QUALITY ASSURANCE GUIDELINES FOR SINO-FINNISH JOINT DEGREE PROVISION

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Published by:

Sino-Finnish Education Double Degree Centre, coordinated by University of Eastern Finland and Beijing Normal University

Sino-Finnish Education Research Centre, coordinated by Tampere University and Beijing Normal University

Publication Date: 15.03.2024

Edition: first edition

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Citation: Zheng, G., Peng, S., Shumilova, Y., Cai, Y., & Kantelinen, R. (2024). Quality Assurance Guidelines for Sino-Finnish Joint Education Provision. Sino-Finnish Education Double Degree Centre and Sino-Finnish Education Research Centre at the Sino-Finnish Joint Learning Innovation Institute (JoLii)

Weblink: https://research.tuni.fi/sferc/projects/quality-assurance-guidelines-for-sino-finnish-joint-education-provision/

Acknowledgements:

The research group of the QA Project would like to express sincere gratitude to all participants in the interviews, workshops, and other associated events in the project. Special thanks go to the GINTL China coordination team; Tiina Vihma-Purovaara, senior ministerial adviser at the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture; Olli Suominen, Counsellor of Education and Science at the Finnish Embassy in China; Mirella Nordblad, Counsellor of Evaluation, Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (Karvi); Hongzhi SUN, head of Education Section, Chinese Embassy in Finland. Without their contributions and support these Guidelines would not have been developed. The project would not have been completed without the financial support from the GINTL projects of Tampere University and the University of Eastern Finland.

Foreword

The Quality Assurance Guidelines for Sino-Finnish Joint Education Provision (hereafter referred as "The Guidelines" for short) is prepared by Sino-Finnish Educational Research Center and Sino-Finnish Double Degree Center, two of the six research centers in the Sino-Finnish Joint Learning Innovation Institute (JoLII). It is an output from the Research Project on Quality Assurance in Joint Degree Programmes between Finland and China (hereafter referred as "The QA Project" for short), funded by the Global Innovation Network for Teaching and Learning (GINTL), one of the nine global networks in the Internationalization Programme (2021-2024) of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland.

As a pilot effort, from 2021 to 2022, considerable progress has been made by the QA Project to promote the importance of quality assurance in Sino-Finnish joint education provision. The QA Project has developed a database of Sino-Finnish joint degree provision programs, organized two sequential workshops on quality assurance in Sino-Finnish joint degree provision, conducted several interviews with practitioners and researchers in the Sino-Finnish joint degree provision. Finally, based on the collected data from the documents, the two workshops' discussion and interviews, these Quality Assurance Guidelines for Sino-Finnish Joint Education Provision are proposed.

The Guidelines consists of five chapters, structured as follows. In Chapter 1, we introduce the background of the development of the Guidelines. Chapter 2 compares the legal frameworks and QA structures in Finland and China. Based on the comparison, Chapter 3 proposes QA Guidelines, including the mission, general objectives, and values of Sino-Finnish joint degree provisions. An input-throughput-output checklist for QA system development is highlighted in Chapter 3 as well. Chapter 4 reflects on the challenges in implementing the QA Guidelines and possible good practices to ensure the quality of the joint degree provision. In the end, Chapter 5 highlights the key messages from the QA Guidelines that we hope to send away.

1. **Introduction**

Finland and China have a long-standing and active history of cooperation in higher education. For Finland, China is a growing global power player with profound influence on the world economy, which cannot be neglected. Following the *Recommendations for Academic Cooperation with China*, published in 2022 by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland, "it is beneficial for the Finnish academic institutions and the society in general to cooperate with China despite differences in systems and values" (Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland 2022, p. 3).

Particularly, since 2005, the higher education cooperation between Finland and China has been growing in multiple dimensions, ranging from individual mobility, joint provisions, to joint research and global network development (Suurmunne, 2022). At the micro level, based on the latest statistics from the Finnish Immigration Service (2022), China has consistently ranked among the top five countries contributing the highest number of international students to Finland. In terms of joint education provision, short-term courses on teacher training, as a form of export of Finnish education, have been increasingly popular (Peng, Kantelinen, & Räihä, 2023). Another popular form of joint education provision at the meso level is joint degree provision, which is the focus of these Guidelines and will be introduced more next. At macro level, three global networks with China have been developed, namely the Global Innovation Network for Teaching and Learning (GINTL China), the Finland-China Network in Food and Health Sciences, and the China Network of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (Suurmunne, 2022).

Among all forms of cooperation, joint degree provision is considered to be an important solution for developing a sustainable cooperative relationship between Finland and China. Such cooperation usually involves years of communication between partner institutions, more institutionalized cooperation platforms, and producing the future generation of Sino-Finnish talents who would continue the cooperation with understanding both Finnish and Chinese cultures. By far, according to the available data collected in this project from the Embassy of China in Finland, the Ministry of Education of China and Finnish higher education institutions (HEIs), there are at least 33 Sino-Finnish joint degree programs, covering bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels. From Finnish partner institutions' perspective, 10 Finnish research universities and 9 universities of applied sciences are actively involved in the Sino-Finnish joint degree provision. The list of the Sino-Finnish joint degree programs can be found in the Appendix 1.

While Finland-China higher education collaborations have expanded, sustaining and enhancing the quality of their joint degree programs presents multiple challenges. These challenges can be related to the different national legislations regulating the academic degrees, programme administration and

regulations of degree provision at partner institutions, the different credit transfer systems, and so on, between Finland and China (Cai, Liu, & Xiao, 2019).

Since 2019, geopolitical tensions have increasingly influenced the global landscape of higher education internationalization. As a result, Europe-China higher education cooperation has become fraught with paradoxes, misperceptions, and risks (Cai, 2023). In 2022, Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland published the *Recommendations for Academic Cooperation with China,* in which three principles of Finnish HEIs' cooperation with China were highlighted, including: (1) the respect for the integrity of academic freedom and scientific peer review and adherence to good scientific practices; (2) consideration of security and safety; (3) maintaining competitiveness (Ministry of Education-and Culture of Finland, 2022). More recently, in January 2024, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) also published the guiding principles for German HEIs to cooperate with China in a more realistic and differentiated manner (DAAD, 2024). Considering the convergence of the European Higher Education Area and European Research Area, one European country's policy and strategy may soon influence another's. Although Chinese HEIs often held the misconception that European HEIs maintain significant independence from political discourses, they are also brought to be aware that in terms of cooperation with China, European HEIs were largely aligned with their governmental positions (Cai, 2023), undertaking an increasingly realpolitikal stand (DAAD, 2024). These changes in relation to the geopolitics have increased the uncertainties as well as possibilities of misunderstanding and low trust in higher education cooperation between China and Finland, which makes maintaining Finland-China higher education collaborations increasingly complex. Navigating the policy differences and divergent values among cooperative HEIs for sustainable partnerships becomes more challenging than ever. In such context, it is even more imperative to pay special attention to the quality assurance of Sino-Finnish collaboration.

To address these challenges and maintain the higher education cooperation between Finland and China, we need to understand the broader context of the academic environment, including the relevant laws and policies governing collaboration between the countries (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022), particularly in the quality assurance of the joint degree provision. It is also necessary to seek for the shared values and principles for both Finnish and Chinese partners, based on which they can uphold the sustainability of the cooperation and quality of the joint education. To realize this, sharing of good practices is always a key step.

Therefore, based on the evidence-based research in the QA Project, these Guidelines have three major objectives:

(1) To distinguish the different understandings and practices of quality assurance of higher education in the Finnish and Chinese education systems;
(2) To outline the basic principles of ensuring the high-quality joint degree provision between Finland and China;
(3) To provide toolkits for practitioners to enhance the quality of the Sino-Finnish joint education provision.

In what follows, the Guidelines will fulfil the three objectives above step by step. As to facilitate readers better understand the Guidelines, we define the key concepts that have been frequently used in the Sino-Finnish higher education cooperation and in this Guidelines, which can be found in Appendix 2.

2. HE systems, legal frameworks and QA structures

The purpose of this chapter is to cultivate a shared understanding of Finnish and Chinese higher education (HE) systems, with a particular focus on the QA structures in both systems. We will first depict the HE systems in Finland and China, and then delve into the key higher education laws and regulations in Finland and China. After that, we will analyze the external and internal QA mechanisms in both countries and compare both sides to seek a common ground for QA for the Sino-Finnish joint degree provisions.

2.1 HE systems

Comparing the higher education (HE) systems in Finland and China reveals that the two systems differ not only in size, but also in their structural organization and recognition of learning outcomes. Nevertheless, both systems adhere to the same three-level academic degree structure and offer a combination of academic and professional education within their HE frameworks. This commonality establishes a fundamental framework for joint degree provision. Next, we will briefly introduce each system respectively.

