis however, was to collect data and information on the experiences of those experts who are involved in the double degree programs installed at the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences at the time of the interviews. Faculty and department members of such programs were interviewed separately about their experiences, thoughts and opinions, as they have insight into the design, implementation and management of such programs.

## 2 Joint/double degree programs

Sources of information on the topic of this thesis can be found in a memo, which was prepared at the Finnish National Board of Education (NARIC/ENIC) in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish higher education institutions and CIMO. Precisely, the fifth revision of a checklist originally drawn up in 2005 provided the author with useful guidance in aspects that are of importance when investigating how to plan and design such a degree program.

The Finnish National Board of Education gives further information on the topic. There are reports and recommendations about the recognition of qualifications of joint/double degrees, which are published through various organizations, such as Unesco and the European Council, as well as universities offering such degree programs at the time of the research, including the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences itself.

While studying the literature for information on joint programs and reading up on interview based research methodology, special attention was given to information available in *Joint Programmes from A to Z*, a publication released by Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015), and when possible, additional sources were used, such as a report of the Finnish National Board of Education on the *Design and implementation of joint/double degrees* (2014).

### 2.1 Joint versus double degree programs

Only little literature could be found on the definition of a double degree and what such a degree program constitutes in comparison to a joint degree program.

'There is confusion around terminology, as several national and international bodies have developed their own, contradicting definitions, which might differ from general conceptions within a specific region or country'. (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015)

Thus, a possible interpretation of the literature reviewed is that the distinctive difference between a joint and a double degree may lay in the setup and arrangements regarding the curriculum of the program and the nature of the certificate(s) conferred.



A joint program is a program offered jointly by several higher education institutions. These institutions can be located in either the same country or in different countries. A joint program does not necessarily lead to a joint degree. It is only one of the possible awards. After completion of a joint program, a graduate may be awarded (1) a single national qualification; (2) a double (or other multiple) qualification; or (3) a joint qualification. (Bologna Process Implementation Plan. 2012).

A recommendation on the recognition of joint degrees and what defines such programs established at the Lisbon Recognition Convention (2012) states that a joint degree may be issued as, firstly, a joint diploma in addition to one or more national diplomas. Secondly, a joint diploma may be issued by the institutions offering the study program in question without being accompanied by any national diploma. Or, thirdly, one or more national diplomas may be officially issued as the only attestation of the joint qualification in question. (Lisbon Recognition Convention. 2012)

Furthermore, the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) explains that it is unlikely that both the joint and the national degree are acknowledged as the national higher education qualification. More so, the second part of the definition is now commonly understood as a joint degree and the third part of the definition describes the situation which is currently considered as a multiple degree. (Arden and Reczulska, 2010).

The Finnish Ministry of Education refers to a 'joint program' as a program, which confers one or more degree certificates. The term 'Joint Degree' is also referred to as a program like a 'double degree', which confers two or more degree certificates. A 'joint degree' may also be seen in international contexts to refer to a program in either a joint degree or a double degree setup, conferring only one certificate. (Opetushallitus. 2014).

The double degrees installed at Metropolia at the time of this research project were set up in a way that the first two years of the double degree program were organized and provided at each home institution. The exchange took place in the third year. Thus, the partner institutions agreed on the requirements of academic progress prior to the exchange, as well as the requirements of what studies and courses had to be completed during the exchange, in their agreements.

For Metropolia's double degrees, each student receives two certificates, based on having been registered at two universities and studying according to an agreed, shared curriculum.

A double degree might also be referred to as "joint degree" or "dual award", or some other expression. But based on Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015), there are various types of joint degrees, whereas double degrees are more strictly defined and administered, simply because of their superior rewards. The Bologna Process Implementation Plan quotation in fact makes this clear – there are various kinds of joint degrees, of which double degrees can be classified as one, but double degrees are more strictly defined. (Keaney, 2015).

The intergovernmental Bologna process released an implementation plan in 2012, which states that joint programs have to fulfill all or at least one of the following characteristics: the programs are jointly developed and/or approved by several institutions and students from each participating institution study parts of the program at other institutions. The students' stays at the participating institutions are of comparable lengths, thus, periods of study and exams passed at another institution(s) are fully and automatically recognized. Professors of each participating institution also teach at the other institutions, jointly work out the curriculum, and form joint admission and examination commissions. Furthermore, the student either obtains the national degrees of each participating institution or a degree jointly awarded by them after completion of the full program. (Bologna Implementation Report. 2012)

#### 2.1.1 The general background leading to the justification of joint/double degree programs

A key message from Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015) is that joint programs are increasingly important at an institutional level, national governmental level and in a global context.

According to Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015), in all 47 states that make up the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the intergovernmental Bologna process is implemented, which is one of the main voluntary processes that aims to ensure more comparable, compatible and coherent higher education systems in Europe. The term 'Bologna Process' however, has been replaced by referring to 'the implementation of the European Higher Education Area'.

Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015) states further that the Bologna activities have introduced transparency instruments to support student mobility, such as the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the Diploma Supplement (DS).

Joint programs have been encouraged by the Bologna Process and listed in the agenda of all the Bologna conferences since Prague 2001. During the Bologna conference in Berlin in 2003, ministers explicitly agreed on supporting the development and quality assurance of integrated curricula leading to joint degrees. References to recognition of joint degrees were included in 2005 and in 2007. Joint programs support various Bologna action lines, such as student mobility, joint curriculum development and joint quality assurance. In the Bucharest Communiqué, ministers committed to 'recognize quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programs'. (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015).

The number of joint programs is not accurately established, but the 2009 Bologna Stocktaking Working Group estimated the number to be around 2,500 within the European Higher Education Area. The Bologna Process Implementation Report (2012) gives an insight in estimated percentage of higher education institutions involved in joint programs and awarding joint degrees.

Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015) goes on to state that activities supported by several EU-funded programs have led to further development and global expansion of the Bologna Process. Initially, the Lifelong Learning Program and their joint curricula were supported through Erasmus Mundus. Later, financing for joint programs occurred through program initiatives such as Erasmus Mundus, EU-USA Atlantis, EU-Canada, the ICI-ECP program with industrialized countries, and Tempus.

According to Stichting EP-Nuffic's (2015) key messages for practitioners on the framework of joint and double degree programs, the legal power related to the implementation of international joint programs lies at the level of national or sub-national authorities, thus, the Ministries of Education. Furthermore, the key messages states that in addition to the national legislative framework, the institutional guidelines and regulations of the partner higher education institutions have to be taken into account when planning joint program cooperation.

According to Stichting EP-Nuffic's key messages (2015), there are several important transparency tools/projects/facilitating processes, which include the recognition of qualifications, such as the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) and The European Area of Recognition (EAR) manual, as well as, guidelines for Good Practice Awarding Joint

Degrees to higher education institutions and the recognition of accreditation decisions such as the Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes (MULTRA).

Sichting EP-Nuffic (2015) recognizes the ENIC-NARIC network as a channel to find relevant information related to joint programs such as information on the legal status of the partner institution, the degree-awarding rights of the partner institution, advice on the future recognition of the jointly awarded degree, as well as, advice on modalities of joint issuing of diplomas.

The main influence that the European Union has on higher educational policy is through political cooperation. Funding bodies of joint programs, such as the European Commission, which were formed over the years since the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, have no legislative power within the educational sector. Instead, funding scheme rules on e.g. admission, selection and tuition fees are subordinated to national legislation. (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015).

### 2.1.2 Joint/double degree program development

Reasons for higher education institutions to implement a joint/double degree program are numerous according to Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015). At an institutional level, for example, reasons are to raise the international visibility and reputation of the institution, to increase global student recruitment and the level of internationalization, to raise institutional revenue by increasing foreign student enrollments, to deepen and institutionalize cooperation with consortium partners and establish more sustainable strategic relationships and to build networks of excellence to strengthen (strategic) international research collaboration. (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015)

Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015) states further reasons for implementing a joint degree program at the program level itself and describes that joint degrees may be a way to broaden and deepen education offering and to develop a more internationalized curriculum, in the realization that a truly international/European course cannot be delivered by one institution or institutions from one country. Furthermore, joint degrees may strengthen strategic partnerships with other regions of the world, improve the quality of the curriculum (and of research elements in case of joint doctoral programs), offer specialist and innovative curriculum by combining the educational and the research

strengths of individual institutions (so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts), increase cross-cultural competencies of students and staff through mobility and by enhancing internationalization at home and improve graduate employability through curricula that respond to labor-market demand (preparation for an increasingly global labor market, e.g. through cross-cultural competencies). Additionally, joint degrees may raise the international visibility and prestige of the course program, provide an important label of quality that strengthens an interdisciplinary case for funding from other sources and attract new groups or nationalities of target students. More so, joint degrees are a way to gain access to the expertise of a partner institution and its research networks and thus providing critical mass and a basis for strengthening research collaboration. (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015)

Reasons for academic staff to become involved in joint programs are that these programs offer them, through staff mobility or incoming student mobility, opportunities to learn about other contexts and teaching and learning methods, student diversity in the classroom, networks for future teaching collaboration, research contacts, professional development opportunities and intercultural competences. (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015)

Lastly, Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015) believes that the main benefit for students is to take advantage of an international jointly developed curriculum, which combines academic expertise available in different countries through a study program guaranteeing automatic recognition of the period spent abroad. Given that the expertise of more than one institution shapes the academic program, it may be believed that a joint program is of higher quality than a common single degree. Other students might be encouraged to enroll into a joint program for the reason that they will be awarded more than one degree or certificate, and that studying abroad will not mean any time loss or risk for credits not being accepted. Having academic degrees from universities in different countries seems to be of elitist value to students. (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015)

Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015) states in their key messages for practitioners to take into account that institutions must clearly define their reasons for entering into joint program cooperation, the academic added value and wider relevance and the intended learning outcomes. To be successful, a joint program must be anchored in the institution's strategy and internationalization policy. More so, the key messages recommend institutions to be aware of the screening and authorization process of joint programs at the higher education institutions involved. Furthermore, institutional support (strategic and practi-

cal) and flexibility at all levels within the institution are crucial. This support must be secured at the start of the development phase. (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015)

According to the key messages, practitioners should know the national and institutional regulations of their own institution and their partner institutions, select partners based on their academic expertise, mutual trust (through open communication and a shared understanding), and institutional strategic commitment. Thus, practitioners are advised to know the partner institutions' academic and administrative strengths and weaknesses. (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015)

Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015) additionally advises practitioners to develop a full-cost budget plan from the beginning, including running costs and to jointly define the need for the program, the learning outcomes and length of the program. Institutions and practitioners are advised to jointly develop the joint curricula, consider recognition and access to further studies and define the level of integration and anticipate degree awarding. (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015)

Stichting EP-Nuffic also recommends institutions and practitioners to develop a robust, clear and flexible cooperation agreement that delineates responsibilities, expected outcomes and other relevant parameters. Furthermore, a clear definition of the target students will contribute to the overall quality of the program, not only academically but also with regard to visa, marketing and admission procedures. (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015)

Lastly, when developing new joint programs, early contact with non-academic partners is important firstly to formulate learning outcomes in relation to employability, secondly to include labor-market elements into the curricula, and thirdly to explore potential financial cooperation to ensure program sustainability. (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015)

### 2.1.3 Joint/double degree program management

Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015) determines how to manage the implementation of joint programs with guidelines and key messages which practitioners would do well taking into account. Stichting EP-Nuffic states that there are no pre-defined management models. All joint programs need to consider their specific context and develop their own suitable model. All the partners in the program and their role should be identified and accommodated in the management and governance structures of the program (partners can

include: degree or non-degree awarding higher education institutions, non-university partners, professional bodies, alumni, etc.). (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015)

Moreover, a joint program should preferably be seen as mainstream educational offer and the partner higher education institutions should avoid creating new bodies that are not necessarily needed. Practitioners are advised to establish the management structure based on the set of tasks for which joint arrangements are needed as compared to regular program administration. Those include joint cooperation and external representation of the consortium, joint development and monitoring of the academic content of the program, joint quality assurance (academic and administrative; internal and external), joint financial administration decisions, joint student administration (joint selection and complaints handling procedure), admission, registration assessment, grading and examinations, transfer of credits, archiving of student records for future enquiries, etc., and joint promotion of the program and joint student recruitment. (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015).

According to Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015), practitioners should take into account the structure of the higher education institution (decentralized versus centralized), and consider the pros and cons of different models in their cooperation. They should also draw up a cooperation agreement as early as possible and make it flexible as it will require frequent updating. A possible solution is a general and simple agreement with references to more detailed annexes regulating different issues in the cooperation. Joint programs impose extra costs and full-cost budgets must be calculated from the beginning. Arrangements for tuition fees, scholarships, cost-sharing and the financial sustainability of programs need to be negotiated. In the case of tuition fees, different national regulations must be taken into account. Practitioners are advised to be aware of distinctions between home countries or nationalities when setting a fee policy. (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015).

