Delving into double degrees: The case of Victorian universities in Australia

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Introduction

- Double degrees (DD) play a key role in meeting future global workforce needs
- Employers find DD graduates more versatile and well-rounded (Moulton et al. 2011)
- Today’s graduates are likely to have several career changes (Bialik 2010)
- Pressure on tertiary sector to ensure relevance, currency and breadth
DD are becoming increasingly popular (Knight 2011)
There are doubts over the design, effectiveness and legitimacy of DD (Knight 2011)
AQF is silent on DD
Scant research on DD
Two themes explored:
  ◦ How do Victorian /Australian universities present information about DD?
  ◦ How are DD constructed?
What is a double degree?

- Various terms used including:
  - Joint, double, dual, integrated, collaborative, consecutive, concurrent, overlapping, parallel, simultaneous
- Awarded by one institution or two?
- Same discipline or different?
- No universal agreement
Double degrees defined

We have defined them as:
- two separate UG degrees
- from different subject areas
- studied concurrently or sequentially
- at the same institution
I– shaped graduate – possess depth of knowledge

T–shaped graduate – cross disciplinary expertise as well as developed soft skills

T–shaped professional
Leonard – Barton (1995)
Graduate outcomes

- Enhanced employment outcomes are a key motivator for studying DD
- DD graduates 80% chance of employment cf 75.6% for single degree graduates (GCA 2012)
- Median commencing salary – about $3000 higher for DD graduates
- Some employers value relevant work experience more than extra studies (Moulton et al 2011)
Double degrees

- **Europe** (Schule 2006):
  - Increase student mobility
  - Improve graduate employability
  - Benefits to collaborating universities

- **Australia** (Hobsons n.d.)
  - Reasons students study DDs
    - Offers opportunity for broad education
    - Students cannot choose between fields
    - Better suits careers goals
Double degrees...

- **Benefits** (Russell et al. 2008)
  - Prepares grads for several careers
  - Equips students with unique combination of transferable skills and literacies
  - Opportunity to develop transdisciplinary knowledge

- **Concerns** (Homewood 2013)
  - Take longer to complete
  - Cost more – time and $
  - Are they delivering value?

- DD appear to be a technical and administrative construct
Methodology

- Content analysis from
  - VTAC
  - Victorian university websites
  - University course guides

- Analysed using NVIVO
## Prevalence of DD – 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>No of UG degrees offered</th>
<th>No of double degrees</th>
<th>% double degrees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACU</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deakin</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federation University</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Trobe</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monash</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swinburne University of Technology</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria University</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>977</strong></td>
<td><strong>287</strong></td>
<td><strong>29.4%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Describing DDs
Two different degrees in diverse discipline areas;
Shorter duration;
Diverse skills, knowledge and competence development;
Educational, personal and social experiences enriched and widened;
Displays commitment and strong work ethic as DD are more challenging;
Graduates are competitive, have increased career choices and greater employment opportunities.

(Source: Summary from web-published information of Victorian universities)
Purpose and benefits...
Entry requirements

- DD are perceived to be more prestigious and desirable
- No consistent message regarding entry requirements

Sometimes:
- Higher of the two degrees
- Higher than either degree
- Lower than requirements for one degree
Structure of DD

- No consistent approach

- Often administrative rather than pedagogical design (Russell et al. 2008)

- Some have integrated units although most have no integration

- Some but not all preserve structure of individual degrees

- Moutlon et al. (2011) – critical of DD as they dilute discipline knowledge (ie Engineering)
Conclusion

- No global understanding of DD
- 29% of UG courses in Victoria are DD
- Most common way of presenting basic information about DD
  - Two
  - Careers
  - Skills
- Inconsistencies have been highlighted
- Anomalies discovered
- Now we need to take this research into the field
Thank you

Any questions?

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