2.1.1 Finland

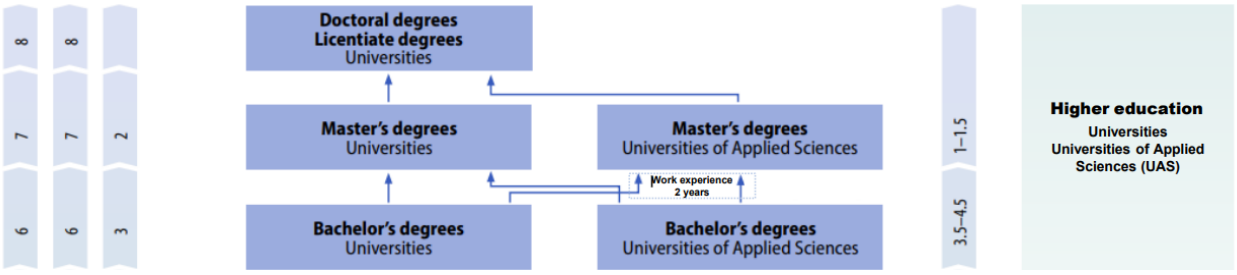

Figure 1 Structure of HE system in Finland (OPH, 2023)

The Finnish HE system is a public system that includes two sectors: 13 universities, focusing on scientific research and education, and 22 universities of applied sciences (UAS), offering professional oriented education. As Figure 1 shows, Finnish HE system adopts a relatively equal dual mode of educational system.

With the mission of scientific research and education, Finnish universities offer study opportunities in bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree levels. The three-level academic degree structure was

adopted by Finnish universities during the Bologna Process in Europe. Before that, students enrolled in Finnish universities usually spent 5 years and completed a master's degree. Therefore, today students admitted to universities' bachelor's program usually by default would be granted the study right for both bachelor's and the master's degree (EDUFI, 2024). The completion of bachelor's degree program in Finnish universities usually takes 3 years, whilst master's program will take 2 years. Doctoral education can be offered only in universities. The recommended length of doctoral study is 4 years; however, in practice, it can last for longer time depending on universities' own regulations.

Different from Finnish universities, the mission of universities of applied sciences (UAS) in Finland is to train professionals to fit the labor market needs. Research at Finnish UASes is characterized by its problem-driven approach, specifically designed to bolster regional development. UASes offer study opportunities at bachelor's and master's degree levels. The bachelor studies in Finnish UAS usually take 3.5 to 4.5 years, including professional training through the UAS's collaboration with industry sector. The master's degree program in UAS usually takes one to 1.5 years, but before getting admitted to the UAS's master programs, one should have at least two years' work experience.

For both universities and UAS, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is utilized to measure students' learning workload. This system allows students to have their studies recognized across various Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Finland and throughout Europe. The full-time workload for one academic year is equivalent to 60 ECTS credits, with one credit typically corresponding to 25 to 30 hours of learning (including self-learning hours) (EC, 2015). Based on the mutual recognition of learning outcomes through the ECTS, students from UAS can apply for continuing studies at Finnish universities, and vice versa. This feature contributes to the main characteristic of the Finnish Higher Education system: no dead ends.

2.1.2 China

By 2021, China has 3,012 HEIs, consisting of 2,072 public HEIs, 928 private HEIs and 12 Sino-Foreign joint HEIs (Ministry of Education of China, 2022b). These HEIs can also be categorized as 1,238 academic HEIs that can offer studies for all three levels, 32 professional HEIs that can confer bachelor's degrees, 1,486 vocational HEIs that can confer college diplomas, 256 adult HEIs that offer continuing education opportunities (Ministry of Education of China, 2022b). As shown in Figure 2, through the promotion of key universities policy, the development of graduate schools in selected research universities, China has constructed a hierarchical pyramid of the Chinese HE system (Zheng, Kivistö, Shen, & Cai, 2019). The position of Chinese HEI in the pyramid may reflect the resources,

status, academic autonomy that they can enjoy in the HE system, as well as the recognition and reputation in the society.

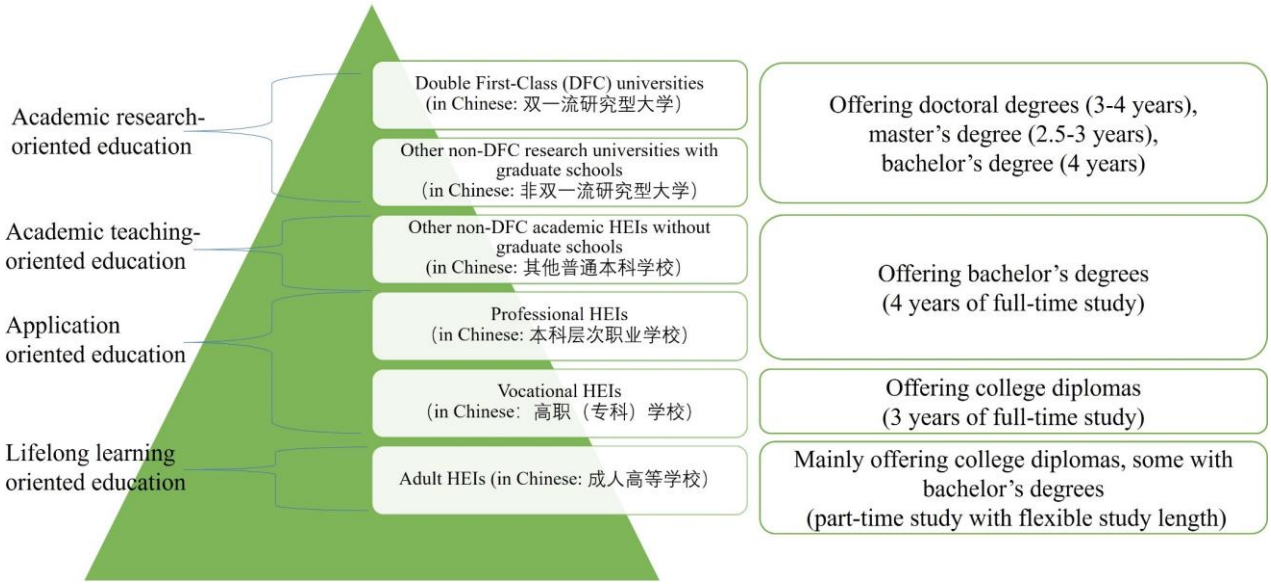

Figure 2 Pyramid structure of Chinese HE system (adopted from Zheng et al. (2019))

On the top of the pyramid are the academic HEIs, which can be further divided into Double First-Class (DFC) research universities, non-DFC research universities with graduate schools and others. Chinese government has been using key university policies to guide the development of Chinese HE system. In continuation of Project 211 and Project 985, in 2015 China launched the First-Class Universities and First-Class Disciplines Development Project, referred to as the "Double First-Class Project" (*Shuang Yi Liu, DFC*). By 2022, all together 147 research universities in China have been included in the DFC Project (Ministry of Education of China, 2022a). The inclusion into the DFC Project not only stands for the superior status on the top of the Chinese HE system's pyramid, but also entails more financial support from the government. In China, the authority of conferring academic degrees lies with the government. Only universities authorized by the Chinese government to provide postgraduate education can offer master's and doctoral programs, while other universities that are authorized to offer bachelor education can provide bachelor's degree programs and focus on teaching. After being granted the right to confer academic degrees, universities have the autonomy to decide on the programs to be opened. Nevertheless, the academic programs need to be aligned with the overarching discipline structures recommended by the Ministry of Education of China.

In recent years, the Chinese government has been promoting the development of application oriented HE, boosting the development of professional HEIs and vocational HEIs. Professional HEIs, like the teaching oriented academic HEIs can provide four-year bachelor's degree programs, but with more

focus on professional needs in the labor market. With similar emphasis on fitting the labor market needs, vocational HEIs provide 3-year study programs, and they award the completion certificates or diplomas.

Adult HEIs are a key component for constituting the lifelong learning system in China, as they provide part-time study opportunities of continuous higher education for people. Strictly speaking, they should not be at the bottom of the pyramid structure, as they are equally important as other application oriented HEIs.

China has been undergoing the reform of its academic credit system aiming to promote the mutual recognition of learning outcomes across HEIs and regions inside China; however, by far such a comprehensive national credit recognition system has not yet been developed. The number of academic credits is calculated based on the hours of teaching. One credit is usually equivalent to 18 hours of teaching. Since there is not yet a common credit system and the recognitions of HEIs in the pyramid can be different, the learning outcomes recognized across HEIs are not taken for granted in China. Usually, they need to be based on bilateral agreements between specific institutions.

2.2 Legal frameworks

Based on the review of relevant laws and regulations on both Finland and China, we draw up Figure 3 to show a legal roadmap that HEIs need to comply with when they plan to provide Sino-Finnish joint degree education. Next, we will explain the Figures from left to right, from Chinese side to the Finnish side, step by step.