In addition, Stichting EP-Nuffic states that practitioners should develop a joint strategy on promotion and marketing, analyzing relevant target audiences based on market research, review of relevant related 'feeding' study programs (BA to MA), use alumni and partner networks and define their unique selling points. Furthermore, awarding the degree is regulated by national legislation. Consulting the national ENIC-NARIC office is recommended when drafting the joint diploma and Diploma Supplement, to support future recognition of the degree. Additionally, global networking activities are essential

to increase the awareness and visibility of the joint program among future employers and enhance employability. (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015)

Lastly, Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015) states that it is important to involve non-academic, labor market actors in the planning and monitoring of the joint program and, preferably, in internship provision.

#### 2.1.4 Quality assurance and recognition

There are several quality assurance issues that need to be taken into account when developing and managing joint programs, according to Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015). For example, practitioners would do well to start cooperation by discussing what they (and their universities and departments) mean by 'quality' and how it can be jointly defined and measured within their joint program. Practitioners should be fully aware of national accreditation legislation in all countries where parts of the joint program are offered and they should look for common reference points to monitor quality. One approach is to jointly discuss quality based on the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurances (ESG). (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015).

The use of alumni in monitoring the quality of joint programs is crucial, since they are the only ones who have followed the entire mobility path with diverse learning environments. Furthermore, if program-level accreditation is required in the partner countries, a single accreditation is recommended. Practitioners are advised to ask the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). Stichting EP-Nuffic recognizes ECA's *Joint Programme Checklist* as a tool to consult because it is inspired by quality assurance and based on good practice in joint programs. (Stichting EP-Nuffic. 2015).

It is important that degrees obtained by students of joint programs are recognized in the countries in which they want to find employment or pursue further studies. Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015) gives practitioners key messages and guidelines on the recognition of the joint program.

Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015) states that the challenges that multidisciplinary cooperation can cause for national recognition should be considered by practitioners. The National ENIC-NARIC office and the national education ministries can be consulted when a)



drafting the joint diploma and Diploma Supplement, and b) on rights to professions and access to further studies.

Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015) also advises HEIs to consult the Guidelines on Good Practice on awarding Joint Degrees by ECA.

### 3 Primary objective and research aim

The primary focus of this thesis was to document the experiences related to double degree programs that experts involved in such programs at Metropolia have made. Furthermore, this thesis aims to investigate what was believed and perceived to be the added value of such programs. Thirdly, the interviewees were asked what should be taken into careful consideration according to them when implementing and managing a joint/double degree in Occupational Therapy.

In order to satisfy the key objectives, the questions that investigated the nature of this research correlated with the paper that the Finnish Ministry of Education published on the Design and Implementation of joint and double degree programs in 2014 (Opetushallitus 2014) and corresponded to the main topics and aspects the paper provided. Therefore, the questions aimed to investigate the following aspects and each question was formed in a 'What are your experiences regarding...'-manner.

- Why a joint/double degree?
- Co-operation within the consortium and an individual higher education institution: a) Co-operation partners and co-operation within the consortium and b) Co-operation within a higher education institution
- Program resources □
- Agreements □
- Student admissions: a) Admission criteria, b) Admission procedures and c) □the student's status
- Content, structure and learning outcomes of a degree program
- Organizing the degree program □
- Questions relating to mobility
- Forms and methods of teaching, student assessment □
- Guidance counseling
- Degree and degree certificate: a) Degree certificate and b) Diploma Supplement (DS)
- Information about and marketing of the degree program such as prospectus, website, etc.
- Quality assurance, program monitoring and evaluation □
- Added value

- Considerations and recommendations

As the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences commissioned this research project, the research was conducted under the supervision of Ulla Vehkaperä, Head of Degree Program in Occupational Therapy at the time of this work.

Cooperation and interviews took place with the Dean of the Unit of International Degree Programs, the Head of the Degree Programs in International Business and the International Degree Coordinator of the double degree programs installed at Metropolia at the time of this research.

The interviews were started with an introduction of the interviewer and the research aim. Permission to record the interview was asked next and then the purpose of the study was explained. The Interviews were held at locations most convenient to the interviewees, although an effort was made to choose quiet venues that allowed concentration and offered little distraction. The equipment needed for the interviews were a voice recorder, a notepad, the list of questions and a pen.

### 3.1 Methodology

Because the focus of this thesis was to gather information on experiences on the double degree programs installed at Metropolia at the time of the interviews, in order to assist the design and implementation of a double degree program at Metropolia in Occupational Therapy, it was essential to pay special attention to the question why Metropolia was to develop such a program to begin with and thus, its added value.

Furthermore, attention was paid to aspects such as cooperation within the consortium and an individual higher education institution, the program resources, agreements, student admissions, the content, structure and learning outcomes of the degree program, the organization of the degree program, the degree certificate, information about and marketing of the degree program such as the prospectus and the website, and quality assurance, program monitoring and the evaluation, as well as what the interviewees perceived as important considerations for the design, implementation and management of joint/double degree programs.

These aspects are of great importance in the design and implementation of a joint/double degree program, as they determine its sustainability and compatibility.

The research conducted was subject to finding possible strengths and weaknesses in the design and implementation of the existent double degree programs at Metropolia in order to benefit the design and implementation of a joint/double degree program in Occupational Therapy.

With the information gathered, the goal of this thesis was to name such opportunities and threats, so that they could be foreseen and overcome during the process of designing and implementing a European Bachelor program in Occupational Therapy at the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. Thus, the outcome of this thesis and the information delivered may be valuable to the Faculty of Culture and Welfare.

The information gathered originated from sources such as interviews and literature on existing design and implementation of joint/double degrees, as well as official and legal guidelines regarding them. The use of these resources benefitted the reliability of the outcome of this thesis.

As the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences requested the outcome of this thesis, the benefiting parties of this thesis are the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences as well as Metropolia's partner institutions, which will gain information that can be taken into consideration when designing and implementing such a degree program as a European Bachelor in Occupational Therapy, and future students.

### 3.2 Study design

The chosen method in gathering the information was qualitative interviews, requested by the primary investigator. According to King (1994), circumstances in which a quantitative research interview is most appropriate are as follows:

- Where a study focuses on the meaning of particular phenomena to the participants
- Where individual perceptions of processes within a social unit - such as a work group, department, or whole organization – are to be studied prospectively, using a series of interviews

- Where individual historical accounts are required of how a particular phenomenon developed – for instance, a new shift system
- Where exploratory work is required before a quantitative study can be carried out. For example, researchers examining the impact of new technology on social relationships in a workplace might use qualitative interviews to identify the range of different types of experience which a subsequent quantitative study should address
- Where a quantitative study has been carried out, and qualitative data are required to validate particular measures or to clarify and illustrate the meaning of the findings

The author of this thesis chose to conduct semi structured interviews, as questions were predetermined with fixed wording and in a pre-set order, but could still be reworded and explanations could be given where appropriate; particular questions could be omitted or additional ones included. The precise interviewing strategy used was interactionism, as the nature of the data was authentic experiences.

The advantages with face-to-face interviews is that they allow the interviewer to modify the line of enquiry, follow up on interesting responses and investigate motives in a way that postal and other self-administered questionnaires cannot. The lack of standardization that it implies raises concerns about reliability. Biases are difficult to rule out. Nevertheless, interview based research has the potential of providing rich and highly informative material. (Robson 2002).

Interviewees were selected purposefully based on the purpose of this research. The first interview was conducted with the Dean/Head of the International Degree Programs. In a 'snowball sample', the networks of the first sample were used to find more sources of information, which were the Director of the international Degree Programs and the International Degree Coordinator at Metropolia.

### 3.3 Data analysis

The underlying research needed in gathering information on practical experiences for such a degree program was conducted through literature reviews on the topic. Keywords that served well in order to provide information were words and phrases such as e.g. joint/double degree program, design, implementation, guidelines, experiences and challenges, in-depth interview and data analysis.

The preparatory work was carried out with due consideration of international reports and recommendations.

Information was also gathered through in-depth interviews with experts working inside Metropolia's unit of international degree programs, which offered double degree programs at the time. The interviews aimed to collect information on what was perceived to be advantages of joint/double degree programs. More so, the aim was to investigate their design and implementation and additionally, experiences of such degree programs.

### 3.3.1 Data Collection

This qualitative study was based on asking the interviewees questions and recording their answers. In order to collect data, the interviews had a predetermined pattern but were fairly free flowing and open-ended.

As the research aim and objective were well defined, collecting data from the above mentioned group of experts, the three interviewees, was straightforward. The aim was to get them to share their perspective on information on the utility, advantages, implementation, challenges and experiences of the double degree that they were involved in at the time of the interviews.

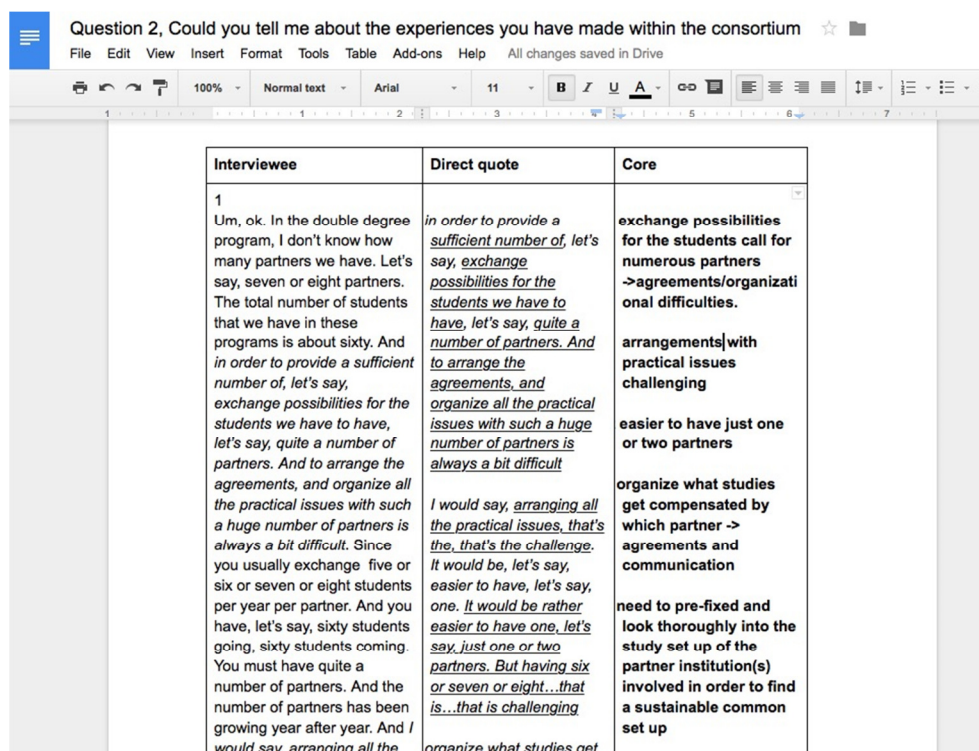
The quality of the transcriptions was very important to the outcome of this thesis and, thus, every interview was recorded for its full duration and initial transcripts were made of all the interviews conducted. At first only the words spoken by the interviewer and interviewees were recorded, after which these early transcripts were organized around the key objective and its sub-categories, using a standard set of transcription symbols like one adapted by A. Peräkylä from Atkinson and Heritage (1984).

### 3.3.2 Developing and analyzing data

In order to process the data collected through answers given by the interviewees, the approach used was to treat the answers as if they were describing internal reality, such as meanings and feelings. (Silverman 2015).

In order to ensure the accuracy of the interpretation, it was inevitable for the author to verify the accuracy of facts told by the interviewees. Computer-assisted qualitative data programs could have been used as a mean to a fit between interpretation and external reality when needed. This approach to interview data can be seen as a naturalist approach because it contains elements of both positivism (facts) and romanticism (experiences). (Silverman 2015).

The author developed and analyzed the data collected by first transcribing the interviews after which the transcribed material was added to a chart, which consisted of three columns. The first column stated the initial interview answers given by the interviewees. The second column highlighted quotes, which corresponded to the initial interview questions. Lastly, the third column stated the core aspects of the interviewees' answers.



