



Quality Assurance for Joint Programmes  
- dealing with the European Approach -

# Context

1

Despite a rapid increase in the numbers of and enthusiasm for Joint Programmes, their quality assurance remains, in too many cases, (overly) complex.

2

To date the establishment of Joint Programmes, in particular when leading to a joint diploma, has often been **complicated by (different) requirements posed by national legislation and associated QA procedures and criteria.**

3

The identification of **approaches to QA that take into account the truly 'joint' nature of a programme**, considering it as a whole rather than a sum of separately assessed and quality assured parts, have proved challenging.

# The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes



Intended to:

- ✓ **dismantle** an important obstacle to the development of Joint Programmes by setting standards for these programmes that are based on the agreed tools of the EHEA, without applying additional national criteria, and
- ✓ **facilitate** integrated approaches to quality assurance of Joint Programmes that genuinely reflect and mirror their joint character.



This new European approach is intended to:

- ✓ **be applicable across different systems of external QA**
- ✓ **provide a set of Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA**
- ✓ **set out a common Procedure for External Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA**

The new approach was endorsed by the BFUG in November 2014 and by the Yerevan Ministerial Conference in May 2015;

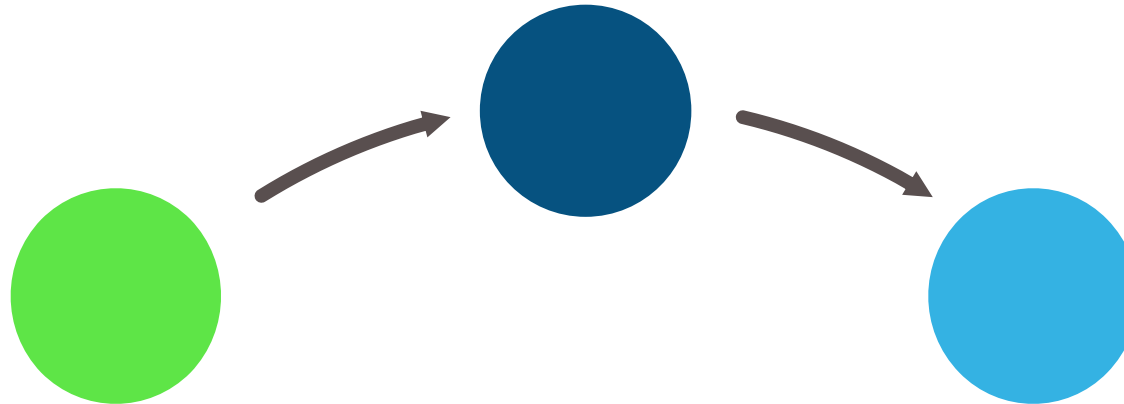
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# Application in Different Systems of External QA

**The European Approach should be applied depending on the needs of the cooperating higher education institutions and the requirements of their national frameworks.**

**The agency will use the Standards and the Procedure to carry out a single evaluation or accreditation of the entire joint programme. The result is to be accepted in all EHEA countries.** Dependent on the national legal framework, the external quality assurance decision should come into force or be recognised in all countries where the programme is offered, as agreed in the Bucharest Communiqué.

If some of the cooperating higher education institutions require external quality assurance at programme level (e.g. programme accreditation or evaluation is mandatory), then the cooperating institutions should select a suitable quality assurance agency from the list of EQAR-registered agencies.



If all cooperating higher education institutions are subject to external quality assurance at institutional level only and have “self-accrediting” status for the programmes they offer, they may use the European Approach in setting up joint internal approval and monitoring processes for their joint programmes (according to ESG 1.2 & 1.9), if they deem it useful in their context.

The European Approach may also be used for joint programmes that are offered by higher education institutions from both within and outside the EHEA.

# Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA

## ELIGIBILITY

# 1

### 1.1 Status

The institutions that offer a joint programme should be recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries. Their respective national legal frameworks should enable them to participate in the joint programme and, if applicable, to award a joint degree. The institutions awarding the degree(s) should ensure that the degree(s) belong to the higher education degree systems of the countries in which they are based.

### 1.2 Joint design and delivery

The joint programme should be offered jointly, involving all cooperating institutions in the design and delivery of the programme.

### 1.3 Cooperation Agreement

The terms and conditions of the joint programme should be laid down in a cooperation agreement, which should cover the following issues:

- ✓ denomination of the degree(s) awarded in the programme
- ✓ coordination and responsibilities of the partners involved regarding management and
- ✓ financial organisation (including funding, sharing of costs and income etc.)
- ✓ admission and selection procedures for students
- ✓ mobility of students and teachers
- ✓ examination regulations, student assessment methods, recognition of credits and
- ✓ degree awarding procedures in the consortium.

# Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA

## LEARNING OUTCOMES 2

### 2.1 Level [ESG 1.2]

The **intended learning outcomes should align with the corresponding level in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA)**, as well as the applicable **national qualifications framework(s)**.

### 2.2 Disciplinary field

The intended **learning outcomes** should comprise **knowledge, skills, and competencies** in the respective disciplinary field(s).