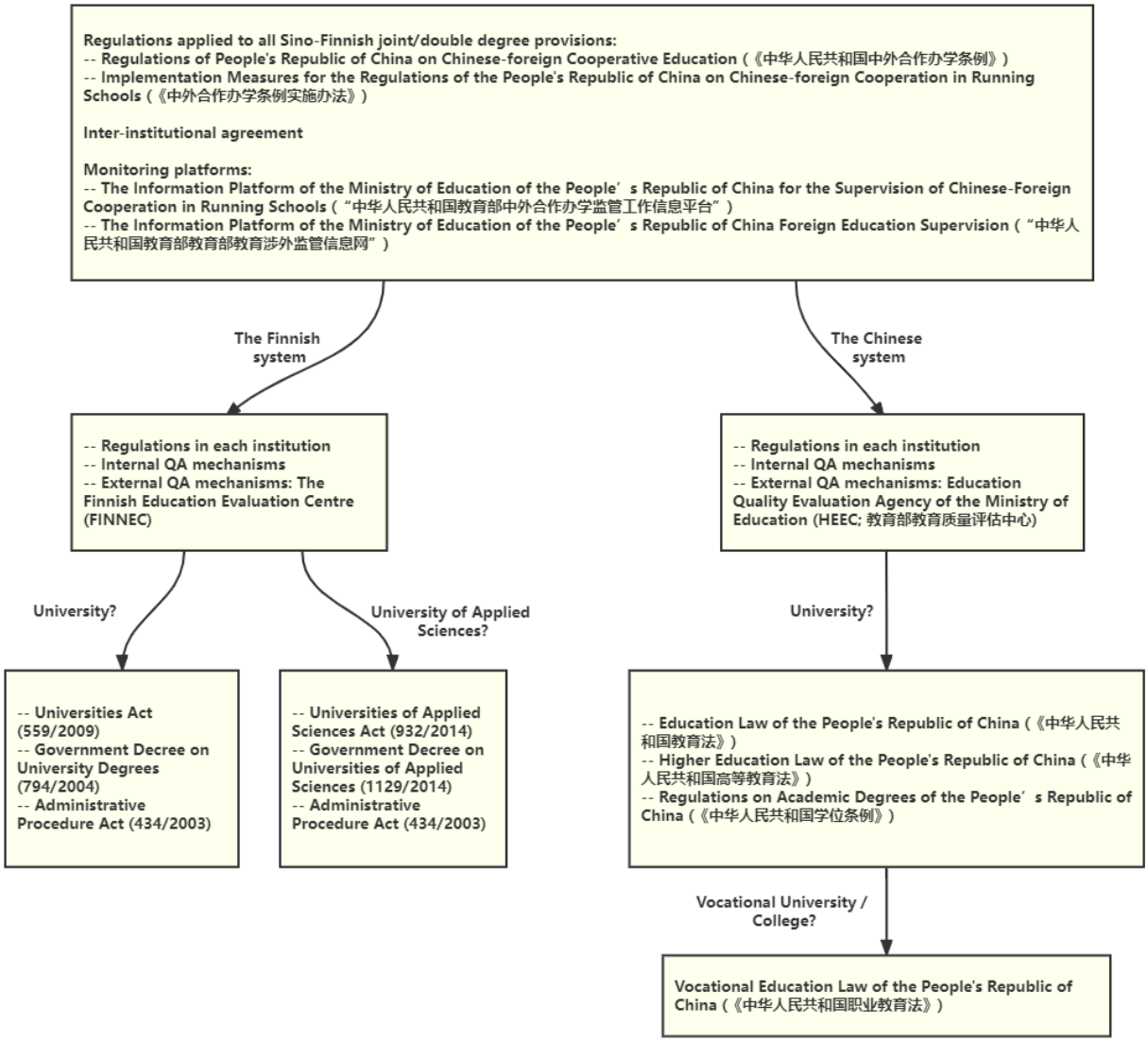

Figure 3 A roadmap to comply with the legal frameworks in Finland and China.

2.2.1 Finland

We summarize the important laws and regulations to Sino-Finnish joint degree provision on the Finland's side and show them in Table 1. In Finland, higher education institutions should comply with the basic laws, including Universities Act (558/2009) [1], Act of the implementation of the Universities Act (559/2009) [2], Government Decree on University Degrees (794/2004) [3],

[1] Universities Act (558/2009): https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2009/en20090558
[2] Act of the implementation of the Universities Act (559/2009): https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2009/en20090559
[3] Government Decree on University Degrees (794/2004): https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2004/en20040794

Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003)[4], Universities of Applied Sciences Act (932/2014)[5], Government Decree on Universities of Applied Sciences (1129/2014)[6]. Universities Act (558/2009) and Act of the implementation of the Universities Act (559/2009), Government Decree on University Degrees (794/2004) apply to universities (yliopisto); Universities of Applied Sciences Act (932/2014) and Government Decree on Universities of Applied Sciences (1129/2014) apply to universities of applied sciences (ammattikorkeakoulu).

In addition, due to autonomy granted by the laws, each higher education institution has its study-related regulations and guidelines. For example, at the University of Eastern Finland[7], there are "University of Eastern Finland Degree Regulations", "Ethical guidelines on teaching and learning", and "Study regulations". Each university establishes a Collegiate Board, which is responsible for internal auditing and accountability.

Table 1 Finnish important laws and regulations relevant to Sino-Finnish joint degree provision

No.	**Name of laws**	**Description**	***Relevant contents to QA***
1	Universities Act (558/2009; Amendments up to 644/2016 included)	These Acts regulate various aspects of Finnish universities, including operations, duties, funding, arrangement, and evaluation of teaching and research, among other practical matters.	Mission of universities: Section 2
			The university system:
			Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral degrees, and non-degree studies: Section 7
			Professional specialization programs: Section 7b
			Commissioned education: Section 9
			Fee-charging degree programs: Section 10
			Internal university rules and regulations: Section 28
			Regulations, rights, and responsibilities of university staff: Chapter 4
			Regulations rights, and responsibilities of students (students' admission and studies): Chapter 5
			Internal and external quality assessment: Section 87

[4] Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003): https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2003/en20030434.pdf
[5]Universities of Applied Sciences Act (932/2014): https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2014/en20140932_20200000.pdf
[6] Government Decree on Universities of Applied Sciences (1129/2014): https://finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2014/en20141129
[7] Study-related regulations at the University of Eastern Finland: https://kamu.uef.fi/en/tietopankki/students-rights-and-obligations/study-related-laws-and-regulations/

No.	Name of laws	Description	*Relevant contents to QA*
2	Government Decree on University Degrees (794/2004; Amendments up to 27/2015 included)	This Decree sets forth the guidelines for bachelor's and master's degrees, academic and artistic postgraduate degrees, and professional specialization programs that can be completed at the universities mentioned in the Universities Act (558/2009).	Objectives, scopes, structures, and completion of university degree studies:
			Bachelor's level: Chapter 2
			Master's level: Chapter 3
			Teacher education: Chapter 4
			Postgraduate academic and artistic education: Chapter 5
			Decree on specific specializations: Section 29
			Diplomas, certification, and academic titles: Section 26, 27
			Adherence to developing high-quality university education programs with national and international equivalence: Section 28
			Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003; amendments up to 893/2015 included) specifies quality and good practices of administration and services.
3	Universities of Applied Sciences Act (932/2014; amendments up to 516/2020 included)	These Acts regulate various aspects of Finnish universities of applied sciences (AMK), including operations, duties, funding, arrangement, and evaluation of teaching and research, among other practical matters.	Mission, authorization, and status of universities of applied sciences: Chapter 1, 2
			The system of universities of applied sciences:
			Teaching, learning, and training: Section 9, 10
			Structures and requirements of study programs:
			Bachelor's and master's levels: Section 11
			Professional specialization programs: Section 11a
			Commissioned education: Section 13
			Fee-charging foreign-language degree programs: Section 13a
			Curricula and normative duration of studies: Section 14
			Internal university rules and regulations: Section 20
			Regulations, rights, and responsibilities of university staff: Chapter 5

No.	Name of laws	Description	*Relevant contents to QA*
			Regulations rights, and responsibilities of students (students' admission and studies): Chapter 6
			Internal and external quality assessment: Section 62
4	Government Decree on Universities of Applied Sciences (1129/2014; amendments up to 1294/2019 included)	This Decree sets forth the guidelines for bachelor's and master's degrees, which can be completed at the universities of applied sciences mentioned in Universities of Applied Sciences Act (932/2014).	Objectives, scopes, structures, and completion of studies:
			Bachelor's level: Chapter 2, 3, 4
			Master's level: Chapter 5
			Teacher education: Chapter 6
			Professional specialization programs: Chapter 6a, 6b, 6c
			Decree on specific specializations: Section 29
			Adherence to EU legislation and international agreements: Section 9
			Diplomas and certification: Section 10
			Qualification requirements for lecturers and teaching staff: Section 17, 18, 18a