Interviewee	Direct quote	Core
<p>1</p> <p>Um, ok. In the double degree program, I don't know how many partners we have. Let's say, seven or eight partners. The total number of students that we have in these programs is about sixty. And in order to provide a sufficient number of, let's say, exchange possibilities for the students we have to have, let's say, quite a number of partners. And to arrange the agreements, and organize all the practical issues with such a huge number of partners is always a bit difficult. Since you usually exchange five or six or seven or eight students per year per partner. And you have, let's say, sixty students going, sixty students coming. You must have quite a number of partners. And the number of partners has been growing year after year. And I would say, arranging all the</p>	<p><i>in order to provide a sufficient number of, let's say, exchange possibilities for the students we have to have, let's say, quite a number of partners. And to arrange the agreements, and organize all the practical issues with such a huge number of partners is always a bit difficult</i></p> <p><i>I would say, arranging all the practical issues, that's the, that's the challenge. It would be, let's say, easier to have, let's say, one. It would be rather easier to have one, let's say, just one or two partners. But having six or seven or eight...that is...that is challenging</i></p> <p><i>organize what studies get</i></p>	<p><b>exchange possibilities for the students call for numerous partners -&gt;agreements/organizational difficulties.</b></p> <p><b>arrangements with practical issues challenging</b></p> <p><b>easier to have just one or two partners</b></p> <p><b>organize what studies get compensated by which partner -&gt; agreements and communication</b></p> <p><b>need to pre-fixed and look thoroughly into the study set up of the partner institution(s) involved in order to find a sustainable common set up</b></p>

Figure 1 Developing and analyzing the transcribed interviews

The author chose to work with Google Docs throughout all phases of the making of this thesis because the internet based tool allows to create and edit documents at any given location and enable easy access to the files on any computer or device. Google Docs furthermore allows sharing files with, in this case the supervisor and opponents, and thus allowed simultaneous collaboration.

### 3.3.3 Quality in qualitative research/Reliability and validity

The main quality consideration that this type of research demanded was theoretical sophistication and methodological rigor. The amount of data collected was enough to draw qualitative conclusions. It was important to use the informants' networks in order to gain enough interviewees and, thus, data towards the outcome of this thesis.

The extent to which the interviewees' answers really related to the aim of this research (representativeness) was considered carefully during the analysis of the data collected through the interviews. Sorting facts from fiction was inevitable while analyzing the data. The logic of purposive sampling was well considered in the research strategy of this project. Every interview was recorded with user friendly and functional equipment that guaranteed good recording quality and audible sound quality.

Truth or rhetoric aspects were taken into consideration during the analysis of the data collected, because the interviewees were involved in double degree programs at Metropolia at the time of the interviews. This relationship to the programs could have affected their identification and attitude and, thus, the unadulterated status of their responses to the interview questions.

The reliability of open-ended questions was considered in the research strategy of this thesis. By design the questions were not too open-ended, so that the interviewees would not be unsure how to answer and therefore left with little time to respond. The questions indicated the concept of the research project's nature clearly and indicated where to start the response. The questions were not phrased in long sentences and investigated one objective at a time.

Validity refers to the credibility of the conclusions drawn from the data collected. The interpretation is plausible and reasonable, thus, guarantees validity. Claims were supported by evidence, negative causes included and alternative interpretations considered. To assure validity, the interview questions and the strategy plan were theorized thoroughly in an attempt to foresee issues and negative instances. Interviewee validation techniques were used.



The criteria for evaluating qualitative research incorporate methodological, theoretical and practical aspects. (Silverman 2015). The questions that need to be considered when evaluating this research, are as follows:

- How can it be demonstrated that the research has mobilized the conceptual apparatus in practical experience gathering and, thereby, helped implementing a joint/double program
- How can the data, methods and findings satisfy the criteria of reliability and validity
- The extent to which the preferred research method reflects careful consideration of alternative methods
- How does this study contribute to practice in revealing practical experiences to practitioners (Metropolia)

When evaluating this research the author developed unique theories. An example of this was that while evaluating the results of this research, a theory occurred that perception and associations might have impacted the responses. The aim in developing these theories was to give a theoretical contribution to the reliability of this thesis.

Appropriate research criteria were applied by the author through critical thinking about the status of this data. The questions asked in the interviews might have been at an unusual level of self-reflection to the interviewee. Therefore, it was considered that reasoning the answers should be part of the method used to evaluate the data.

There are numerous threats to qualitative research. In order to deal with them as they arise and keep the research effective, it was essential for the author to bear in mind to keep it simple, to not assume that the only thing concerned is subjective experience, to take advantage of using qualitative data and avoid drowning in data, as well as, to avoid journalistic approaches.

#### 3.4 Ethical review on the research, its aims and objectives

There was a possibility that the practical information delivered through this thesis would not be detailed and in-depth enough for a potential future implementation. The focus of this project was to give a broad range of information, which can be considered when

designing, implementing and managing a joint/double degree program. Although conclusions drawn are useful for the principal investigator, the information delivered, however, cannot be seen as a final implementation plan. Thus, there is possibly a need for further development/refinement.

The information collected through the interviews is reliable due to the carefully chosen methodology of the study design, interview planning, the interviewing process and data analysis. Furthermore, the author was also aware that sudden unexpected changes, e.g. health or other aspects of life, could have affected the schedule of this thesis. The author was abroad due to an internship during the planning and designing stage of this thesis. This could have possibly created issues with supervision and interview scheduling. However, solutions to this were found through online services such as Email, Google Drive and Skype, etc.

As the interviews were a major aspect of this thesis, communication was indispensable. Working inter-disciplinarily in cooperation with members of various departments and faculties required organizational and scheduling skills.

Because the topic of this thesis was well focused, the author was positive about being able to deliver the requested reliable information on practical experiences towards the design and implementation of a double degree in Occupational Therapy by November 2015.

Anonymity of the interviewees could have been a possible issue when publishing this thesis. However, anonymity was granted. Only information strictly related to the topic of this thesis was used as material throughout all phases of the making of this thesis. Professional secrecy and confidentiality applied for all information not strictly subject to the research conducted. All interviewees were aware of the purpose of the research conducted and consented to participation prior to the interviews.

Being an international student herself, the author's interest in the matter of this thesis was enhanced.

## 4 Results

Based on the interview structure, interviewees answered questions on numerous aspects which Finnish higher education institutions are advised to take into account by the Finnish Ministry of Education when designing joint and double degrees in international cooperation (Opetushallitus. 2014). Furthermore, the answers were based on the interviewees' expertise and included their experiences on the topic, such as what they believe are the pros and cons and what they believe should be taken into consideration when implementing a double degree.

### 4.1 Why a double degree?

Interviewees' responses to the question "why to implement double degrees" often contained feelings that there is an added value for the students because they are conferred two degrees and that the implementation of double degree would lead to an increase in applicants, resulting in the ability to select more ambitious and qualified students. Historically, one interviewee responded that when the first double degrees were implemented in Finland in the 1990s, Finland was looking forward to becoming more integrated with non-communist Europe and to eventually gaining EU membership. The Finnish education sector could see that double degrees could lead to the possibility for greater co-operation, including the possibility of double degree arrangements within the Erasmus framework.

Another response stated how double degrees may be regarded as a minority or sometimes even a peripheral interest of any higher education institution but stated further that double degrees in fact, are something, which can be and perhaps should be used as a key marketing aspect as a quality indicator of the department's teaching, student selection process and overseas partners.

### 4.2 Co-operation within the consortium and an individual higher education institution

When interviewees were asked about their experiences with the cooperation within the consortium and the individual higher education institution, it was mentioned that the co-operation with partners and the cooperation within the consortium generally works well

within the double degree programs installed at Metropolia at the time of the interviews.

Nevertheless, interviewees stated that there are limitations to the cooperation and that the level of cooperation varies with different partners. Generally however, it was noted that there is good will among the people that are directly dealing with one another. From a quality point of view, one interviewee stated that nothing can be guaranteed and that partnership is a question of trust. Thus, if there is no trust, there is no point in being partners.

Comments on the number of partners stated that it is the most valuable for students when partners are numerous because the students have more exchange options. On the other hand however, interviewees also mentioned that greater numbers of partner institutions cause challenges in practical issues such as agreements and organizational aspects. For logistical reasons, one response stated, it may be easier to have just one or two partner institutions.

Remarking on the quality, strengths, expertise and specialization of partners, one interviewee noted that there is a need to look thoroughly into the study set up of the partner institutions involved in order to find a sustainable common set up. Another aspect that was concluded as important was to organize which studies get compensated by which partner, which is a matter of communication and the agreements.

Prior experiences with the double degree programs installed at Metropolia at the time of the interviews are that differences in working cultures, such as holidays and schedules, may cause issues with the cooperation.

On the topic of written agreements and the organization of the cooperation, the responsibilities and communications between partner institutions, the interviewees responded that in order to avoid issues, agreements should be the same or follow a specific logic within each partner institution. It was acknowledged that following or setting the rules and regulations for different partners the same way is definitely challenging. However, it was perceived as important that cooperation on agreements should include multiple questions such as the number of semesters, specifically an eighth semester, and what the requirements of each partner institution are.

Moreover, a recommendation mentioned on the language of the program and the administrative language of cooperation is to look carefully at the working culture of both the partner universities and the countries in which the universities are based when making decisions about where to locate potential partners.

In the double degree programs installed at Metropolia at the time of the interviews, it was stated that there is a contact person for each partner, whose work includes regular correspondence with the allocated partner. Partners may appoint a joint manager, a steering group, or an equivalent for the program to represent both teaching and administrative staff, and agree on its status, roles, remit and composition, an interviewee remarked. Thus, it needs to be considered that changes within the organization, the assignees and the functionaries, as well as the institutions, cause distractions with the cooperation.

On the cooperation within the higher education institution, it was stated that the cooperation at that level is one of the biggest difficulties and that it would only become easier when more double degree programs exist throughout the institution. According to what interviewees noted regarding problems with the flow of information within the unit, the faculty, the study administration and the international affairs, there had been issues with decisions being made inside Metropolia, on e.g. strategic partners, without enough consultation nor cooperation with the degree programs. According to one of the interviewees, one solution to this problem would be to consult on opportunities that there could be in strategic partnership negotiations, and, to look at the number of different sub-criteria and degree programs which would share potentially the same institutional partner. But that is not happening at Metropolia and, thus, causes problems within the institution.

The institution's own rules and regulations governing the curriculum, student admissions and other matters relating to completion and administration of degrees were mentioned as one interviewee addressed administrative issues that arise due to the fact that in a large organization it is too easy to ignore or forget about small areas inside the organization, where things are done differently, and for double degrees they must be done differently. But too often at Metropolia the central administration is making decisions about the way things are done without acknowledging what this means for double degree cooperation. Thus, it is a struggle to regularly have to explain to the administration why things are done in a specific and different way, and that they need

to be done in a particular way because it is a partnership in question. According to the interviewee, the administration does not always understand this.

#### 4.3 Program resources

When asked about experiences with program resources and the aspects that would be good to consider when installing a double degree, one interviewee described that looking at the world through spreadsheets encourages people to assume that cutting certain costs, everything else will stay the same and the financial results will be better. However, it was concluded that projecting and planning the resources for double degrees at Metropolia present a challenge, not only inside the degree program but also for Metropolia's international department.

On funding and continuity of funding it was said that the initial investment pays off when the ability and willingness to fund the investment are given, but that this is often difficult to explain to people. Thus, it is perceived by many that one must first invest, in order to accumulate financially. Interviewees identified the value of the investment as potentially double the number of graduates and consequently, double the financial income from the Ministry of Education.

In conclusion, one interviewee stated, that double degrees are an excellent investment, guaranteeing Metropolia's financial position under the current funding model. Once people understand the difference all the extra graduations have on Metropolia, it should become easier for Metropolia's decision makers to understand exactly what benefits double degrees can bring to the whole organization.

Budgeting was considered in statements given by the interviewees and the demand of resources for travels in double degrees was highlighted. But at the same time, the interviewees noted that those resources are not as distinct compared to resources needed for the actual teaching cost. Another aspect arose from one of the interviewee's consideration that the organizational work is intensive with double degrees. Accordingly it is demanding on resources and the workload may be too intensive if only few students participate in the double degree program as that may cause an imbalance of work versus gain and benefit.

Human resources for the preparation and monitoring of individual study plans and for adequate tutoring were commented on by the interviewees when they mentioned that the student counselors' and coordinators' tasks are much more demanding in comparison to the ones working with the traditional Finnish degree programs. Thus, according to their statements, more resources will be needed in order to arrange the actual teaching. One interviewee stated that a lot more resources will be needed for the program coordination and estimated that all those resources may be multiplied by one and a half.

