

# Program Coherence in LSE Double Degree Programs

## INTRODUCTION

LSE European Institute offers four double Master's degree programs with international partners:

1. **LSE-Bocconi Double Degree in European and International Public Policy and Politics (London & Milan)**
2. **LSE-Sciences Po Double Degree in European Studies (London & Paris)**
3. **LSE-Fudan Double Degree in the Global Political Economy of China and Europe (London & Shanghai)**
4. **LSE-Columbia Double Degree in European Politics, Conflict and Culture (London & New York)**

These programs allow students to spend one year at LSE and one year at a partner institution, leading to two degrees. They aim to provide students with a rich transnational learning experience. However, the dual structure introduces complexity in curriculum alignment, academic culture, and administrative coordination.

### This study:

- Evaluates programme coherence from student and staff perspectives
- Focuses primarily on the **LSE-Bocconi** and **LSE-Fudan** programmes
- Uses insights from primary & **secondary data**
- Considers **broader implications** for the **LSE-Sciences Po** and **LSE-Columbia** programmes.

## METHODOLOGY

The study used a **mixed-methods approach**, combining **first-hand data with institutional secondary data**. The primary research **focused on the LSE-Bocconi Double Degree in European and International Public Policy and the LSE-Fudan Double Degree in the Global Political Economy of China and Europe**. These two were selected for access and to **contrast a European vs. non-European partner**.

A **short survey was distributed** to second-year students from these two programs during their LSE year. **~29.6% of the 27 entrants in the 2024–25 academic year responded**. The survey included Likert-scale questions and open-ended responses about curriculum design, support systems, and overall satisfaction. In addition, a **semi-structured interview was conducted with the program director of the LSE-Bocconi double degree**, offering institutional insights into how program structure, academic alignment, and communication have evolved. Secondary data— e.g. SSLC minutes, institutional summaries, and graduate surveys—were analysed to contextualise findings across all four double degree programs. *While primary data focuses on Fudan and Bocconi, the analysis has observations relevant to LSE-Sciences Po and LSE-Columbia programmes.*

## REFERENCES

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## LIT. REVIEW

Literature on transnational joint and dual degrees highlights several challenges to program coherence. **A key issue is curriculum misalignment**. **Knight and de Wit (2011)** emphasise that many joint programs suffer from duplicative rather than complementary coursework, undermining their added value. **Varano and Verspeeten (2019)** suggest that deliberate design around complementarity, rather than simple course mirroring, enhances coherence. Pedagogical divergence is another recurring theme. **Healey (2008)** notes that different teaching styles and expectations (e.g., lecture-driven vs. discussion-based formats) can cause adjustment difficulties if not clearly communicated. Similarly, **Brandenburg and Federkeil (2007)** stress that inconsistent academic standards between institutions can lead to imbalanced experiences. Administrative coordination is equally important. A study by the **American Council on Education (2014)** found that double degree programs often face friction over credit transfer, grading scales, and calendar mismatches, which students feel most acutely. **Qiang (2013)** underscores that administrative misalignment—not academic design—is often the biggest challenge to program sustainability.

## FINDINGS

### Administrative Coordination and Information Gaps

**Students reported several coordination issues impeding a seamless administrative experience**. A clear theme: a lack of transparent communication between partner institutions and towards students. In the survey, 0% of respondents agreed that the statement of “clear communication and support from both institutions” was satisfactory. **Analysed SSLC student representatives’ minutes also underlined information gaps** – such as students not being fully briefed on the partner school's grading criteria and timetable quirks – which could cause anxiety especially transitioning to LSE. Another coordination challenge was dealing with bureaucratic procedures and support services in two systems. Students had to navigate two sets of online portals, two library systems, and sometimes visa and housing logistics without a single point of contact. While each university has its own support offices, the double degree students perceived a lack of joined-up administrative guidance. This is reflected in our survey's improvement suggestions: “better administrative coordination between the two institutions” was a top recommendation, raised by multiple students. Likewise, respondents called for “improved communication of program expectations and requirements,” underscoring that more transparency is needed in conveying how the double degree works in practice.

### Student Experience: Cultural Integration, Mobility, and Workload

The double degree immerses students in two distinct environments, arguably both its greatest benefit and challenge. Our findings support this positive aspect: the program director observed LSE-Bocconi students benefit from “the combination of two different styles,” becoming **adept at both performance-driven study and critical thinking**. Students themselves appreciated developing adaptability and a global outlook. However, the **cultural integration aspect could be challenging**. One survey respondent admitted “sometimes feeling hard to fit in to [the] Chinese culture” during the year in Shanghai. Navigating language barriers, academic norms (e.g. classroom participation styles), and social integration in a new country required significant adjustment.

Additionally, the **transition timing can be stressful**. The most striking example is the requirement for two separate master's theses - survey respondents cited “having to **write two dissertations and managing the coordination of the two**” as a major format drawback. Balancing dual academic commitments – often with overlapping deadlines – can negatively affect student well-being. Moreover, differences in grading standards and workload (e.g. some partner schools assigning more continuous assessment vs. final exams at LSE) made the second-year adjustment challenging. **2024 program survey data reflects one such outcome: only 33% of LSE-Sciences Po double degree students felt the balance of study was appropriate, suggesting workload distribution issues.**

## FINDINGS CONTINUED

### Course Coherence and Curriculum Alignment

Our results show significant gaps and overlaps between curriculums. The LSE-Bocconi programme director highlighted students arriving at LSE found that the core quantitative courses were “a bit too easy” after rigorous training at Bocconi. The program subsequently negotiated with Bocconi to allow students to take more advanced methods courses better suiting their skill level. While this adjustment reflects a positive restructuring effort to ensure academic content continuity, student feedback indicates that content overlap continues as an issue. y was appropriate, suggesting workload distribution issues.

## DISCUSSIONS

Administrative friction is found in all partnerships. The administrative “two halves” model strands students in the middle. **Creating a shared guidance document and assigning co-coordinators would reduce confusion**. Inconsistency between the requirements of the two institutions can lead to student anxiety, especially during times of transition. Workload intensity is another cross-cutting issue. Multiple programs require students to complete dual theses, internships, or independent studies with little to no downtime. This reduces academic depth and impacts physical and mental health. In sum, while the context of each program is different, the challenges they face - curricular alignment, administrative coordination, and workload distribution - are common. Improvements in these areas would benefit the entire dual-degree portfolio at LSE.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Regular Joint Curriculum Reviews

Each partnership should conduct annual or biennial curriculum mapping sessions. These meetings would identify overlapping topics, sequence progression better, and ensure that first-year courses feed into second-year ones.

### 2. Enhance Communication and Transparency

Develop a single shared document or microsite for each program outlining all key dates, course structures, grading policies, and contact points. Assigning a liaison at each institution to handle student concerns would improve responsiveness and cohesion.

### 3. Monitor Workload and Adjust Scheduling

Consider allowing a jointly supervised thesis that satisfies both institutions. Breaks between academic years or flexible start dates should be introduced to avoid burnout. Periodic surveys on workload fairness should inform future program adjustments.

## CONCLUSION

LSE's double degree programs represent a great attempt to internationalise postgraduate education. While students benefit from cultural immersion and academic diversity, this report recommends **deeper alignment is needed in curriculum, communication, and scheduling**. By embedding regular reviews, transparent communication, and better workload management, LSE can strengthen the coherence and impact of its transnational offerings, delivering a truly integrated double degree experience.

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