2.2.2 China

Similarly, we summarize the key regulations and laws in China that are relevant to Sino-Finnish joint degree provision, as shown in Table 2. Overall, *Education Law of the People's Republic of China* (《中华人民共和国教育法》)[8] is the basic law for all educational activities. In the sphere of tertiary education, all activities and degree provisions should comply with the *Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China* (《中华人民共和国高等教育法》)[9] and the *Regulations on Academic Degrees of the People's Republic of China* (《中华人民共和国学位条例》)[10], which specifies the

[8] *Education Law of the People's Republic of China*: http://www.gov.cn/banshi/2005-05/25/content_918.htm (in Chinese); http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/laws_policies/201506/t20150626_191385.html (in English)
[9] *Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China*: http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c30834/201901/9df07167324c4a34bf6c44700fafa753.shtml (in Chinese); http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/laws_policies/201506/t20150626_191386.html (in English)
[10] Regulations on Academic Degrees of the People's Republic of China: http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/sjzl_zcfg/zcfg_jyfl/202204/t20220421_620264.html (in Chinese); http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/laws_policies/201506/t20150626_191392.html (in English)

rights and obligations of different stakeholders as well as the minimum quality standards. For example, the minimum qualification for all tertiary level teaching staff is a bachelor's degree.

For vocational HEIs, including vocational colleges (职业技术学院) and vocational universities (职业技术大学), *Vocational Education Law of the People's Republic of China* (《中华人民共和国职业教育法》)[11] should also apply. According to Hou (2020), there are no laws or regulations particularly for joint/double degree provisions with foreign and non-Mainland partners; instead, *Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-foreign Cooperative Education* (《中华人民共和国中外合作办学条例》)[12] and *Implementation Measures for the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* (《中外合作办学条例实施办法》)[13] have spec regulations, guidelines, and requirements for these provisions.

Table 1 Chinese important laws and regulations relevant to Sino-Finnish joint degree provision

No.	**Name of laws**	**Description**	***Relevant contents to QA of Sino-Finnish joint degree provision***
1	*Education Law of the People's Republic of China* (《中华人民共和国教育法》)	*The general principles and regulations on educational provisions at all levels.*	Educational quality, goals, and missions in general: Article 1, 8, 11
			Structure of management and supervision: Article 14
			Regulations on establishing educational institutions: Chapter III
			Encouragement, requirements, and missions of international cooperation: Chapter VIII (especially Article 67, 68, 69)
2	*Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of*	Description of national higher education system and specifies basic	The mission of higher education: Article 4, 5
			The supervision role of national and regional authorities: Article 13, 14
			The higher education system: Chapter II

[11] *Vocational Education Law of the People's Republic of China*: https://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/sjzl_zcfg/zcfg_jyfl/202204/t20220421_620064.html (in Chinese); http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/laws_policies/201506/t20150626_191390.html (in English)
[12] *Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-foreign Cooperative Education*: http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/sjzl_zcfg/zcfg_jyxzfg/202204/t20220422_620494.html (in Chinese)
[13] *Implementation Measures for the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools*: https://www.crs.jsj.edu.cn/news/index/6 (in Chinese)

No.	Name of laws	Description	*Relevant contents to QA of Sino-Finnish joint degree provision*
	China (《中华人民共和国高等教育法》)	principles and regulations on higher education institutions.	Educational goals of degree provisions at the Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral levels: Article 16
			Student admission: Article 19
			Degree qualification conferment: Article 20, 21, 22
			Regulations on establishing higher education institutions (e.g., funds, property): Chapter III
			Required organizational and educational practices (e.g., student enrolment plan, curriculum plan, internal committee of quality assurance): Chapter IV
			Staff members' qualification requirement: Article 47, 48, 49, 51, 52
			Funding, sponsorship, property, and materials: Chapter VII
			Requirements for student graduation: Article 58
3	Regulations on Academic Degrees of the People's Republic of China (《中华人民共和国学位条例》)	Regulations on the higher education degree system and qualification / graduation requirements at the Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral level:	Overall learning goals and outcomes:
			Bachelor level: Article 4
			Master level: Article 5
			Doctoral level: Article 6
			Degree conferment requirements and processes: Article 8-19
4	Vocational Education Law of the People's Republic of China (《中华人民共和国职业教育法》)	Regulations on vocational colleges and vocational universities. In terms of quality assurance:	The Mission of vocational education: Article 1, 3, 4, 8
			The vocational education system: Chapter II
			Regulations on establishing vocational education institutions (e.g., funds, property, teaching staff's qualification): Article 24
			Requirements for student graduation: Article 25

No.	Name of laws	Description	*Relevant contents to QA of Sino-Finnish joint degree provision*
5	Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-foreign Cooperative Education (《中华人民共和国中外合作办学条例》)	Descriptions of the basic regulations on international joint higher education provision in China	The mission and legal basis of Sino-Foreign cooperation in educational provisions: Article 1, 5
			The encouragement of importing high-quality educational resources: Article 3
			Regulations on establishing Sino-Foreign educational provisions (e.g., intellectual properties, legal representatives, application and approval): Chapter 2
			Requirements for consortium and internal management of Sino-Foreign educational provisions: Chapter 3
			Quality management: Article 26
			Qualification and requirements for teaching staff: Article 27
			Regulations on teaching and learning:
			Teaching materials, curriculum, and language of instruction: Article 30, 31
			Student admission: Article 32, 33
			Graduation and qualification: Article 34
			External monitoring and supervision: Article 35
			Penalty of low-quality provisions: Article 56
6	*Implementation Measures for the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-foreign*	Implementation of the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-foreign Cooperative Education (《中华	The recognition of cooperation with high-quality educational providers: Article 3
			Regulations on establishing Sino-Foreign educational provisions (e.g., intellectual properties, legal representatives, application and approval, organising committee): Chapter 2
			The evaluation of quality of imported educational resources: Article 3

No.	Name of laws	Description	*Relevant contents to QA of Sino-Finnish joint degree provision*
	Cooperation in Running Schools（《中外合作办学条例实施办法》）	人民共和国中外合作办学条例》）	Qualification and requirements for teaching and administrative staff: Article 18
			Quality assurance strategies for teaching:
			Training for teaching staff: Article 24
			Compliance with admission guide and student recruitment materials: Article 25
			Regulations on approval of Sino-Foreign educational provisions: Chapter 4
			Management, monitoring, and supervision of Sino-Foreign educational provisions: Chapter 5
			Penalty of low-quality provisions: Article 32, 57

2.3 QA structures

The analysis of the QA structures in Chinese and Finnish higher education systems shows that on both sides, the combination of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms is used to ensure the quality of education. Nevertheless, the overall orientation of QA approaches differs for Finland and China. This might bring potential challenges for ensuring the quality of Sino-Finnish joint education provision.

2.3.1 Finland

An enhancement-oriented QA model is developed in Finland. Enhancement-oriented model of quality assurance refers to the continuous process of improving the quality of teaching and learning to better meet the quality expectations and needs of students, employers, and society (Abebe 2021). Compared to the accountability-oriented model of quality assurance, the enhancement-oriented model is characterized by a higher level of trust and autonomy of education providers, and, as a result a higher intrinsic motivation to improve their quality of teaching and learning (Abebe 2021).

In Finland, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (former FINEEC, now Karvi) plays a pivotal role in external quality assurance, employing an enhancement-oriented approach to evaluate educational quality across all levels of the system, encompassing universities and universities of applied sciences alike.

Promoting engagement and interaction, enhancement-oriented evaluation provides diverse opportunities for involvement in planning, generating evaluation data, and interpreting results (Karvi, 2020). It relies on trust between the evaluator and participant, emphasizing the educational provider's duty to improve quality and its practices. In contrast to producing ranking lists and imposing standardized criteria on HEIs, enhancement-oriented evaluation prioritizes flexibility by tailoring methods to individual cases. This approach focuses on continuously strengthening evaluation impacts and enhancing activities throughout the evaluation process, actively involving key stakeholders to gather diverse perspectives and produce comprehensive evaluation data (ibid.).

Thus, these methods contribute to a collective comprehension of the subject being evaluated, at the same time receiving feedback from evaluation participants on methods' functionality. Although the Centre is the national evaluation agency, it is considerably autonomous in terms of conducting and tailoring quality evaluations by experts, determining the evaluation results, and granting quality labels to HEIs (Abebe, 2021).