On the support services for learning and teaching and human resources for administration and guidance, the interviewees stated, that double degrees are very structured and that because there are not many choices or alternative paths for students, it consequently results in security and less intensive workloads in terms of scheduling, administrative work and guidance.

According to an interviewee on (human) resources for student admissions and recruitment, previous cuts in the number of administrators had caused momentary challenges because admissions are labor intensive as instead of one degree program and one curriculum, in double degrees there is one program but numerous curricula to be handled. This results in a lot of extra time spent contacting the partners and dealing with problems that emerge frequently with students and administration, states a reply. Furthermore, it was said that each partner of Metropolia's has a dedicated person from the international department dealing with a lot of the administration but these people are described as very busy to the extent that there are not enough of them. Consequently, it was remarked, that administrative tasks must not be generalized because the tasks are different for each degree program depending on the subject, the number of international partners, the type of cooperation with the partners and the number of semesters.

Responses on (human) resources for program development and evaluation stated furthermore that the tasks of the heads of the degree programs are more challenging as organizing the learning agreements and all the arrangements within the partner institutions are highly demanding.

#### 4.4 Agreements

Agreements should preferably follow a fixed logic as having many partners easily results in different types of agreements, according to responses. Although it was stated that Metropolia's program coordinators are well aware of what is required and what is not, the program coordinators of the particular higher education institution and the partner institutions may change and unawareness may lead to violation of agreements. Thus, the interviewee continued, in order to guarantee graduations, communication between Metropolia and the partner institutions is required but has proved difficult in the past.

Another consideration that was voiced was that it would be of value if there was understanding that it is most unlikely that students understand the national language of the country in which they spend their year abroad, unless it is English. Therefore, it is very important that the tuition at partner institution is conducted in the language that the agreements name as the teaching language. The interviewee mentioned, that there had been instances in the past where students found themselves in a situation where, regardless of the agreements and regardless of the information that had been given, classes were only provided in the national language. In conclusion, the interviewee said that this is something that should be considered very carefully.

About the extent of the degree program, the interviewees mentioned several aspects. One of those aspects is the number of students and, further, the amount of credits required from their own higher education institution versus the amount required by the partner institutions. Replies on the topic also noted that the contents of the exchange year abroad, potential internships and the number of semesters leading to a double degree are to be decided early on and stated in the agreements. According to the expertise of the interviewees, it needs to be considered how these aspects meet the requirements of the partner institutions.

One interviewee pointed out that the rules and regulations with partner universities may vary and gave as an example the fact that some partner institutions may expect 210 ECTS while others expect 240 ECTS leading to a jointly awarded degree. Additionally, another consideration that was explained during the interview is that any changes in the curriculum/curricula need to be accepted by all partner institutions prior to their installation.



Another responsibility highlighted was the differences in agreements that demand careful supervision of which partner institution a particular student had attended and how many of the required credits were gained.

There were also several agreements for different purposes that were mentioned in the course of the interviews. Interviewees advised to set certain criteria and to consider carefully the aspects regarding the number of credits that are required by each partner institution, course compensation when necessary, courses to be arranged during the exchange year, internship requirements and the Bachelor's Thesis.

In the double degrees installed at Metropolia at the time of the interviews, according to one interviewee, the minimum requirements of credits to be completed abroad is 60 ECTS and a thesis that is assessed by both partner institutions that the student is enrolled in. How exactly that is done, the interviewee continued, should be clearly stated in the agreements.

Correspondingly, it was said that the final year thesis and the maturity test had caused issues in the double degrees in the past at Metropolia because students from partner institutions are required to write a maturity test according to Metropolia's regulations and rules. However, the interviewee continued, this may be changed in the future and Metropolia may be able to quit or skip that requirement but it was advised that this must be clearly stated in the agreements.

It was mentioned as well that the responsibilities of each institution and the shared responsibilities must be clearly written in the agreements. An example of such a responsibility was given when the final year thesis was mentioned by one of the interviewees explaining how Metropolia expects the final year thesis to be published in Finland by both their own students and students from partner institutions.

#### 4.5 Student Admissions

An administrative issue that was mentioned during the interviews was that the challenge in a large organization is that it is too easy to ignore or forget about small areas inside the organization, where things are done differently, even though they must be done differently. According to what an interviewee explained, in double degrees certain

procedures must be done differently and too often the central administration at Metropolia is making decisions about the way things are done without understanding what this means for double degree cooperation. Accordingly, it was described as a struggle having to regularly explain to the administration why that is not how things can be done in a double degree and that they have to be done in a certain way because of the partnership. In the past, it was experienced that the administration did not understand this and that this had sometimes caused disagreements.

The interviewees also pointed out that the rules and regulations with partner institutions vary regarding, for example, the transcripts of students graduating. Currently, according to an interviewee, the different agreements they have with each partner institution result in extensive extra work because it means that they are required to investigate each student's exchange period separately. They need to check which partner institution a particular student attended, which courses were completed there, how many of the required credits were achieved and whether all of that meets the conditions of that particular agreement between Metropolia and the partner institution that the student attended.

On the topic of student admission, one interviewee mentioned that the double degree should be something that means more than the single degree and that therefore, one extra semester and one full year of study abroad at an approved partner should motivate students.

Furthermore, it was stated that it is a big responsibility to the Finnish tax payers that there is a value delivered for the tax payers' money, to the Finnish economy as resources must be used appropriately, to the partner institution that promises are kept, and, to the institution that the profile and brand are enhanced in such a way that inside Metropolia students are proud to study there because they know that the degree means something very important to them. Correspondingly, people would be proud to work with the program and students would be very eager to get into the program. Thus, ideally, student admission supports itself if it works properly.

Admission criteria were identified as important by the interviewees. It was stated that the way that a degree program is marketed to applicants is extremely important because every student that gets recruited is expected to complete their degree. It was pointed out, that Metropolia gets paid according to the number of students who com-

plete the degree and how quickly they complete it. Acknowledging that it is maybe not the best way to organize education but it is the system Metropolia has to work with, the interviewee continued, that for that reason it's even more important than ever before that the recruitment and selection process is as thorough and comprehensive as it can be.

On the topic of general and specific criteria for eligibility and any other possible requirements for double degree program applicants, the interviewees mentioned that one needs to think very carefully about the kind of student who gets into the program and who is sent to a partner school. With the student there is also a message sent to the partner school that these people can be trusted, that they are good students and that they have completed the studies required, that they are motivated and fully ready to what the partner has got to give them. However, if these requirements are not met, the partnership is threatened and it may result in the loss of that partnership, according to the interviewee. In conclusion, it was remarked that there is a need to identify very clearly, as well as possible, that the institution has got the right students participating.

Remarking on admission procedures, it was said that the recruitment process is absolutely fundamental to the success and the motivation of the students and that it does no harm in the recruitment process to emphasize these matters to the point where people are actually encouraged to leave. This is because if they do not succeed it is actually very expensive for the degree program. According to the statement, not only the graduation income will be lost but also the income that would otherwise be received for each student who completes 55 credits per academic year as that is how Metropolia is currently funded.

According to one interviewee there are experiences of applicants coming in on the selection day to the entrance exam just because they had been told to do so by their guardians which, it was concluded, resulted in them not really knowing or understanding what they were up for. That is why info sessions prior to the entrance exams were installed in order to give the students an exact run down on the program and what they sign up for and to let them know that they must complete all studies of the first two years in order to be allowed to go abroad.

It was pointed out that the selection methods and recruitment is one of the biggest and most important issues. And therefore, according to the interviewee, the double degree

programs at Metropolia do not participate in the common entrance exam. They have their own entrance exams, which they insist students have to attend if they want their application to be considered. Therefore, the interviewee continued, if students do not attend, their application is automatically rejected. Furthermore, the interviewee added that it takes them a full day to test each applicant on a number of issues including written skills, linguistic skills, speech, comprehension, team building, team working skills and their ability to cooperate with other people they have never met.

Giving further information on the exam day, another interviewee stated that in the double degree programs installed at Metropolia interviews are conducted and in addition students are tested on their ability to follow a lecture. According to the interviews, despite the eligibility to apply through certain criteria, the recruitment process starts off with equality. It was mentioned that there are mathematical-logical thinking, writing, interviews and team task elements in the entrance exams. However, one interviewee points out that because the entrance exam does not test the ability to remember study material, but rather determines the drive and motivation to participate in the program, no study material to prepare for the exams with is given to applicants. This, as the interviewee remarked, allows them to very quickly establish what sort of students are not suited for the program, and, that it allows them to identify the attitudes which are simply not going to work in Finland, not to mention another country. In conclusion the interviewee noted that those students can be separated from the people who really deserve to be in the degree program. However, it is a quite intensive process according to the interviewee.

One interviewee concluded that there are no guarantees but that without the investment, the only guarantee is that there would be many people who are unlikely to be the best applicants. That is why, as the statement was continued, one has to make the double degree something that ambitious students really want. Therefore, it was added by the interviewee, one has to try to scare off any students who are wasting time and who do not really understand what is expected of them.

On a positive note, one interviewee reported that the double degrees at Metropolia have had students who were rejected in the application process before but who then came back one year later because they were determined that the double degree program was exactly what they wanted. These students, the interviewee continued, are precious because they are so focused and dedicated. They have made their decision

and that is, the interviewee said, the reason why these students are reliable and can be trusted to keep their promise throughout the course of their studies.

On the topic of the student's status, an interviewee mentioned that despite the fact that the basic idea of a double degree is that students have to do a period of time abroad, occasional status changes of students, such as for example marriage or changes in the health status, must be considered. Additionally, despite the expectancy and briefing, there may be students changing their minds. Therefore, it is very important that there is an alternative study route for these students in order to guarantee their graduation.

About the student's right to study, one interviewee stated that, unfortunately, one of the side effects of the free education in Finland has been to create an atmosphere among a lot of people that they can take it for granted. This creates a problem where students are not graduating for years, sometimes even decades. In the interviews it was moreover reported that there is also a sense of entitlement that students seem to perceive it as their right to receive education when they want it and how they want it. The interviewee pointed out that there may be problems for the students, for the partner and for the degree if students with this type of attitudes are sent to foreign partners. Therefore, the interviewee summed up the statement, double degree programs have to be very clear in how they communicate their values and expectations to the students who are trying to get into the program.

#### 4.6 Learning outcomes, content and structure of a degree program

The starting point for program design is the definition of learning outcomes, reflected one interviewee by saying that they can be varied to a certain extent as some subjects can be emphasized more than others. The interviewee went on remarking that there is a basic portfolio of knowledge and of skills, which the vast majority of partner institutions expect, and correspondingly, the vast majority of employers would expect.

On the academic content and methodology, the interviewees responded that the contents or learning outcomes according to the degree curricula and Metropolia procedures in the double degree programs are installed at the time of the interviews. The interviewee explained, using the example of the installed double degree programs at Metropolia, that the actual learning outcomes of these programs are very different from the Finnish programs. They focus more on international business, international law and

internationality. The knowledge that is provided through these programs is at a broader European level, the interviewee pointed out.

Going into more detail, the interviewee explained that the actual learning outcomes are based on Metropolia guidelines and that there is a need to have learning outcomes to the whole degree program which are then categorized to fit the learning outcomes of different courses, blocks and modules and finally the degree.

The interviewee remarked that it should be taken into account that when the idea is to create a double degree option in a traditional program and not a restricted double degree program, it must be considered how the students participating in the double degree option are recruited and what would happen if there was not an adequate number of students willing to go. The interviewee recommended to consider how the situation, where there is strong competition because all the students want to go but only e.g. half of the students get to go, may affect the motivation of the students that are not eligible to go.

On the topic of accreditation, it was said that across Europe accreditation is becoming a very important aspect of cooperation and that this means that common quality assurance criteria must be satisfied across all the countries of the European Union and beyond. Therefore, it was stated, schools are forced to address issues, which are common to all schools in ways, which are similar, if not the same. The statement was continued by pointing out that these quality assurances deal with exactly the quality issues that double degree programs need to address, for example the learning outcomes or the pedagogical philosophy.

Going into more detail, an interviewee explained that the accreditors are not dictating that there is only one best way but that they recognize diversity, even encourage it. The interviewee went on stating that the one common theme is that every decision that is made on the double degree should be clearly explained. According to the interviewee, this means that every institution that seeks accreditation, must think very carefully and strategically, about basically everything that it does academically, pedagogically and administratively, which is very comprehensive.

One interviewee pointed out that if partners want to be kept and if new partners are desired to get attracted, there is no choice because double degrees are working in a transnational education market. The interviewee furthermore made a point asking that just because the state of Finland says accreditation is sufficient, a partner school outside Finland may not agree.