### 2.3 Achievement [ESG 1.2]

The programme should be able to demonstrate **that the intended learning outcomes are achieved**.

### 2.4 Regulated Professions

If relevant for the specific joint programme, the minimum agreed training conditions specified in the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC, or relevant common trainings frameworks established under the Directive, should be taken into account.

# Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA

## STUDY PROGRAMME 3 [ESG 1.2]

### 3.1 Curriculum

The structure and content of the curriculum should be fit to enable the students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

### 3.2 Credits

**The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) should be applied properly and the distribution of credits should be clear.**

### 3.3 Workload

A joint bachelor programme will typically amount to a total student workload of 180-240 ECTS-credits; a joint master programme will typically amount to 90-120 ECTS-credits and should not be less than 60 ECTS-credits at second cycle level (credit ranges according to the FQ-EHEA); for joint doctorates there is no credit range specified.

**The workload and the average time to complete the programme should be monitored.**

# Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA

## ADMISSION AND RECOGNITION

[ESG 1.4]

# 4

### 4.1. Admission

The admission requirements and selection procedures should be appropriate in light of the programme's level and discipline.

### 4.2. Recognition

**Recognition of qualifications** and of periods of studies (including recognition of prior learning) should be applied in line with the **Lisbon Recognition Convention** and subsidiary documents.

## LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

[ESG 1.3]

# 5

### 5.1 Learning and teaching

The programme should be designed to correspond with the intended learning outcomes, and the learning and teaching approaches applied should be adequate to achieve those. **The diversity of students and their needs should be respected and attended to, especially in view of potential different cultural backgrounds of the students.**

### 5.2 Assessment of students

The examination regulations and the assessment of the **achieved learning outcomes should correspond with the intended learning outcomes.** They should be applied consistently among partner institutions.



# Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA

## STUDENT SUPPORT

[ESG 1.4]

# 6

The **student support services** should contribute to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. They should take into account **specific challenges of mobile students**.

## RESOURCES

[ESG 1.5 & 1.6]

# 7

### 7.1 Staff

The staff should be sufficient and **adequate (qualifications, professional and international experience)** to implement the study programme.

### 7.2 Facilities

The facilities provided should be sufficient and adequate in view of the intended learning outcomes.

# Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA

## TRANSPARENCY AND DOCUMENTATION

# 8

**Relevant information about the programme** like admission requirements and procedures, course catalogue, examination and assessment procedures etc. should be well documented and published by taking into account specific needs of mobile students.

## QUALITY ASSURANCE

[ESG 1.1 & part 1]

# 9

The cooperating institutions should apply **joint internal quality assurance processes in accordance with part one of the ESG.**

# Procedure for External Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA

**The cooperating institutions should jointly select a suitable EQAR-registered quality assurance agency.** The agency should communicate appropriately with the competent national authorities of the countries in which the cooperating higher education institutions are based.



## 1. Self-Evaluation Report [ESG 2.3]

The external quality assurance procedure should be based on a self-evaluation report (SER) jointly submitted by the cooperating institutions which should:

- ✓ contain comprehensive information that demonstrates the compliance of the programme with the Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA (part B)
- ✓ contain the necessary information about the respective national frameworks of the cooperating institutions that foreign agencies and experts might need in order to appreciate the context, especially the positioning of the programme within the national higher education systems
- ✓ **focus explicitly on the distinctive feature of the joint programme as a joint endeavour of higher education institutions from more than one national higher education system.**

# Procedure for External Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA



## 2. Review Panel [ESG 2.3 & 2.4]

The agency should appoint a panel of at least **four members**. The panel should:

- ✓ combine expertise in the relevant subject(s) or discipline(s), including the labour market/world of work in the relevant field(s), and expertise in quality assurance in higher education
- ✓ be able to take into account the distinctive features of the joint programme.
- ✓ collectively, possess knowledge of the HE systems of the HEIs involved and the language(s) of instruction used.
- ✓ include **members from at least two countries** involved in the consortium providing the programme, and **at least one student**

**The agency should also:**

- ✓ ensure the impartiality of the experts and observes fairness towards the applying higher education institutions and
- ✓ brief the experts on the review activity, their specific role, and the specifics of the quality assurance procedure.

# Procedure for External Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA



## 3. Site Visit [ESG 2.3]

The site visit should

- ✓ **enable the review panel to discuss the joint programme based on the self-evaluation report and assess whether the programme complies with the Standards (part B).**
- ✓ **include discussions with representatives of all cooperating institutions and in particular the management of the institutions and the programme, the staff, the students, and other relevant stakeholders.**

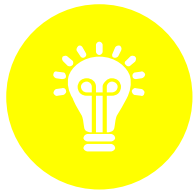


## 4. Review Report [ESG 2.3 & 2.6]

The review panel should prepare a report that contains:

- ✓ relevant evidence, analysis and conclusions with regard to the Standards (part B)
- ✓ recommendations for developing the programme further. The conclusions and recommendations should pay particular attention to the distinctive features of the joint programme.