Every six years, each higher education institution needs to pass Karvi's quality audits to support self-regulated quality management, but it does not mean that every quality evaluation is one-off. Instead, Karvi supports HEIs and their programs to follow the enhancement-oriented quality model that pays special attention to improving students' learning experience and the quality of institutions and educational programs. At the end of each evaluation, the evaluated education provider will receive holistic and clear feedback that highlights current good practices and strengths, and offers future-oriented recommendations for improving weaker areas, intending to support tangible and continuous quality improvement and positive change rather than compliance to standards (Abebe, 2021; Karvi, 2020). For the time being, Karvi's evaluation is based on the quality standards and guidelines (*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG)[14]) in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as well as the functionality and effectiveness of each institution's quality system. Nevertheless, the formation of ownership of and commitment to comprehensive evaluation results, as to benefit evaluation participants, such as students, faculty, administrators, and the evaluation themes, remained nationally pivotal (Karvi, 2020). Although joint/double/dual degree provisions offered by EHEA institutions adhere to the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programs*[15], which has specified quality guidelines for implementing jointness, a quality framework for non-EU partners is still lacking.

[14] ESG: http://www.ehea.info/cid105593/esg.html
[15] *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programs*: https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/02_European_Approach_QA_of_Joint_Programmes_v1_0.pdf

Finnish higher education institutions enjoy a high level of trust and autonomy in terms of management. Therefore, each institution/faculty/program has developed its internal system of objectives, evaluations, activities, and instructions for quality management and improvement, depending on the quality culture of shared vision and practices. For example, the University of Helsinki has developed instructions of quality management (please see: https://www.helsinki.fi/en/about-us/strategy-economy-and-quality/quality-management), and more detailed instructions for, e.g. documentation are available in the University's intranet, which is available for students, teaching staff, and administrative personnel; University of Eastern Finland has a webpage introducing the quality policy of the University (please see: https://www.uef.fi/en/quality-management) In addition, each institution/faculty/program should have international and quality coordinators who are responsible for QA management and documentation. As part of quality culture, it is noteworthy that personal responsibility and continuous self-assessment are highly valued throughout the whole process of assuring and improving quality, which is encouraged by Karvi. Common practices for QA include student feedback gathered by teaching staff members during and after each course, joint planning of quality evaluation with administrative and teaching staff, students, and other important stakeholders for the evaluation theme.

2.3.2 China

In China, the quality assurance approaches tend to be accountability-oriented, characterized by a lower level of trust between HEIs and external stakeholders like quality assurance agencies. Accountability-oriented model of quality assurance refers to the process of ensuring teaching and learning that align with quality standards and norms set by e.g., government agencies or higher education institutions (Abebi 2021). In this sense, external quality assurance mechanisms might play a more decisive role in Chinese HE system.

In terms of external quality assurance, the Information Platform of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China for the Supervision of Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools ("中华人民共和国教育部中外合作办学监管工作信息平台")[16] and the Information Platform of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China Foreign Education Supervision ("中华

[16] The Information Platform of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China for the Supervision of Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools: https://www.crs.jsj.edu.cn/ (in Chinese)

人民共和国教育部教育部教育涉外监管信息网")[17] are the two platforms that facilitate access to bureaucratic application processes, operational guidelines, and accreditation standards for Sino-Foreign educational ventures. Additionally, they provide a list of institutions outside Mainland China recognized for such collaborations, delineate quality and evaluation standards, and issue notifications regarding external reviews of Sino-Foreign collaborative degree programs. This centralized information hub supports stakeholders in navigating the regulatory landscape, ensuring compliance, and enhancing the quality of transnational educational partnerships.

Accordingly, quality evaluation includes mandatory self-evaluation report and an audit/spot check (please see: https://www.crs.jsj.edu.cn/news/index/23). Appointed expert reviewers will conduct random spot checks through site visits, interviews (with students, graduates, employers, and faculty), lesson observation, document review, etc. The audit covers administration and financial management of the program, program content, university policies and facilities, teaching staff members' qualification and experience, academic affairs management, students' and graduates' feedback, quality of the theses, and the program's social impact (see: https://www.crs.jsj.edu.cn/news/index/24). After conducting a spot check, the reviewer team members will publish a report with constructive feedback.

The Education Quality Evaluation Agency of the Ministry of Education (教育部教育质量评估中心; HEEC) is a national-level authoritative organization for higher education quality assurance, with the responsibility of providing multi-level, professional and diversified forms of services for higher education quality monitoring and evaluation to the government, higher education institutions and society. It makes significant contributions to connotative development of quality-based higher education in China (please see: https://www.heec.edu.cn/pgzxyw/wwyt/index.html), adhering to the following "Five-in-one" Evaluation System principles:

- Self-evaluation: HEIs autonomously set up an internal QA system, implement self-assessment, release quality reports to the public and carry out the external evaluation.
- Institutional evaluation: The categorized evaluation at the institutional level conducted by QA agencies within the statutory mandate of the government, including eligibility evaluation and audit, aiming to guide the HEIs to establish a proper standing and orientation and develop with distinctive features.
- Program accreditation & Evaluation: The accreditation and evaluation at programmatic level carried out by accrediting bodies which represent 'the profession',

[17] The Information Platform of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China Foreign Education Supervision: http://jsj.moe.gov.cn/ (in Chinese)

aiming to promote the industry's in-depth participation in professional education and increase the fitness of student training for social demand.

- Regular monitoring of status data: Based on the National Database of Basic Educational Status of HEIs, regular monitoring of HEIs quality can be implemented; the core data of HEI's educational status and National Reports on Quality Monitoring and Evaluation (blue papers) are published on the basis of objective data and facts.
- International evaluation: The evaluations are implemented in accordance with international standards and procedures by high-level overseas evaluators or international QA agencies.

Besides, the China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Center (CDGDC) accredits degree-awarding units and evaluates the excellence of degree programs and subjects (Liu & Liu, 2017). In parallel with these formal evaluations conducted by the State, QA behaviors of HEIs as well as their motivation for establishing and delivering joint degree provisions are influenced by provincial accreditation committees, which evaluate the quality of vocational and private institutions formally (ibid.). Besides, informal evaluations on institutional reputation, which influence HEIs' QA practices and institutional behavior, are conducted by independent evaluation organizations entrusted by national and local authorities, research institutes and educational companies that rank universities (ibid.). Although non-numerical evaluations are also conducted, such as site visits, and interviewing with students and faculty, many indicators of these evaluations are standardized and quantitative, which compare and rank HEIs, such as student-teacher ratio, research output, and employment rate of graduates. Consequently, some standardized indicators might surpass the capacities of the institutions being evaluated, leading to a situation where actual change is constrained within these institutions. In efforts to align with evaluation expectations, they may adopt strategies such as hiring part-time teaching staff to meet the requisite student-teacher ratio (Liu & Liu, 2017). This approach reflects an attempt to conform to evaluators' standards, albeit through measures that may not fully capture the institution's ongoing educational quality or improvement efforts.

On the other hand, in the aspect of international QA structure, under the compliance pressure of external quality assurance, HEIs in China at different levels endeavor to develop their own internal QA mechanisms with different levels of autonomy. For the top research universities in China (e.g. the universities in the Double First-class (DFC) Project), individual faculties are the decision-makers in establishing academic degree programs, and thus playing a more important role in QA affairs. They are responsible for the cooperation with international partners, the coordination of Sino-Foreign programs and delivering and updating information on periodic external (thematic) reviews and spot checks conducted by, e.g. the Ministry of Education of China. Usually, department/faculty heads,

deans, and administrative personnel who are responsible for international affairs and academic programs should be involved in the QA process. International office, quality assurance office, and the graduate school in these universities may provide support to facilitate the internal quality assurance process when it is necessary. However, for non-DFC universities or regional universities, they do not have the authority to develop degree programs autonomously and need further approval from the local authorities. Common internal QA practices include teaching observed and assessed by senior or retired faculty, student feedback, and lesson observations between colleagues (Liu & Liu, 2017).

2.4 Comparing QA structures in Finland and China

From the comparative analysis of the QA structures in Finland and China, we find the distinctive differences between both sides in the aspects of quality concepts and the associated QA purpose and approaches. Chinese stakeholders in HEIs and Chinese policy makers mostly see quality of education as passing the checking standards set by the government, which leads them to adopt outcome- driven, accountability-based QA approaches, emphasizing the state-led QA agencies as the main decision makers. Overall, it is an external QA focused structure. In contrast, in Finland, stakeholders from both HEIs and the government see quality as perfection or consistency, which believes the desired quality of education can be achieved if we can put the right persons in the right place and implement the quality process with zero defects. Such thinking nourishes the development of quality culture in Finnish HE, meaning motivating everyone involved in education become responsible for the quality at every stage, with a common goal for enhancing the quality. Thus, the main responsible body for QA lies in Finnish HEIs and the implementation of QA focuses on the process management. When Finnish and Chinese HEIs cooperate to provide higher education jointly, these differences of the QA structures should be taken into account.