During the interviews, another aspect that was commented on was the content of the program, such as possible core courses compulsory for everyone and optional courses. One of the interviewees commented that, in the context of one of the installed double degrees at Metropolia, agreeing on learning outcomes and curriculum content with partners is not difficult when looking at the first two years of study. That, the interviewee remarked, is due to similar expectations of that type of degree program across countries. However, the interviewee continues that, it is after the first two years when more challenges arise e.g. what sort of specialization or options the students should be allowed. According to the interviewee, that depends on the strategy of each institution. What is more, the interviewee added, is that one partner may be more able to offer certain specializations and academic strengths than others.

One interviewee gave the advice to consider the extent to which the degree may or must include studies taken abroad as part of the program and the timing, and said, that if a double degree program in Occupational Therapy was to be created it should be very clearly stated what courses should be offered at the partner institutions.

Any possible professional qualifications or eligibility that may be provided by the program in each country were perceived as very important in negotiations by the interviewees. It was said that there must be trust between the partner institutions concerning the basic quality, the basic skills and learning outcomes. Furthermore, it was stated that the largest part of the negotiation was, in the double degrees at Metropolia, the advanced curriculum content. One interviewee pointed out that aspects such as what their institution and program can offer the partners' students and what partners can offer their students, in addition to what the resulting outcome is, must be investigated. In conclusion, the interviewee stated that the main focus of the discussions on content, structure and learning outcomes of a double degree program with the partner institutions lies in the specializations in different areas of expertise and how partnerships could meet the student's best interest.

On the compatibility or connection of learning outcomes with or to national qualifications frameworks in particular, as well as with the European Qualifications Framework, an interviewee noted that the rules to be followed are much stricter in double degrees. That is because gaining a degree in, for example, Occupational Therapy or Nursing means that there will be certain specifications, which are at least governed at a national level. The interviewee added, that in some cases they may be the same at a European level and that the Occupational Therapy study curriculum is strictly regulated which, consequently, means that certain learning outcomes and courses need to be fulfilled.

Referring to previous complications with the structure, content and learning outcomes in double degrees at Metropolia, an interviewee explained that this is an environment which a lot of people are not so prepared for because they are accustomed to following the instructions from the Ministry of Education. Especially so in University of Applied Sciences education, which derived, according to the interviewee, basically as a substitute for a more academic upper secondary education. The interviewee continued, that the referred schools became the University of Applied Sciences but that they also inherited the working culture, the working practices, and the practice of listening every year to what the Ministry of Education has to say about the curricula and then following the pattern. And, even today in 2015, the interviewee remarked, many people have not adjusted to the new international reality.

#### 4.7 Organizing the degree program

When asked about experiences organizing the degree program, an interviewee stated that it seems that everything goes relatively easily but that there are practical issues now and then which depend on the partner university and on their program coordination. According to the interviewee, some universities have a lot of manpower to organize the exchanges, the issues, the housing and so on but in some cases the degree programs have minor problems with certain partners.

Another interviewee remarked that in order to be effective it is important to have the support of the home organization. More so, it was said that if that support is not given, then it is even more work to organize the double degree program than it is at the outset.



Giving an example, an interviewee explained that 25 years ago, when double degrees were first installed at Metropolia, the top management of the school was supportive of the whole process. They were not just supporting it but actively steering it which is not the case at Metropolia right now, the interviewee remarked.

Interviewees also acknowledged that internationalization is a key strategic goal as dictated by the Ministry of Education, and that it is and has been part of Metropolia's funding model. Therefore it was concluded by an interviewee, that the resistance to internationalization, within the sector and from within the university, is unfortunate.

It was also noted during the interviews that institutionally, in order for Metropolia to become more effective at internationalization there needs to be greater cooperation and coordination between the different levels to the extent that the management and the degree programs are communicating with each other and share a common perspective. In conclusion, the interviewee said, that decisions should be discussed, negotiated and made jointly.

Another comment made on the organization of double degree programs was that the degree programs are financially beneficial for Metropolia. Therefore, as one interviewee concluded, that if the interest is purely commercial, if there is no attention given to education or higher humanitarian values, if the only aspect is money, then this is the income generator that pays off. According to what was said during the interviews, the double degree programs generate even more income than the traditional ones and, therefore, it is not advisable to inconvenience the cooperation within the institution regarding the organization of such programs.

One of the interviewees pointed out that the organization of double degrees have many different elements compared to traditional programs and stated as an example that there had been relevant issues due to different holiday schedules and timetables causing the administration to often wait for e.g. transcripts from partner institutions. This results in a delay with the updates of ECTS which may cause financial issues because Metropolia is financed greatly by the government which requires 50 credits per student in an academic year.

Explaining this organizational process further, the interviewee remarked that the grades should be updated in Metropolia's software system 'Winha' by mid-September every

year. Therefore, the interviewee continued, when partner institutions return from their holidays later than that it causes a lot of pressure to get the transcripts on time.

Delays in updating the transcripts and the number of credits achieved cause issues for students as well. It was said that most Metropolia students receive KELA (the *Social Insurance Institution* is a Finnish government agency which is in charge of settling benefits under the national social security programs) study grants. KELA also checks up yearly around September 16<sup>th</sup> on the student's performance and the number of credits achieved. It is common practice, the interviewee stated, that all the students whose credits were not updated on time, receive a request from KELA asking them to clarify why they have not proceeded in their studies even though they have received the monthly financial aid. In such cases, the interviewee continued, Metropolia has to provide the students with separate statements certifying that they have in fact proceeded in their studies but that the credits have not been updated at the time. The same work schedule issue applies also for the police as in some cases residence permits depend on the same type of credit requirements.

Moreover, interviewees commented on organizational aspects by stating that it should be well thought through how students are selected for each partner. Currently students enrolled in double degree programs at Metropolia can request their choices by priority but the decision which partner university the students will do their exchange year at is made based on the grade average. An interviewee pointed out that this procedure motivates students, but continued, that at the same time it creates competition among the students. The interviewee noted further that students may get excited about planning a shared experience with a fellow student and may be disappointed when they had gotten their hopes too high.

On the question relating to mobility one interviewee stated that in a double degree, the students are mobile by definition and there is no way that a lack of mobility could be accommodated because the exchange periods are the crucial element of such programs. The interviewee pointed out that in the case that the number of students exchanging is larger than the number of exchange positions, spaces would open up when negotiating with the partners. This, according to the interviewee, happens both ways around and Metropolia's double degree program units, too, are flexible and take on additional exchange students when necessary, despite the jointly agreed numbers in the agreements.

Telling about previous experiences in organizing the mobility, one interviewee stated that in current double degrees at Metropolia over 60 students are recruited every year. Which, the interviewee said, is challenging because finding partners who would accept a large number of students is not easy. Additionally, the interviewee mentioned the consideration that when a large number of students is sent over to a partner, how they would integrate, or if they integrate at all. According to the interviewee, from a mobility point of view having a lot of partners allows the program to send small groups of students, which in turn is very good for the students as they have more choice and better integration. In conclusion it was recommended to keep the numbers of students attending each partner institution small in order to encourage mingling.

More so, another interviewee pointed out that exchange places for all the students participating in the program could always be found through the sufficient number of partner institutions that are able to offer the exchange positions for students. The interviewee noted that based on the student's previous studies and credits the current program management is able to locate exchange positions quite easily.

Another interviewee made a point stating that in the current double degree programs at Metropolia students can apply to transfer to another program if they for some reason are unable to study abroad.

Regarding studies at a certain higher education institution, one interviewee replied that, in the current double degrees at Metropolia, issues relating e.g. to the learning agreements are well figured out. The interviewee continued that it requires manpower and the program coordinators handle these issues.

When asked about the organization of mobility, one interviewee pointed out that perhaps it reflects the success of the recruitment and selection because if the right applicants were picked to study in the degree program, finding accommodation in other countries is not that difficult for most students since young people are already quite experienced in finding a new place to live and organizing their lives independently. According to one interviewee, students not only organize their affairs independently but they utilize their fellow students' experience and knowledge for information and recommendations. As a conclusion, the interviewee noted that student mobility and the students' organizational skills have worked out in the past.

Relating to reception and orientation of students, the interviewees mentioned that with social media it is easy to stay in touch and that finding accommodation for existing students can be made even easier with the help of the graduates who have stayed in touch with the degree program. More so, another interviewee said that often accommodation is passed down to fellow incoming students.

Responding to questions on the forms and methods of teaching and the student assessment, interviewees said that in the double degree programs installed at Metropolia at the time of the interviews, the assessment methods are similar to the ones used in the traditional programs and the ones used by the partner institutions.

In reflection, one interviewee mentioned that there had been issues with assessment and teaching methods in the past within the different degree programs at Metropolia. The interviewee continued that the willingness to change and reform the assessment and teaching methods have proven successful and improved the overall results. However, according to the interviewees, the setup of teaching and assessment methods vary greatly within Metropolia.

In the interviews it was also said that in the double degree programs at Metropolia the teaching staff is multinational which consequently means various methods of teaching and assessment methods that are installed. One interviewee added to this saying that the multinational setup and the varying methods of teaching and assessing prepares students for their exchange and the differences they will face at the partner institutions.

The interviewee also pointed out that preparing the students for differences in teaching and assessment method has been a priority as students had been surprised at differences in style and quality of instruction and assessment methods in the past.

In the partnership negotiations, according to an interviewee, some of the bigger differences and some of the less desirable differences can be resolved. The interviewee made a point stating that despite all efforts, not everything can be controlled and that, therefore, the best thing that can be done is to prepare the students for potentially big differences between what they expect and what they get. The interviewee concluded that this could be seen as a kind of orientation process for the students.

The form of teaching was a topic that had caused terminology and philosophical issues in the past at Metropolia as some programs use a lecturing approach and others a teaching approach. According to one interviewee however, 'lecturing' is perceived as negative and outdated in the double degrees at Metropolia while it is stigmatized as prestigious and conservative and has a status ring to it.

One interviewee also stated that there is a lot of variation in the forms of teaching and the assessment methods that can be used, such as a course-lecturing-end exam approach or more alternative teaching measures such as group works, projects.

Despite the agreements and efforts to ascertain language proficiency, according to one interviewee, there have been issues in the past where students were not taught in the language agreed upon but found themselves in a situation where courses were taught in the national language of the partner university.

Guidance and counseling is considered a key organizational aspect in the double degree programs installed at Metropolia at the time of this research, according to the interviewees. This is because prior to the students' exchange, all learning agreement issues have to be figured out. Furthermore, the interviewees noted that the resulting amount of guidance and counseling is much more demanding and time consuming than in the corresponding Finnish degree programs. In conclusion an interviewee recommended to allocate enough resources for guidance and counseling.

Another statement made was that it helps greatly if there are people who can identify with and who understand the possibilities and the potential of the whole double degree process because it is different from traditional national programs. More so, it was pointed out by the interviewees that basic human understanding and empathy are needed in guidance and counseling which would apply to any kind of counseling. Furthermore, the interviewee stated that culturally aware people are needed in guidance and counseling who have some experience of travel and have lived abroad or worked abroad, or the very least, who have worked with people from abroad. According to the interviewee, if they have that sort of experience and empathy then it is possible for them to provide a good level of support for students who perhaps face difficulties.

The atmosphere of the school and the degree program can itself be a very big support or obstacle to students, according to one interviewee. Therefore, the double degrees at

Metropolia usually organize an event once a semester just to relax and have some down time with people that students otherwise spend most of their time working with. According to the interviewee, when students are able to see the same people in a different environment and different set up that is relaxed, supportive and fun, they get encouragement from that and thus gain a sense of belonging versus being just a student.

Referring to Individual study plans and learning agreements, an interviewee pointed out that one-on-one guidance counseling is very important and that the double degree programs at Metropolia are lucky to have sympathetic staff who do a good job dealing sometimes with very difficult cases, including students who claim to have suicidal feelings.

During the interviews it was also mentioned that at Metropolia level a bigger investment is required in guidance and counseling because the number of reports and cases of students experiencing problems with depression is growing. According to an interviewee, depression is becoming noticeably more common and it was concluded by the interviewee that because of Metropolia's financial situation, hiring another counselor or paying the same counselor more hours and making counseling more available to students, would be a worthwhile investment because it can make the difference between a student staying and completing the degree or a student dropping out, which is financially costly.

There are, according to one interviewee, issues with counseling when a double degree is optional within a degree program as different sets of rules apply for students participating in the double degree and those who are not. The interviewee recommended in conclusion that guidance counseling for double degree students may have to be separated from the counseling for traditional programs as students may get confused when listening to two sets of conflicting information regarding, for example, the rules.