# Procedure for External Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA



## 5. Formal Outcomes and Decision [ESG 2.5]

If required, the agency should take a decision on the basis of the review report and the recommendation for the decision, considering the comments by the higher education institutions as appropriate. **In case the review results in an accreditation decision, it grants or denies the accreditation (with or without conditions), based on the Standards (part B).**

- ✓ The agency may supplement the formal outcome and the accreditation decision by recommendations.
- ✓ The agency should give reasons for its accreditation decision. This applies in particular for accreditation decisions limited by conditions or negative decisions and for cases where the decision differs from the review panel's conclusions and recommendation for the decision.



## 6. Appeals [ESG 2.7]

**The institutions should have the right to appeal against a formal outcome or an accreditation decision.**

Therefore, the agency should have a formalised appeals procedure in place.

# Procedure for External Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA



## 7. Reporting [ESG 2.6]

The agency should publish the review report and, if applicable, the formal outcome or the accreditation decision on its website.

In case the review was not conducted in English **at least an English summary of the review report and an English version of the decision, including its reasons, should be published.**



## 8. Follow-up [ESG 2.3]

The agency should agree with the cooperating institutions a **follow-up procedure** to assess the fulfilment of conditions – if applicable – and/or to evaluate the follow-up actions on recommendations – if applicable.



## 9. Periodicity [ESG 1.10]

**The joint programme should be reviewed periodically every 6 years**, which should be specified in the published decision. If there is an accreditation decision it should be granted – if the decision is positive – for a period of 6 years. **During the 6-year period the agency should be informed about changes in the consortium offering the joint programme.**

# Challenges in implementing the European Approach QA of Joint Programmes



- ✓ Different regulatory frameworks, and different or ambiguous use of terms between them, were seen as a major impediment to the development / expansion of Joint Programmes.
- ✓ Collaborations through programmes labelled as dual / multiple programmes could achieve (many of) the same goals but with far less difficulties



- ✓ Different national regulatory requirements were seen as ‘not going away, at least in the short term’
- ✓ Different teaching traditions, and particularly assessment practices
- ✓ Issues relating to data – lack off, inconsistencies between, different uses of terminology, difficulties in finding – were highlighted
- ✓ Resourcing and sustainability problems (at technical and personal/ motivational levels) were commonly identified

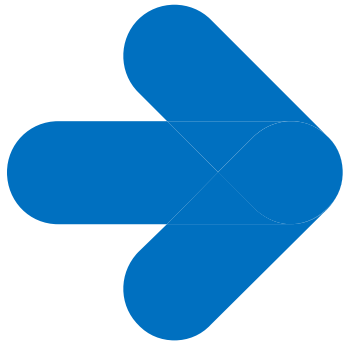


# Recommendations to address challenges



- ✓ identification of possible contradictions in terminologies etc. (initially through QAAs);
  - ✓ dissemination of good practices - through shared 'activities';
  - ✓ clarification regarding different assessment systems (with clear regulations where needed);
  - ✓ identification/clarification of the specific (added) value of Joint Programmes).
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- ✓ There is a need for a **more consistent approach to regulatory frameworks**, and where necessary incorporation of key aspects in national legislation. A (legal) problem here however is that different national legislations use different definitions for some of the key terms.
  - ✓ **Trust building is identified as a key element** – through discussions, comparisons and explanations. An identified paradox was, however, that the level of trust (and autonomy / motivation) and the extent of regulation (at national and institutional levels) are inversely correlated (regulation was reported as 'demotivating').

# Cross-cutting themes



- ✓ why bother with Joint Programmes when Double/Multiple programmes are ‘easier’ to set up and run?
- ✓ what are Joint Programmes, and what is their ‘added value’? What are the relationships between modules, options and the overall Joint programme, concerning identification and assessment of JP-specific learning outcomes?
- ✓ resourcing and sustainability concerns – financial, administrative and student records management, personnel
- ✓ academic management – from the strategic to the detailed – including intra-HEI relationships between Joint Programmes and Internationalisation
- ✓ quality assurance – general lack of alignment in both internal (inter- and intra- HEI) and external (between QA agencies) concerning needs, cycles, standards, criteria and procedures, and in the use of different definitions / interpretations of common (key) words.
- ✓ national legal frameworks and their (continuous) revisions; and the relationship between national policy/ requirements and Bologna Process initiatives

**‘Cross-cutting’ themes and questions are found to recur irrespective of the phase of development or delivery of a Joint Programme, or its evaluation/quality assurance, and have been raised by ministries, QA agencies or HEIs**

# QA perspectives

A number of QA agency projects provide a substantive, published, evidence base for policy development concerning the QA of Joint Programmes:

- ✓ ENQA TEEP II and the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) TEAM I and II,
- ✓ JOQAR – methodology for JP single evaluation using one national framework (plus any additional required features),
- ✓ MULTRA - mutual recognition of accreditation decisions (including JOQAR).



*The European Approach, accepted by EHEA ministers, includes a set of Standards and Criteria and a Procedure for the single evaluation of a Joint Programme – with outcome validity across the EHEA without the requirement for inclusion of specific national requirements.*

*Although optional, the European Approach can offer huge benefits to JP consortia in reducing their workload in relation to external evaluation and in particular to preparation for (multi country) accreditation.*