Table 3. Comparing Chinese and Finnish QA structures in HE systems

Category of comparison	**China**	**Finland**
Conceptions of quality	Quality as passing the formal checking standards	Quality as perfection or consistency
Main purpose of QA	Accountability	Quality enhancement

Main responsible body for QA	External QA agencies under the administration of the government	HEIs (internal QA mechanisms)
Major QA mechanisms	External QA approaches, including accreditation, quality assessment and audit.	Internal QA process within each HEIs
Emphasis of QA	Outcomes of QA	Process of QA

3. QA principles for Sino-Finnish joint degree provision

Awareness and the understanding of the differences of QA structures in Finnish and Chinese HE system is a first step, based on which, we need to reach a common consensus on quality and QA if one aims to develop high-quality Sino-Finnish joint education degree provision, which will be proposed in this section. In these Guidelines, we propose to adopt a pragmatist view and conceive quality as fitness for purpose in the Sino-Finnish joint degree provision. In so doing, we can integrate the elements of QA structures from both Finnish and Chinese HE systems for the ultimate benefits of the joint degree provisions. This does not mean this conception of quality will replace the mainstream understanding of quality in HE systems. Instead, we want to emphasize the stakeholders in Sino-Finnish joint degree provision can find a consensus on QA throughout adding or agreeing on this viewpoint of quality as fitness for purpose.

3.1 Common understanding of quality

By seeing quality as fitness for purpose, we propose to define the purpose of Sino-Finnish joint degree provision as follows. First, it refers to fulfilling the mission of Sino-Finnish joint degree provision, i.e. to provide high-quality education to students at all levels through the joint efforts between Finland and China and contribute to sustainable higher education cooperation between both sides. Second, it refers to fulfilling the specifications of stakeholders involved, e.g. Finnish and Chinese HEIs, students, staff, policymakers. Overall, it shall aim to achieve the following objectives:

a. To provide high-quality educational opportunities,

b. To sustain and institutionalize the cooperation between Finnish and Chinese universities,

c. To enhance communication and mutual understanding between Finnish and Chinese actors,

d. To nourish mutual trust between Finnish and Chinese academia and societies regardless of the uncertainties.

3.2 Common values for quality culture

To achieve the proposed goal, we need to have a common value shared by all stakeholders in the joint degree provision. Based on our interviews with practitioners in the Sino-Finnish joint degree provision, mutual respect, commitment, trust as well as the appreciation of diversity, equity, equality and inclusion are commonly recognized by both Finnish and Chinese stakeholders. Below we explain each concept.

a. Respect

A high-quality Sino-Finnish joint degree provision should uphold the respect for cultures, traditions, education values in both Chinese and Finnish higher education systems and beyond.

b. Commitment

A high-quality Sino-Finnish joint degree provision should nourish a quality culture in the collaboration which encourages the commitment to ensure the quality of joint education provision and sustainability of collaboration with the involvement of all stakeholders in the collaboration.

c. Diversity

A high-quality Sino-Finnish joint degree provision should recognize and appreciate the diversity of cultures and educational systems in Finland and China. By utilizing the advantages of diverse educational practices in the educational system, the Sino-Finnish joint degree provision can provide opportunities for innovative educational practices to enhance the quality of education.

d. Equality, equity, and inclusion

A high-quality Sino-Finnish joint degree provision should be organized based on the principles of equality and upholding social justice.

e. Trust

A high-quality Sino-Finnish joint degree provision should encourage mutual trust development among stakeholders in the Sino-Finnish collaboration. This includes mutual trust between Finnish and Chinese partners as well as among academics, administrators, students, and any stakeholders in the collaboration.

3.3 Recommended checklist for QA process

Based on previous research, we propose the following checklist for Chinese and Finnish partners to ensure the high-quality Sino-Finnish joint degree provision (Zheng, 2020; Zheng 2019):

Inputs

(1) A clearly defined mission statement of the joint degree provision program, in which the mission, values, short-term and long-term goals and strategic plans should be stated. The mission of the joint program should be aligned with the common mission and core principles of the Sino-Finnish joint degree provision.

(2) A clear set of student admission requirement agreed by all partner institutions, and clear and transparent student admission procedures agreed by all partner institutions.

(3) A program management consortium formed, consisting of program director, representative of teachers, program facilitators from each partner institution, and quality assurance coordinator.

(4) A joint educational provision agreement between partner institutions, in which the roles and responsibilities of each partner, routine management procedures of the joint program, and solutions to address conflicts, are stated.

(5) A program management manual with routine management descriptions

(6) A needs analysis survey to define the specifications for stakeholders

Throughputs

(1) A clear, structured curriculum design of the joint educational program, in which the yearly study plan should be stated.

(2) A quality checkpoint system, including checkpoints at mid-term assessment, external review and examination, a clear description of the grading criteria, monthly thesis seminars (at PhD level), pre-defense, to ensure the quality of thesis (especially at master and doctoral levels) (student handbook)

(3) A clear guidance on supervisor's role, responsibility, and good practices of supervision.

(4) A clear guidance on students' responsibilities and rights.

(5) Regular program consortium meetings to manage the routine management and administration of the joint program.

(6) Monthly quality culture coffee/talk with all stakeholders/students.

Outputs

(1) A learning outcome mutual recognition agreement, in which credits transfer and conversion table among/between partner institutions are stated.

(2) A clear graduation requirement and procedures agreed upon by all parties.

(3) A follow-up graduate employability and employment evaluation.

(4) Students' satisfaction survey.

(5) Stakeholders' feedback survey.

Environment support

(1) Intercultural mentorship program.

(2) Students career development counselling service.

(3) Conflicts report and resolution program.

4. Potential QA challenges and good practices

When evaluating the effectiveness of implementation of the QA Guidelines, it has been brought to our attention that challenges remain in the empirical exploration. In this section, we will briefly describe the major challenges. Meanwhile, we hope to bring out a more positive message to share the good practices in existent programs to tackle these challenges in this section.

4.1 Challenges

We find the key challenges revolve around communication issues, the difference between QA systems in different countries or institutions, and the process of reaching mutual agreement on QA. Here are the key challenges with examples:

Communication issues

In some cases, it is challenging to resolve communication issues due to the lack of full-time administrative staff members who take care of the program, low proficiency in foreign languages, and failures to understand cultural or contextual differences. Communication will become less effective when limited funds do not allow for face-to-face interactions, especially when there is no mutual agreement on the funding plan.

Difference between QA systems in different countries or institutions

Each institution has their university policy for QA, and there are differences in terms of national regulations and QA systems. It is challenging to follow all these requirements at the same time, especially when the QA system and requirements are ambiguous for foreign partners.

The process of reaching a mutual agreement on QA

Apart from the differences in QA systems, similar programs from different institutions or countries may set different program content and objectives, and it might be difficult to find competent academic staff to teach in a different program. When different programs serve as bases for developing a joint degree, it becomes challenging for those who are not familiar with the program content to ensure high-quality teaching and learning. Below we suggest some good practices to overcome these barriers.

4.2 Good practices

Despite the challenges, we also found some good practices for quality assurance and management. To help with the implementation, we added two examples of quality assurance forms in the Appendix.

4.2.1 Bachelor's level

Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK) is running a Double Bachelor's Degree Program in Bioproduct and Process Engineering, with Qilu University of Technology. The history of this program can be traced back to the early 2010s when both institutions started student and staff exchange in order to explore the possibility of offering a joint degree program. This program has been admitting students to the double degree program since 2016, and the program comprises a two-year exchange period so that students can obtain bachelor's degrees from both institutions.

During the Summer of 2023, we interviewed the program coordinator, to learn about the quality assurance practices for the double degree program, and here are their good practices for developing the quality culture:

(1) Enhancing the jointness

The program leader has a clear vision of providing high-quality teaching and learning to students. Until June 2023, 77 Chinese students have graduated from this program, nearly 50% of which continue their master's studies in Europe, and the rest are employed. This achievement relies heavily on the quality of jointness of leaders, faculty, and administrative staff from both institutions. One good practice to enhance jointness is to enable effective communication and cooperation between both universities, which is enabled by team building, joint training sessions, and regular student and staff exchange in order to understand both sides.

(2) Gathering feedback and advice from teaching and administrative staff, and students:

Establishing the double degree program cannot only be based on the top-down decision from the leaders. The program leader has been gathering feedback and advice from teaching and administrative staff, and students. For example, how teachers and students experience English-taught courses, and what their needs and challenges are.

(3) Sustainable financial management

Before designing the double degree program, it is essential to co-plan and discuss matters of financial and human resources, so that all the program objectives and practicalities can be realized.

(4) Supports from alumni

The double degree program has developed an alumni network in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. For example, alumni can be tutors who support students' studies, application to master's and doctoral degree studies, and job-seeking. This tutorship system has also reduced the workload of teaching staff so that teachers can concentrate more on teaching and research.