Guidance counseling in the double degree programs is somewhat easy because of the setup of courses and the fixed nature of the curricula and schedules, said one interviewee.

On the recognition of prior studies and other learning, it was remarked that the current double degrees at Metropolia do not accept the recognition and accreditation of prior learning (neither experiential learning nor prior certificated learning) due to the agreements with partner institutions as part of guaranteeing quality assurance.

Guidance and counseling was also perceived as important by the interviewees regarding aspects relating to optional courses and study performance because incoming students from partner institutions in the past needed a lot of counseling during their stay at Metropolia. One interviewee remarked also that, in terms of monitoring and the control of students' progress, guidance counseling is much needed when the unexpected occurs, for example when courses are cancelled at the home or partner institution and issues regarding the fulfillment of requirement arise.

#### 4.8 Degree and degree certificate

When asked about the degree and degree certificate the Interviewees responded that double degrees are easier to install than joint degrees because instead of a full curriculum only the exchange period needs to be arranged. It was also noted that there had been issues with the communication and cooperation between the double degree programs and Metropolia's Admission Services, Admissions Office, Student Affairs Office and Degree Program Study Coordinator in the past regarding the certificates and the diploma supplement.

An interviewee remarked regarding the transcripts and the type(s) of degree certificate(s) to be awarded for the degree(s) completed through the joint/double degree program, that the details it should state and its signatories and layout, must be defined in the agreements with the partner institutions. In the double degrees that were installed at Metropolia at the time of the interviews certificates in English are conferred as well as in Finnish.

One interviewee pointed out that issues regarding the language statements need to be agreed on and settled because the mandatory Swedish language in Finland has caused trouble in the past. The interviewee pointed out that it demands careful consideration how the mandatory Swedish course for all students at Metropolia as well as partner institutions could be arranged. The interviewee said that it needs to be agreed on how situations are handled where students do not have to take Swedish classes

and remarked furthermore that there may have to be a substitute for the Swedish classes. The interviewee noted, that this would affect the language statement in the transcripts.

According to the interviewees, the diploma supplement of the double degrees installed at Metropolia at the time of the interviews are similar to the ones of traditional Finnish degree programs and that the student affairs office handles the diploma supplements.

Responding to aspects of program details on the certificates and the statements that explain which studies have been completed at each institution, the interviewees stated that partner institutions tend to list the courses completed at the home institution in detail on their certificates and mention that the rest of the studies were completed during the exchange year at the individual partner university.

It was noted that the double degrees at Metropolia used to list every single course completed at both the home institution and during the exchange at the partner institution, which was an enormous amount of intensive work not only because of the translations but also because it involved a lot of consulting and communication between the partner institutions. Due to the fact that the negotiations were difficult and work intensive, the decision was made to proceed exactly in the same way as the partner institutions do which is a list of the courses that were completed at Metropolia, the internships, the bachelor thesis and one row of text stating that the rest of the courses were completed at the partner institution. This decision, according to one interviewee, simplified the procedure.

Nevertheless the double degrees installed at Metropolia do wish that there was an option to a list all of the courses that have been completed by the student at both institutions in the same certificate. Especially because the graduates need to always have both certificates at hand to prove the curriculum undergone, explained the interviewee.

More so, on the topic of the certificate, the diploma supplement and the transcripts of the double degrees installed at Metropolia at the time of the interviews, one interviewee explained that there may be possible changes in Metropolia's main administrative software in the near future. The interviewee described that the change is thought of as potentially positive because according to the statement, the current software is neither efficient nor user-friendly. The interviewee pointed out as well that new software might



cause compatibility and formatting issues. One experience with the double degrees installed at Metropolia, which was emphasized during the interviews, is that despite all of the difficulties with the administration policy and bad software, the staff in the student office and central administration generally are very cooperative and willing to do the extra work if necessary. The interviewee noted that it is inconvenient for them, and to a certain extent, that there is probably a lot of unnecessary extra work due to software issues for the programs.

Another aspect that was remarked on is that in the double degree programs at Metropolia the AHOT software (*Aikaisemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnistaminen* is Finnish for the recognition and accreditation of prior learning, which responds in English to: APEL - accreditation of prior experiential learning and APCL - accreditation of prior certificated learning recognition and transcription of prior learning) causes difficulties regarding the certificates because the system makes it hard to transcribe credit transfers. Explaining this in more detail, one interviewee indicated that system causes extra work for students and study coordinators because information needs to be entered multiple times and the applications go back and forth between different employees involved in the application process.

The interviewee remarked that the double degree programs at Metropolia at the time of the interviews have stated the need for changes regarding the software because it is a lot of work for everyone involved.

According to the interviewee, APEL (accreditation of prior experiential learning) and APCL (accreditation of prior certificated learning) are not used in the double degree programs at Metropolia to recognize prior education, but the software is strictly used to transfer credits within the degree program. Therefore in a perfect scenario students from partner institutions do the software credit transfer for every course completed in the two years that they have already studied at their home institution. Then, according to the interviewee, the grades and credits achieved at Metropolia are directly updated but the students might still have some courses to complete when they get back to their home university after the exchange period. And again, Metropolia should update those credits, thus transcripts, within the software, the interviewee pointed out. Since the software program is not working well and it is confusing the students especially when they are abroad because hands on guidance on how to do credit transfers through AHOT is hard to provide.

#### 4.9 Information about the marketing of the degree program: prospectus, website

On transparency of information about double degrees, one interviewee mentioned that solving the unknown concept of double degree programs is an issue that involves marketing.

When asked about experiences with the marketing of the degree program such as the prospectus and the website, the interviewees responded that the double degree programs installed at Metropolia at the time of the interviews have done somewhat different marketing because the application deadlines are slightly different for the double degree programs versus the ones for the traditional programs at Metropolia. Otherwise, according to one interviewee, the double degree programs at Metropolia rely on Metropolia's marketing strategies for financial reasons.

One interviewee noted additionally that the number of applicants went down quite dramatically that year. However, as the interviewee stated, the programs do not face any problems and have enough applicants. But, the interviewee went on, the previous year and the year before, they had many more applicants. The interviewee said that one does not know if that is due to the marketing or not. But, the interviewee guessed that it might not be.

In addition, it was mentioned that the benefits of the exchange choices need to be marketed to students through the prospectus such as advantages regarding the CV, languages and teaching quality. More so, one interviewee said that the double degree programs at Metropolia would approach the students and explain to them that they can go to a nice, sunny country and enjoy themselves for a year. But how that looks on their CV should be pointed out because many students do this and it does not stand out on any CV. The fact that this may reflect the student's choice of a good time over acquiring academic strengths, is also understood by employers, said the interviewee. Therefore, the interviewee said that students should be made aware that if they go somewhere less mainstream for a year, it will immediately stand out on their resume. And the chances are that employers will want to talk to the student because the exchange at a less mainstream but academically strong institution is an interesting experience, the interviewee continued. With this students are already demonstrating in their CV that they are prepared to take chances and do something different. This, the inter-

viewee concluded, is how they market their link to foreign students who are considering whether to come to Finland or not. Explaining this, the interviewee stated that looking at somebody's CV and seeing Finland, is almost guaranteed to get them to the job interview because not many students go to Finland, which makes the student seem much more interesting. So, the interviewee makes a point, this is a very important marketing aspect from their own point of view.

Remarking on ascertaining the accuracy and clarity of the program information, consistent terminology and harmonized program descriptions at all partner institutions, one interviewee pointed out that in marketing it should be made very clear to applicants what the program is about and how it is set up because students do not have many elective choices in the course of their studies in a double degree program. The interviewee concluded that the applicants and future students need to know what exactly they are up for through the marketing of the program.

According to the interviewees, strategic planning and implementation of marketing efforts are very important. Commenting on this, one interviewee remarked that the units/departments that are considering whether to install a double degree program at Metropolia may learn that Metropolia's central marketing is inadequate. It was said during the interviews that there are people occupying positions who want to produce a common format, a common identity. This seems like they do not have a very good understanding of marketing and communication. Explaining this in detail, the interviewee pointed out that a big problem for Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland has been that the traditional University has been marketed as a very serious place where people read many books and study hard and think about the big questions whereas a University of Applied Sciences is a place where students go to have fun and party. And so, the interviewee continued, the way the programs at Metropolia are advertised communicates this entire stigma. These are exactly the wrong attitudes or values to promote. In conclusion, the interviewee stated that it is unfortunate that during their time at Metropolia, the central marketing department has either used the 'let's have lots of fun' type of marketing or very unappealing marketing. Therefore, it was pointed out that marketing strategies become outdated after a while and need regular renewing.

One interviewee made a point recommending to just be yourself and authentic when marketing and to try to communicate as effectively as possible to the people attempted to be reached. The interviewee furthermore remarked that if the marketing is not talking

to people who are representative of that group, it is unlikely to succeed and it seems like trying to negotiate with people from another country without understanding anything about their culture.

Referring to the target audience for information and marketing, the interviewees said that they want students who are motivated in the right way and therefore the marketing should be more consistent with the general serious message that should be promoted. Which is, the interviewee continued, that a double degree program is not for ambitious students who are afraid to step out, take a risk or have an adventure but it is for students who really want to get to know more about this world and grow as individuals. A double degree is the right place for this type of students. This is the message that, according to one interviewee, any kind of double degree, regardless of the subject, can communicate to potential applicants. In the interviews it was also pointed out that the age group, the cultural references, the perspectives of the staff running Metropolia's central marketing, is completely divorced from the target group that they should be trying to communicate to.

On how the parties at the higher education institution play their own roles and how the marketing is directed at all levels, the interviewees said that the double degree programs' marketing relies partly on Metropolia's marketing department. However, at the same time they run a parallel marketing. The double degree programs at Metropolia can utilize the Metropolia marketing which, said one interviewee, varies in degrees of not terribly good. And the double degrees in Business at Metropolia have their own marketing which, depending on how they design it, can be exactly what they desire. However, the interviewees remarked, the central marketing neither likes the different marketing strategies from their own nor the idea that degree programs would be working on their own. It was added by one interviewee that the double degree programs at Metropolia had previously done the marketing independently, but that resources had caused financial issues.

When asked about joint marketing with the partner institutions and each institution's own marketing, an interviewee explained that, in the double degrees installed at Metropolia at the time of the interviews, there is not much marketing or advertising cooperation between the partner institutions. The interviewee stated that they rely on the partner institutions to send the agreed number of students over.

Marketing channels, such as Internet marketing through the double degree programs' websites and social media like Facebook is important, as it was remarked during the interviews.

#### 4.10 Quality assurance, program monitoring and evaluation

Relating to quality assurance, program monitoring and evaluation, the interviewees noted that in the double degree programs installed at Metropolia at the time of the interviews, the quality assurance has been conducted within the Finnish system.

In addition to the institutional quality assurance systems, the double degrees installed at Metropolia at the time of the interviews use the European Level Accreditation System EPAS, said an interviewee. Many partner institutions use EPAS and some of them even require their partners to use it as well. It was also explained during the interviews that in the double degree programs at Metropolia, external accreditation will be installed by autumn 2015 and that the International External Accreditation System is a priority. An appointed person was designated to prepare them for the application and installation of the European Level Accreditation for their degree programs. According to one interviewee, the installation demands documenting all of the processes and understanding them and if necessary changing them to more logical processes. In conclusion the interviewee said that this means that they need to be able to explain those processes to anybody who asks about them. That is why the installation of the International External Accreditation System is quite a time-consuming project. The interviewee pointed out that it is also a worthwhile process because it forces the involved faculty in the double degree program to think more carefully and to justify the aspects that need to be justified anyway. In addition, the interviewee remarked, that the work done for the European Quality Assurance will help with the Finnish quality assurance and in any negotiations with other parties, including potential partners.

Because employers are always complaining about graduates who do not have enough knowledge, they do not want to train our students with the exact skills and knowledge that employers expect from the graduates at a given time because that will not result in being up-to-date, remarked one interviewee. What the double degrees at Metropolia are trying to do instead, the interviewee continued, is to create a situation in which the students learn and become accustomed to adapting to changing circumstances and even anticipating some of those changes by learning to ask the right questions and

knowing where to look for the answers. This is a very big part of what the double degrees at Metropolia do. According to the interviewee, learning the above mentioned is a fundamental skill of life, which is increasingly demanded by organizations that wish to remain competitive. Therefore, instead of trying desperately to stay up-to-date with today's fashions, degree programs have to try and be more long-term in their perspective and encourage their students to grow into so called life-long learners, people who can adapt, people who can think analytically and strategically, people who know where to go looking for the answers, people who know how to ask the right questions.