4.2.2 Master's level

A good example of Sino-Finnish joint education provision at master's level is the Erasmus Mundus joint master program - Master of Research and Innovation in Higher Education (MARIHE), that has been running since 2012. It is jointly offered by six partners from Europe and Asia: Danube University Krems (Austria), Tampere University (Finland), University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück (Germany), Eötvös Loránd University Budapest (Hungary), Beijing Normal University (China) and Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology (India). It is also the first Erasmus Mundus master joint program that has Chinese and Finnish higher education institutions as partner institutions.

As Quality assurance of joint education provision has been an important aspect in the organization of MARIHE Program, one significant approach adopted in the MARIHE Program is the development of quality culture for the program, which involves students, lecturers and program consortium members all together. To achieve this goal, several good practices have been adopted in the MARIHE Program:

(1) Strong program consortium

The program has developed a strong program consortium based on aligned motivation and interest from partner institutions, nourishing trust and effective communication through regular consortium meetings, and maintaining top-level leadership support regardless of uncertainties (Cai et al., 2019).

（2）Monthly Quality Coffee

The program organizes monthly coffee for staff and students, during which students can share their feedback on the quality of the courses, organization and management of the program, and their expectations for the learning outcomes from the Program.

(3) MARIHE Day

The MARIHE Program involves students' mobility among the consortium institutions almost every semester. Every time students move to a new host institution, the MARIHE consortium members from partner institutions have a Board meeting at the host institution. After the consortium meeting, MARIHE students, staff and students in the host institutions and staff from the consortium have dinner or social events together. This has become a tradition of MARIHE, called MARIHE Day.

(4) Student representative

For each cohort, students will vote and decide on one to two student representatives for the cohort, who will join the consortium meeting with staff members to discuss the quality issues of the program and make students' voices heard.

4.2.3 Doctoral level

Based on the research of Finnish Chinese intercultural doctoral supervision and other examples of Sino-European joint doctoral programs, the Guidelines suggest the following three aspects as good practices for Sino-Finnish joint doctoral degree provision.

(1) Reciprocal learning between doctoral supervisors and doctoral candidates in Sino-Finnish intercultural supervision

Previous studies on Chinese doctoral candidates' integration experiences in Finnish universities based on the interviews of Chinese doctoral candidates and Finnish supervisors indicated that reciprocal learning between Finnish doctoral supervisors and Chinese doctoral candidates can contribute to the development of mutual trust and the enhancement of the quality of doctoral supervision (Zheng, Cai and Zuo, 2023).

(2) Joint doctoral degree provision based on joint research and joint supervision

In the newly established Sino-German Doctoral School in Tongji University, a joint doctoral degree provision model has been established, based on joint doctoral supervision involving both Chinese and German supervisors on a common doctoral research project. In order to realize this model, a Chinese doctoral supervisor needs to identify his/her German partner with a common research interest to

develop a joint research project together. Then based on the joint research project, they recruit and supervise Chinese and German doctoral students together.

(3) A check-in system to manage doctoral research progress

In the Sino-Portuguese joint doctoral program between Southern Medical University in China and ISCTE UoL in Portugal, the program consortium has implemented several practices to ensure the quality of the joint doctoral education, such as establishing China Office for the program in China's partner institution, providing intercultural staff training for the project management, group supervision involving international supervisors, students, translators and facilitators, and so on (Zheng, Cai, Ma 2017).

One significant practice in the program, which has contributed to the quality assurance of doctoral theses, is developing a check-in system to monitor the progress of doctoral projects. Several key checking points were identified in the program, such as the research proposal seminar, mid-term progress seminar, and thesis seminar. In combination with the individual supervision meeting, the check-in system can help doctoral supervisors and doctoral candidates to follow up on the progress of the doctoral thesis jointly.

5. Summary

Drawing from the two-year continuous research, a series of workshops and discussions in the Research Project of Quality Assurance in Joint Degree Programmes between Finland and China, we present these QA Guidelines to support the quality assurance of Sino-Finnish joint degree provisions. While the increasingly prevailing influences of geopolitics on higher education have brought more uncertainties, doubts, and challenges in Finland-China higher education cooperation, the publication of these QA Guidelines is meant to uphold the spirit of international higher education cooperation despite all the odds. This effort aims to contribute to a sustainable partnership and friendship between different HEIs, particularly between Finland and China, Within the concluding section of the Guidelines, we would like to highlight three main messages intended to support the Sino-Finnish higher education cooperation:

Firstly, there are differences in the HE system structure and size, legal frameworks, quality conceptions and QA structures between Finland and China, which should not be neglected in organizing the Sino-Finnish joint degree provision.

Secondly, despite these differences, it is possible to reach a consensus on quality assurance of the joint educational provision by adopting a pragmatic approach and conceptualizing quality as fitness for purpose. Thus, it is important for actors from both Finnish and Chinese sides in the joint degree provision to agree on a common purpose of the cooperation. After defining the common purpose and adopting a pragmatic approach, actors in the joint degree programs should develop a QA process for the program, in which the QA structures and good practices from both Finland and China can be selectively adopted and integrated.

Finally, it's essential to recognize that the Guidelines are not intended as infallible dictates. Instead, they offer evidence-based recommendations meant to be applied by practitioners within their specific contexts and aligned with their defined objectives.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 The list of Sino-Finnish joint degree provision programs and institutions

No.	**Program title**	**Finnish partner**	**Chinese partner**
1	Master's Program in Collaborative and Industrial Design	Aalto University	Tongji University, College of Design and Innovation
2	Master's Program in Creative Sustainability - Master of Arts		
3	Master's Program in International Design Business Management		
4	Mechanical Engineering (Bachelor + Master (optional)	LUT University	Hebei University of Technology
5	Software and Systems Engineering (Bachelor + Master (optional)		
6	Energy technology (Bachelor + Master (optional)		
7	Electrical Engineering (Bachelor + Master (optional)		
8	Master's Program in Creative Sustainability - Master of Arts	Tampere University	National University Taiwan
9	Master's Program in International Design Business Management		National University Taiwan
10	Master's Program on Research and Innovation in Higher Education (MARIHE)		Beijing Normal University
11	Double Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral Degree Programs in Atmospheric Sciences	University of Helsinki	Nanjing-Helsinki Institute in Atmospheric and Earth System Sciences, Nanjing University

No.	**Program title**	**Finnish partner**	**Chinese partner**
12	NJIT-UO Joint Double Degree Bachelor Program in Software Engineering	University of Oulu	Nanjing Institute of Technology (NJIT)
13	Master in Food Development	University of Turku	Jiangnan University
14	Master's in Future Health and Technology		Fudan University
15	Double Master's Degree Program in Information and Communication Technology (FuTuRe)		
16	Master's Degree Program in Business Intelligence and Knowledge Management (BIKMA)		Central China Normal University (CCNU)
17	Joint or Double (optional) Bachelor's Degree Program in Early Childhood Education		Henan University
18	Double Bachelor's Degree Program in Information Technology	Centria AMK	Guangzhou Maritime University
19	Joint or Double (optional) Bachelor's Degree Program in Chemical Engineering and Technology		Liaoning Shihua University
20	Bachelor of Business Administration, Business Management		(several partners in China to choose from?)
21	Bachelor of Business Administration, Business Management, Enterprise Resource Planning		
22	Bachelor of Business Administration, International Business		
23	Finland Pathway, Hospitality, Tourism and Experience Management Bachelor's degree program	Haaga Helia AMK	CHT Management School, Hangzhou
24	Double Bachelor's Degree in Logistics and Aviation		Chongqing University of Science and Technology

No.	**Program title**	**Finnish partner**	**Chinese partner**
25	Joint Bachelor's Degree Program in Nursing	JAMK	Beihua University
26	Joint or double (optional) Bachelor's Degree Program in Logistics Engineering		Huaiyin Institute of Technology
27	Joint or Double (optional) Bachelor's Degree Program in Energy and Power Engineering	Karelia AMK	Heilongjiang Institute of Technology
28	Bachelor's Degree Program in Nursing	Satakunta AMK, Pori	Changzhou University
29	Bachelor's Degree Program in Artificial Intelligence (Data Engineering)		Chinese Tianjin University of Science & Technology
30	Bachelor Degree Program in Environmental Engineering	Savonia-AMK	Hebei University of Environmental Engineering
31	Insinööri (AMK), ympäristötekniikka		Shanghai Second Polytechnic University
32	Joint Bachelor's Degree Program in Electrical Engineering and Automation	South-Eastern Finland AMK	Zhengzhou Institute of Science and Technology
33	Double Bachelor's Degree Program in Bioproduct and Process Engineering	TAMK	Qilu University of Technology

Note: Program information included in Table 1 and Table 2 is up to October 2023. Data sources comprise survey responses from program coordinators from Finnish higher education institutions, Embassy of China in Finland, and the Information Platform of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China Foreign Education Supervision ("中华人民共和国教育部教育部教育涉外监管信息网"; https://www.crs.jsj.edu.cn/).

Appendix 2 Key terms

Sino-Finnish joint degree provision: refers to all kinds of collaborative education provision that involves both China and Finland, leading to degrees, regardless of the forms of degrees (Cai et al., 2019).

Forms of degree provisions include a joint degree program, a double/multiple degree program, and a consecutive degree program.

A joint degree program: a joint degree program awards one joint qualification upon completion of the collaborative program requirements established by the partner institutions (Knight, 2011)

Accountability-oriented model of quality assurance refers to the process of ensuring that teaching and learning align with quality standards and norms set by e.g., government agencies or higher education institutions. Compared with the enhancement-oriented model of quality assurance, the accountability-oriented model is characterized by a lower level of trust and autonomy of education providers, and education providers being more extrinsically motivated to improve their quality of teaching and learning.

A double/multiple degree program: A double/multiple degree program awards at least two individual qualifications at equivalent levels upon completion of the collaborative program requirements established by at least two partner institutions (Knight, 2011).

A consecutive degree program: "A consecutive degree program awards two different qualifications at consecutive levels upon completion of the collaborative program requirements established by the partner institutions" (Knight, 2011).

Enhancement-oriented model of quality assurance refers to the continuous process of improving the quality of teaching and learning to better meet the quality expectations and needs of students, employers, and society. Compared with the accountability-oriented model of quality assurance, the enhancement-oriented model is characterized by a higher level of trust and autonomy of education providers, and education providers tend to be more intrinsically motivated to improve their quality of teaching and learning.

Quality assurance is "about ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and processes in places to ensure the desired quality, however defined and measured, is delivered" (Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 19).

Quality is defined as “fitness for mission” meaning the institution is fulfilling its own stated objectives, or mission (Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 19).

Appendix 3 Template of course feedbacks (Example from Tampere University)

Course feedback is part of the education feedback system and is collected throughout students' studies. In order to develop degree education, feedback from students should be actively collected at different phases of university studies. Six universal questions have been created in the system, which are asked on all feedback forms. In addition, teachers can add their own course-specific questions to the feedback form. In accordance with the decision of the Vice President of Education, the universal questions in the system are:

- Which aspects of the course went well in terms of your learning? (open)
- How would you develop the course? (open)
- In your opinion, how well did you achieve the learning outcomes of the course? (1= sufficiently, 2= satisfactorily, 3= well, 4= very well, 5= excellently, n/a= cannot answer)
- Assess the work amount of the course in relation to the credits (approx. 27 h/credit). (too heavy - somewhat too heavy - appropriate - somewhat too light - too light)
- I think that non-discrimination and equality were achieved in the teaching situations (e.g. lectures) of the course.
  (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree)
- Give the course an overall assessment.
  (1= sufficient, 2= satisfactory, 3= good, 4= very good, 5= excellent, n/a= cannot answer)

Providing feedback is voluntary at the Tampere University. If feedback is a prerequisite for completing the course (e.g. in part of medical studies), it must be described in the curriculum. Although giving feedback is voluntary at the Tampere University, the university encourages students to give feedback and teachers to respond to student feedback. By giving feedback, students have the opportunity to influence the content of studies, teaching and the development of education. Feedback enables teachers to develop their own courses and teaching tools.

Your feedback is anonymous and cannot be linked to you unless you provide information that identifies you. Offensive or otherwise inappropriate feedback is neither appropriate nor permitted. If feedback is inappropriate, the person providing the feedback may be identified by the system administrators.

Course feedback is processed mainly by the teachers responsible for the course. Feedback is also processed by the planning groups of degree and doctoral programmes as well as various events related to the development of studies, many of which include student representation.

Appendix 4 Evaluation form of students' employability (Example from MARIHE program)

Employability of __[name of program]__ Graduates survey

Dear [Name of the program] graduate,

The [Name of the program] consortium would like to invite you to participate in the anonymous online survey to get feedback on your employability and the overall impact of the programme. It will take approx. 20 min of your time. Please fill in the questionnaire by _____, 20_. Thank you!

Personal background**:**

1. Year of graduation:
2. Which track did you follow? □ research □ management
3. Gender □ Male □ Female

4. Current country of residence:
5. Do you reside in your home country?

☐ Yes

☐ No

6. Your occupation before enrolling in the _____ program

Current occupation:

7. What was the scope of your search for career opportunities?

☐ International

☐ Within my home country

☐ Within my home town

☐ Within the organization I worked prior to [Name of the program] studies

8. What is your current status? (please answer the applicable follow up questions)

□ I am employed/self-employed (excluding PhD positions) (proceed with Q. 9-14)

□ I continue my studies (e.g. PhD, another Master…) (proceed with Q. 15-17)

□ I am unemployed (proceed with Q. 18)

Questions for employed and self-employed:

9. Are you working in the area related to your studies?

☐ Not at all (Please specify _____

)

☐ Partly

☐ Mostly

☐ Fully

9. a) Please specify your organization and position, for us to be proud of you☺ (Optional)

_____

10. How well do you feel the [Name of the program] prepared you for your current job?

1 Not at all ----------7 Very well

Comments:

11. How long did it take you to find your first job after graduation?

- I resumed work in the same organisation, right after graduation
- Less than a month
- 1 – 3 months
- 4 – 6 months
- 6 months-1 year
- more than 1 year

11 a) If you went back to the organization where you had been working prior to [Name of the program] studies, do you work in the same position?

- Yes
- No, I got promoted
- No, I got a different position at the same level

11 b) What was the decisive factor that helped you get the current job?

_____

12. What is the employment nature of your current job?

☐ temporary part-time

☐ temporary full-time

☐ permanent full-time

☐ permanent part-time

13. How do you compare your current occupation in terms of salary with the one you had prior to joining the [Name of the program] program?

☐ I earn less

☐ the salary is about the same

☐ I earn more

14. How satisfied are you with your current work? (After this move to Q. 19)

1- very dissatisfied ----------7- very satisfied

Questions for those who continue their studies

15. What level of studies are you enrolled in?

☐ Masters

☐ PhD

☐ Other

Please specify if 'other':

16. Is your current area of study related to the field of higher education/innovation studies?

☐ 1 Not at all---------- 7 Fully

17. How well do you feel the [Name of the] program prepared you for your current studies? (Then continue with Q. 19)

1 Not at all ----------7 Very well

Comments:

Question for those who are unemployed

18. The reasons for me being unemployed are:

☐ Not related to the ___name of the _____ program

☐ Related to the ___name of the_____ program

Please elaborate _____

[Name of the] program evaluation:

19. How satisfied are you with the [Name of the] programme in overall?

1- very dissatisfied ----------7- very satisfied

20. How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the [Name of the program] vis-à-vis your employability:

	very dissatisfied	dissatisfied	moderately satisfied	satisfied	very satisfied
curriculum					
mobility scheme					
networking opportunities					
career mentoring by academic stuff, alumni					
internship					
master thesis project					
language training					

21. Was there any particular course/aspect of the program that affected your employability?

_____

22. Which content/module would you add to the programme, if any, in order to improve employability of graduates?

_____

23. How do you rate your own level of competences and skills after graduating from [Name of the program] ? (1=very low, 5= very high)

	1	2	3	4	5
a. Mastery of your own field or discipline	○	○	○	○	○
b. Decision making skills	○	○	○	○	○
c. Research skills	○	○	○	○	○
d. Ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge	○	○	○	○	○
e. Leadership skills	○	○	○	○	○

f. Team working skills	○	○	○	○	○
g. Problem-solving skills	○	○	○	○	○
h. Ability to coordinate activities / projects	○	○	○	○	○
i. Creative/innovative thinking	○	○	○	○	○
g. Communication / social skills	○	○	○	○	○
k. Presentation skills	○	○	○	○	○
l. Ability to write reports and documents	○	○	○	○	○
m. Inter-cultural competences	○	○	○	○	○
n. Foreign language proficiency	○	○	○	○	○
o. Handling complexity	○	○	○	○	○
p. Entrepreneurial skills	○	○	○	○	○

Comments _____

24. What other benefits have you derived from the [Name of the program] in terms of personal and professional development?

_____

25. What changes in the [Name of the] program would you recommend to help future graduates?

_____

26. Did you experience any difficulties with the recognition of the [Name of the] joint/double Master degree?

☐ No

☐ Yes

If yes, please elaborate

_____

27. What follow up projects/activities do you have with other [Name of the program] graduates or staff?

-we have joint publications

-we are involved in joint projects*

-we exchange information on _____ FB group

-social get together activities

-no follow up activities

*Please give examples of projects: _____

28. What activities do you think the Consortium should organize for its graduates in order to improve their employability?

_____

29. Anything else that we missed out but you would like to discuss?

_____

Thank you for your feedback!