Furthermore, the interviewees pointed out that program monitoring in the double degree programs at Metropolia includes a briefing for students on quality issues during the exchange year regarding the language and overall quality of the partner institutions.

#### 4.11 Added Value

When asked what they believed the added value of a double degree program is, the interviewees responded that a double degree program's added value lays in the enhanced internationalization and the higher demands that are placed on the students in terms of their time and effort. There has been an added value to the double degree programs installed at Metropolia at the time of the interviews as internationalization reflected on the traditional programs as well, according to one interviewee.

One interviewee added that enhanced internationalization and the deeper experience of a particular foreign country or area and having to live and work there for an extended period of time is itself a major learning experience, in addition to which the students have all the subjects that they are studying. Double degrees are an efficient way to make it possible for students to gain different views of the world because student and teacher exchanges are continuous, said another interviewee.

Furthermore, one interviewee stated that the double degree programs at Metropolia are very pleased with the amount of recognition among the students of their own achievements. The fact that they have grown a lot and the fact that they have been able to do many things that they have never imagined doing after graduating from the double degrees, is very gratifying for everybody concerned, according to the interviewee. It is a sign of a successful degree program and a successful school. That is certainly a significant part of the value added, the interviewee concluded.

According to the interviewees, double degrees encourage quality assurance because they require constant reflection on the institution and the program. One interviewee pointed out that understanding and negotiating in between different systems is something that enhances the ability to adapt and adjust to different circumstances. Because a complaint is not a very constructive answer to change, it is much better to try and adapt and take advantage of change. One interviewee said that the demonstrated commitment to extra work, stepping out of the comfort zone, doing something different, going abroad, communicating, forming friendships, forming strong bonds between partner institutions and connecting with people from different countries and cultures is life enhancing both for the student and the degree program concerned and, thus, creates an added value.

Furthermore, one interviewee mentioned that the marketing of the home country, the profile of Finland itself, is greatly enhanced by all this mobility, and added that double degrees have been a good marketing strategy in the past and resulted in increased numbers of applicants. Through the cooperation with partner institutions Finland benefits because many people across Europe and elsewhere are working with the double degree programs, and therefore get to experience the country. This means educating people from other countries who come to Finland to study on exchanges as part of double degree programs. And they go back to their own country with a Finnish degree, which is a connection that has been made for life, added the interviewee. In conclusion, another interviewee said that there is an added value for students and potentially an economic value for the Finnish society as students from abroad spend time in Finland and form links. This presents an added value for employers who utilize the skills that were acquired through the double degree program and the bonds that have been formed.

The double degree component is a signal of discipline, it is a signal of greater achievement and it should be a signal of higher quality, as one interviewee pointed out. This means that even if a program already is in a double degree partner network but if the program is unable to maintain a certain standard of quality, it will quickly lose its partners. Thus, the interviewee recommended to make sure that the performance level is high enough to maintain and even enhance the network.

Students have in the past experienced the environment of partner institutions as less stressful than expected because they were well prepared and educated which in itself presents an added value, reported an interviewee. In addition, the interviewee stated that there is an added value for students because they get two degrees while undergoing a similar workload to a traditional program.

In the interviews it was remarked that another added value is that the nature of the set-up of the curriculum of double degree programs is structured and determined, which presents a value for the school because a double degree program is easy to manage as students undergo a structured study path and cannot afford to mismanage time.

#### 4.12 Considerations

The interviewees responded to the question of what they thought should be taken into careful consideration when implementing and managing a double degree program that one needs to be careful with the agreements. More so, they recommended to make all the agreements clear and settle questions such as what the credit requirements are, what the requirements regarding the Bachelor's Thesis are and what the requirements regarding the transcripts are.

Because inconsistent agreements cause issues and extra work with for example the continuous effort to meet each partner's regulations, one interviewee remarked that the more logical and consistent the agreements are, the easier it will be to manage a double degree program. However, the interviewee noted that because inconsistent agreements cause numerous issues, viewer partner institutions may be beneficial, but pointed out at the same time, that organizing large numbers of exchange students migrating to a partner institution may be difficult as well.

Another interviewee recommended considering the volumes of students participating in a double degree program and the work involved in administrative and organizational tasks. The interviewee said that it could not be recommended doing the work for only a few students because the amount of work that needs to be done for the exchange and the few students, is enormous. The interviewee continued saying that what the program receives is the security that students will definitely graduate on time because they do not have any other choice than to go with the setup of the study path. It also needs to be considered, according to one interviewee, what should be done when students



are unable to keep up with the schedule and structure of the study path as this may create trouble for both the administration and student.

The interviewee explained that the double degree programs installed at Metropolia at the time of the interviews use a semester model, which means specific courses and modules run only once a year. If a student misses one of them there is a year's wait and many delays. In addition, the student is relying on KELA (the Finnish Social Insurance Institution) grants and therefore needs to achieve a certain amount of credits per academic year. This is a very important issue to consider, the interviewee pointed out.

Furthermore, the interviewees said that there needs to be a backup plan for these students because there will be some drop-outs and then the program needs to know how to guarantee the students' graduation. It is important to consider whether the students are able to continue in a double degree program or whether there is a way to transfer them to a corresponding traditional degree program so they can continue their studies. Making a point, the interviewee asked how the program management could master this issue in a way that complements the student's best interest and does not delay the graduation. In addition, the interviewee emphasized that this issue goes back to the student selection process being vital in order to guarantee graduations.

On that note, an interviewee expressed the impression that double degree programs are to some extent not necessarily trendy anymore because students want to have more flexibility and want to have more choices. They want everything today, now and right away. The interviewee went on saying that it may be difficult to recruit adequately committed students. However, the interviewee pointed out that the fixed and structured nature of a double degree program does suit some students. It is important to bear in mind that people have many opportunities to go abroad also in the traditional degree programs. Thus, a double degree program is not necessarily tempting when students compare it to the choices given in the traditional degree program.

Another interviewee asked whether the department's organization is ready for a joint/double degree program and if people in positions of responsibility realize the extent of the commitment that they are about to make. More so, the interviewee made a point by asking what sort of partners the program wants, what is really attempted to be achieved, if specifically enhanced educational value is the driving force or whether it is just a marketing trick, and, the interviewee asked, whether it is a way to enhance the

income. In conclusion, the interviewee stated that a double degree could be used as marketing and as an income-generating enhancement. But, the interviewee pointed out, that marketing and income generation will work much better if the focus is on the educational quality. If that is forgotten and the focus is on other matters, the double degree program is doomed and is not going to work and even if it does, it will not last for long. It will do the institution's reputation a lot of damage, said the interviewee.

One interviewee concluded that the focus on education and the quality of the education, the quality of the partner institutions and the quality of students who are ambitious and able to meet this challenge must be considered and identified. Everything else will take care of itself as long as the organization is supportive.

## 5 Conclusions

Referring to the results presented in this thesis, the author concluded that designing, implementing and managing joint/double degree programs is challenging and demanding but also worthwhile and rewarding for both the institutions and the students involved in the program. Based on the results of this research, the impact of the quality of cooperation within each individual institution and between all partner institutions unitedly, at all levels and at any stage of the designing, implementation and management processes of a joint/double degree is the foundation for the success of the program and, more so, determines the intensity of its workload.

The results of this thesis stated experiences on double degree programs of people involved in the programs at the institutional level. The results furthermore point out the added values of these degrees and emphasizes which issues, based on the experiences of double degrees, were perceived as important considerations. In this chapter the conclusions drawn by the author are presented and corresponding recommendations are offered.

After analyzing the data and stating the results of this thesis, the author noted that the considerations emphasized by the interviewees agreed in some aspects with the key messages for practitioners on joint program development, management and implementation offered by Stichting EP-Nuffic (2015). In other cases, the interviewees pointed out aspects that derived from their practical experiences with double degrees and their individual expertise.

Based on the conclusions drawn from the data analyzed and the results of this thesis, the author addressed a list of aspects, which she concluded to be important at both an institutional level and furthermore, within the partnership. In correspondence to what was emphasized during the interviews and in the results chapter on aspects of cooperation, the author concluded that successful joint/double degree program cooperation necessitates not only efficient and adequate level of cooperation among the partner institutions but also within each individual institution/organization. The author concluded that this is because even though the (jointly) established agreements of joint/double degree program guide the set-up of the program to a varying extent, each institution seems to manage the program individually and integrates it into the institution's entirety. The agreements will help to guide the institutions/organizations through processes

throughout the design, implementation and management of the program. However, unexpected issues, which could not be foreseen, may arise and even though the partners may discuss them, institutions may have to produce their own coping strategies in order to overcome the challenges. Therefore, an adequate level of cooperation and collaboration within each individual institution seems to be indispensable. Resistance within the participating institutions must be paid attention to and taken seriously. Thus, the lists of aspects in figure 2 may be useful to consider carefully and take into account during the development, implementation and management of a prosperous joint/double degree.



Figure 2 Aspects that should be considered and taken into account when developing, implementing and managing a joint/double degree

Firstly, the author concluded from the interviews, that institutions seeking joint/double degree partnerships would do well in recognizing that within a jointly implemented and managed degree program and its underlying partnership, **not everything can be controlled**, regardless of the agreements and goodwill. The author points out furthermore, that a significant conclusion of the interviews is that partnership requires **trust** that the basic skills and learning outcomes, and the basic quality processes, are in place at the partner institutions.

Based on the way that the interviewees emphasized the importance of common **quality assurance** across all the countries of the European Union and beyond in double degree cooperation, the author concluded that institutions would do well to consider explaining every decision that they make on all aspects of quality assurance. This means that every institution that seeks accreditation, must think very carefully and strategically, about everything that it does academically, pedagogically and administratively. This comprehensive process means that **each institution should document all of their processes** and should, thus, also understand them and if necessary change them into more effective processes. Therefore, institutions should be able to explain the processes to anybody who asks about them. While this seems like a very demanding and time-consuming process, the author concluded that it is also a worthwhile process because it not only encourages institutions to carefully consider and justify their processes, but the work they do also may help with the national quality assurance and in any negotiations with other parties, including potential partners.

Concluding the results of this research project in terms of the communication and cooperation inside each institution or organization, the author gained the understanding that a successful joint/double degree program should be a part of **each participating institution's strategy and internationalization policy**. Faculty resistance within each participating institution must be paid attention to and taken seriously in order to ensure an adequate level of cooperation and communication.

Institutions must clearly **define the concept** of the degree program they desire whether the program to be launched was a joint or a double degree program. Furthermore, the academic added value and wider relevance and the intended learning outcomes, as well as the number and design of certificates awarded should be agreed on.

The author came to the conclusion that certain **criteria such as credit requirements** leading to the exchange and to the graduation of a student should be set early on. It should also be jointly decided if internships are required and how the Bachelor's Thesis will be evaluated and assessed. The outcome of this research project emphasized the need for institutions seeking partnerships to jointly define the reasons for the implementation of the program, the learning outcomes desired and the length of the program. Thus, they should evaluate and define the curriculum/curricula and consider its recognition and the anticipated degree awarded.

Institutions seeking partnerships may do well to draw up a simple and general cooperation **agreement** with references to more detailed annexes regulating different issues in the cooperation early on. As updates may be applied frequently, the cooperation agreement should be flexible.

In correspondence to what the interviewees emphasized, the author concluded that the **selection of the partners** should be based on each institution's academic expertise, mutual trust, a shared understanding, and the institutional strategic commitment. Therefore, **each institution should be aware of their partner institutions' academic and administrative strengths and weaknesses.**

On the topic of qualitative issues, the author concluded that institutions seeking a joint/double degree should jointly make it clear and agree on how each institution and the corresponding departments define 'quality' and how they aim to **measure the quality** within the joint/double degree program that they are about to implement. Therefore, it may be advisable for the partnership institutions to agree on shared references for quality monitoring.

Institutions should agree on **terminology and philosophical/pedagogical issues** relating to the tuition, such as 'teaching a class' versus 'giving a lecture', in order to install a common mean of quality.

Additionally, the author concluded that in order for a joint/double degree to be successful and for its quality assurance to be effective, all institutions involved in the joint/double degree partnership should know their national **accreditation legislation**, as well as the accreditation legislation in the countries or states of their partner institutions.

When a joint/double degree program is to be implemented, each partner institution's screening and authorization process must be considered. Therefore, the author concluded that institutional support, both strategic and practical, as well as the desire to cooperate at all levels within each institution must be examined and secured from the start of the implementation process. Thus, each institution may do well to **ask themselves whether their organization is ready for a joint/double degree program cooperation** and if people in positions of responsibility realize the extent of the commitments that they are making.

Institutions may do well in ensuring that there is enough **consultation and cooperation** with the joint/double degree program at all levels of their organization, including a **common strategy**. The author concluded from the interviews that in small areas inside a large organization, like a joint/double degree, may easily be ignored or forgotten about when the central administration makes decisions about the way things are managed without understanding what this means for joint/double degree cooperation.

The author of this thesis concluded from the results presented that in order for a joint/double degree to be successful, each partner institution needs to be aware of the **national and institutional regulations** of their own institution and every partner institution.

The author concluded from the results presented in this thesis on the topic of a **contact person/group/team** and the number of people that share the communication and correspondence, that in order to guarantee fluent cooperation between the partner institutions, it may be helpful to jointly draw a thoroughly considered, clear and flexible cooperation agreement which indicates and alludes responsibilities, the expected outcomes and other relevant methods to be installed.

The interviewees emphasized the labor intensity involved in contacting partners and dealing with problems that emerge with students and with administration. Thus, the author concluded and recommended that **administrative tasks must not be underestimated**. Therefore, institutions would do well to consider the number of people that they assign the correspondence and communication to. The amount of work and responsibility may be overwhelming for a single person and institutions should acknowledge that changes within the setup of the contact person/group/team may oc-

cur and could potentially cause administration, communication and correspondence related issues. Furthermore, institutions should foresee that unawareness of people working in this field may result in violations of the agreements.

The author concluded from the literature reviewed that there do not seem to be defined management models, but only guidelines for their installation and management. Thus, the author came to the conclusion that **the specific context and development of every joint/double program should be made in consideration of their individual purpose and type**. Thus, in order to accomplish this, the author concluded, each institution involved in the joint/double degree would benefit if they acknowledged every partner, identified each institution's and their combined role and implemented these acknowledgements in the management strategy and governance structures of the program.

On the topic of student recruitment and administration, the author recommends institutions looking to install a joint/double degree, to **define target students** because it had become clear to the author in the results based on the interviews, that the recruitment process contributes directly to the quality of the program academically and marketing wise. Therefore, the recruitment process and the student quality impacts both the intensity and procedures of administration.

Because of the issues which the interviewees emphasized in their responses on **administrative efforts**, the author concluded that it may be wise for institutions seeking joint/double degrees to establish a management plan based on the initial reasons why the program is desired and, thus, the tasks that correspond to the arrangements needed in regards to its administration. This should, according to the author's conclusion, involve tasks such as the **admission, registration assessment, examinations and credit transfers**. More so, it involves the tasks of jointly defining and agreeing on **internal and external quality assurance methods**, i.e. the monitoring of the academic content of the program, and the joint selection and complaints handling procedure within the student admission. Therefore, the author concluded that institutions would do well to cooperate on the external representation of the consortium and jointly agree on financial administration decisions and the promotion of the program, including the student recruitment.



Furthermore, the author gained an understanding that institutions may do well in providing as much information to potential students as possible prior to the entrance exams or recruitment process and to **give applicants an exact rundown on what the program is about and what they would sign up for.**

**Institutions should agree on what they require of applicants** and, in case of e.g. entrance exams, what qualities, skills and abilities applicants should be tested on and how an applicant's ambition, drive and ability to participate in the program should be identified.

Another conclusion that the author came to was that institutions need to carefully consider the **number or volume of partner institutions and students participating in the program.** From the interviews the author gained an understanding that finding partners who would accept a large number of students is challenging. But an additional consideration is that large numbers of students from the same country may not mingle much with locals and, thus, may not integrate well at the partner institution. Therefore, having multiple partners allows institutions to send smaller groups of students which is good for the students as it presents more choices and encourages better integration. On the other hand, the author concluded from the interviews, that the interviewees emphasized that they had experienced numerous issues regarding differences with the agreements because following or setting the rules and regulations in the same way as the number of partners increases had been challenging.

Concluding what was said in the interviews about **alternative study paths** for students dropping out of double degrees for reasons such as health or any other status changes, the author concluded that despite expectancy and all efforts to brief the students, there may be students changing their minds and institutions may do well considering an alternative route for such students. Institutions should also jointly **define the number of students** that is it worth the amount of work it takes to design, implement and manage a joint/double degree program.

Concluding what was said during the interviews on differences in **work schedules and cultures**, the author came to the conclusion that institutions should look carefully at the working culture both of the partner institution and the country in which the institution is based when making decisions about where to locate potential partners. The author concluded furthermore that institutions should negotiate and agree on schedules and

deadlines in order to prevent e.g. delays in student transcripts and credit updates as they may cause numerous financial and administrative issues.

The results of this research project emphasized the need to develop a **budgeting plan** that considers all costs and expenses, as well as the running costs, from the beginning of the negotiations. Another conclusion drawn by the author was that it would be beneficial for the institutions to jointly acknowledge the imposed expenses and costs of such a joint/double degree program and investigate and negotiate matters such as tuition fees, travel expenses scholarships, cost-sharing and the financial sustainability of the program.

Institutions may want to **consider whether the investment needed for a double degree program is able to guarantee their institution's financial position**. Additionally, the author concluded from the interviews, that institutions should acknowledge the increased workload on student counselors and coordinators.

Marketing wise, the author concluded from the interviews, that the strategies on how institutions agree on how to **promote and market** the joint/double degree program, the way they define their target audience and how they review corresponding traditional study programs, are an inevitable part of their marketing strategy.

The author concluded from what was said during the interviews, that institutions would do well in **promoting the prospectus of the degree program and the benefits** of the exchange choice that the students make, in terms of their CV, language qualifications and teaching quality because those aspects may make those students much more interesting to future employers.

**The marketing should promote the attitudes and values** that all partner institutions have agreed on, as the author concluded from what was pointed out during the interviews. However, the author also recommends institutions to try to communicate as effectively as possible to the target audience through individuals who are representative of that group.

Corresponding to what was mentioned during the interviews on **responsibilities** regarding the financial structure and organization of a joint/double degree, the author came to the conclusion that it is essential to increase the awareness of the joint/double

degree program and its prospectus through the marketing strategies in order to gain future employers' interest and enhance the employment of graduates.

## 6 Discussion

Deriving from this research, the impact of the effectiveness of the cooperation within an individual institution and within the partnership of all participating institutions at all levels and stages of the design, implementation and management processes of a joint/double degree is the basis for the success and defines the work intensity of the program.

Being an international student herself, the author of this thesis had a particular interest in internationalization of education in Finland generally. However, the author's own experience studying as an international student in Finland and in Finnish without being a native speaker, as well as the background in Occupational Therapy enhanced the curiosity about a potential joint/double degree in Occupational Therapy.

The author participated in the International Innovative Project in Boston in 2014 and completed two internships outside of Finland, one mandatory as part of the curriculum and an extra curricula one within the field of Occupational Therapy, during the course of her studies. All those opportunities to study internationally were independently applied for, arranged and organized. The author experienced student mobility as effective, encouraged by the institution and trouble-free within the context of the single national degree program in Occupational Therapy at Metropolia. The impression gained was that it is fairly easy for students to study abroad if they choose to do so and if they are able to make a set of arrangements independently, regarding e.g. the accommodation and travel itinerary. Metropolia offers various exchange programs that are semi-structured and organized at multiple partner institutions for students enrolled in the traditional national programs. Additionally, ambitious and self-standing students can create their own specific exchange as part of the Free Mover program.

However, despite the international experiences gathered during the course of the studies undergone, the author acknowledges that she herself would have preferred a joint/double degree over a single national degree had it been an option at the time. This is not because she minded organizing the exchange periods abroad, but because of the differences in their attestation. A student that undergoes a joint or double degree will be awarded one or multiple certificates stating the student's internally enhanced, therefore broader, insight into a specific field of knowledge. In today's multicultural world, this may open the door to many opportunities to any student. The author will not

receive this type of certificate, even though the transcripts will state where each course and internship was completed.

The author believes that joint and double degree programs may encourage students to study abroad who might otherwise be overwhelmed with organizational tasks and obligations that need to be resolved independently, language barriers and leaving for foreign country without a peer, especially so for students that have never been abroad before. Joint and double degrees are by nature rather structured and the organizational task and there are less decisions to be made by students than in the corresponding national degree exchange programs. Students enrolled in joint or double degree programs ideally know the set-up of their studies and are aware of the partner institutions that are involved in the program. Therefore, students know when and for how long they will be abroad at the individual partner school and they know which courses, internship or other type of study they will complete there. They know that the achievements will be fully recognized by their home institution upon successful completion. Joint and double degree students often spend the time abroad at partner institution(s) with a number of fellow course mates from their own institution and the peer support that this enables may make it possible for students to be adventurous and go to a foreign country for a certain amount of time, study and communicate in a foreign language and mingle in an unfamiliar culture.

### 6.1 Research limitations

The questions that investigate the nature of this research correlate with the paper that the Finnish Ministry of Education published on the design and implementation of joint and double degree programs in 2014 (Opetushallitus. 2014) and corresponds to the main topics and aspects provided by it. However, the questions do not interrogate every detail and sub-criteria of the main aspects provided by the paper in depth.

Despite the initial plan to conduct interviews with people at all levels involved in double degree programs installed at Metropolia at the time of the research, only members of the faculties and departments were interviewed. Thus, the results and conclusions of this research are not representative of the students enrolled in the double degree programs at Metropolia, nor its alumni.

Furthermore, as this research correlates with the paper that the Finnish Ministry of Education published on the design and implementation of joint and double degree programs in 2014 (Opetushallitus. 2014) and the interview questions correspond to its main topics it needs to be remarked that the paper often refers to joint degrees only. Thus, scepticism and uncertainty of the applicability of the information provided by the paper on double degrees arose due to the inconsistency in the terminology used and the general confusion around the terminology of joint and double degrees in the literature reviewed.

## 6.2 Reliability and validity

This thesis can be considered valid because meaningful matters of the experiences with double degrees, its perceived added value and considerations for the installation and management of double degrees were pointed out in order to find out suggestions for a double degree program in Occupational Therapy at the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. The interview questions were chosen and designed to provide relevant data. The reliability of this research is assured, as there will be similarities in the interpretation of the results regardless of the interpreter. Based on the results of this thesis, similar issues were mentioned by all interviewees.

The reliability of research is evaluated by looking at its reliability and validity. Thus, the main quality consideration that this type of research demands was theoretical sophistication and methodological rigor. The extent to which the respondents' answers related to the aim of this research, thus, its representativeness was considered carefully during the analysis of the data collected through the interviews. The amount of data collected was enough to draw qualitative conclusions toward the outcome of this thesis. Furthermore, the logic of purpose sampling was well considered in the research strategy applied. Every interview was recorded using functional equipment that guaranteed good recording quality and audible sound quality. Truth or rhetoric aspects were taken into consideration during the analysis of the data collected, because the interviewees were involved in double programs at Metropolia at the time of the research. This relationship to the program may have affected their identification and attitude and, thus, the genuineness of their responses to the interview questions.

The reliability of open-ended questions was considered in the research strategy of this thesis. By design the questions were not open-ended, so the respondents would not be

unsure how to answer and would be left with little time to respond. The questions indicated the concept of their nature clearly and indicate where to start the response. The questions were not phrased in long sentences and investigated one objective at a time.

Validity refers to the credibility of the conclusions drawn from the data collected. The interpretation is plausible and reasonable, in order to guarantee validity. Claims are supported by evidence, negative causes are included and alternative interpretations were considered. The reliability of the transcripts is granted through recording and transcribing the data in an analytically informed manner. To assure validity, the interview questions and the strategy plan were theorized thoroughly in an attempt to foresee issues and negative instances. Respondent validation techniques were used.

### 6.3 Suggestions for further studies

The objective of this thesis was to investigate experiences with double degree programs, what people involved in the programs believe the added value to double degrees is and what should be considered when installing and managing such a degree program. However, because there was not enough time to conduct interviews at all levels of the double degree programs at Metropolia at that time, a suggestion for a further study would be to investigate the experiences with double degree programs, the believed added value of such programs and the considerations of the students and alumni enrolled in such programs about the installation and the management of the programs.

Furthermore, investigations on the inconsistency regarding terminology and distinctions of joint versus double degree programs generally and how they impact the comprehension and interpretation provided through them and, thus, the design and the implementation of double degree may be useful for future partnership negotiations.

Moreover, further studies could investigate whether the recommendations given in this thesis had an impact on the installation and management of the double degree program desired in Occupational Therapy at the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences desired at the time of this research. Additionally a quantitative research investigation may give insight into how many students and faculty would potentially be interested in participating in such a program.

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