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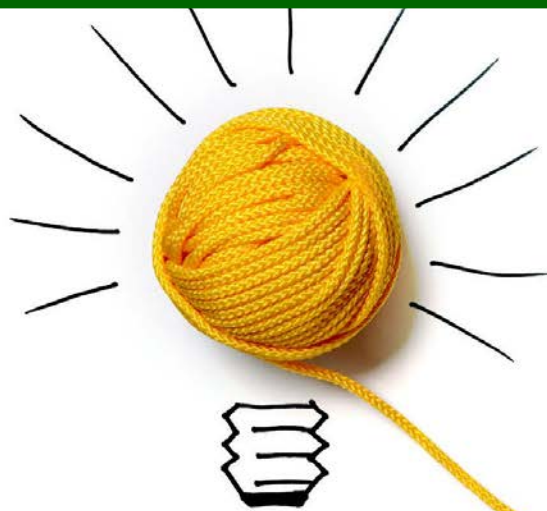


# Materiales presentación Antonio Serrano González

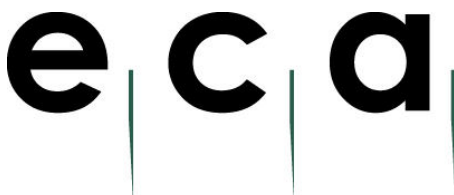
“Estudiar en Europa,  
estudiar en el  
extranjero.  
La movilidad de los  
estudiantes  
universitarios y las  
dobles titulaciones”.

Universidad de Zaragoza  
30 de noviembre de 2016

# Joint Programme Checklist: inspired by quality assurance



Axel Aerden



european consortium for accreditation



# Joint Programme Checklist: inspired by quality assurance

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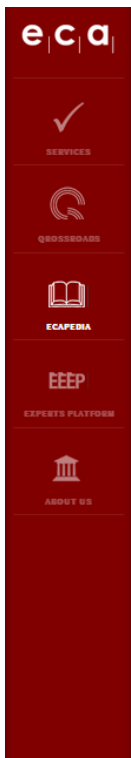
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*“The Joint programmes portal provides information on the quality assurance of joint programmes, including accreditation issues, on the recognition of degrees awarded by joint programmes and on Erasmus Mundus.”*



Home Joint Programmes Training experts

Portal: [Discussion](#)

## Portal: Joint programmes



The Joint programmes portal provides information on the quality assurance of joint programmes, including accreditation issues, on the recognition of degrees awarded by joint programmes and on Erasmus Mundus. In addition, the portal provides a check-list for joint programmes.

### Terminology

A clear presentation of the joint programme terminology and its concepts, with background information and agreed upon definitions.

### The Check-list

The Check-list provides the lessons learnt from quality assurance as good practices for developing and managing joint programmes.

### Practical guidelines

These practical guidelines come from different sources and cover several topics, such as sustainability, employability, etc.

### Key publications

An overview of the most relevant publications with for each a link to a dedicated article and the download page.

### Quality assurance

How to deal with specific internal and external quality assurance and with varying national quality assurance regimes.

### Erasmus Mundus

Everything you need to know about Erasmus Mundus, including an overview of all Erasmus Mundus Master and Doctorate programmes.

### Recognition

Awarding degrees for joint programmes and the recognition of these degrees require specific information and documentation.

### Article overview

All the articles which are part of the Joint programmes portal are available here and presented alphabetically.

<http://ecahe.eu/joint-programme-portal/>

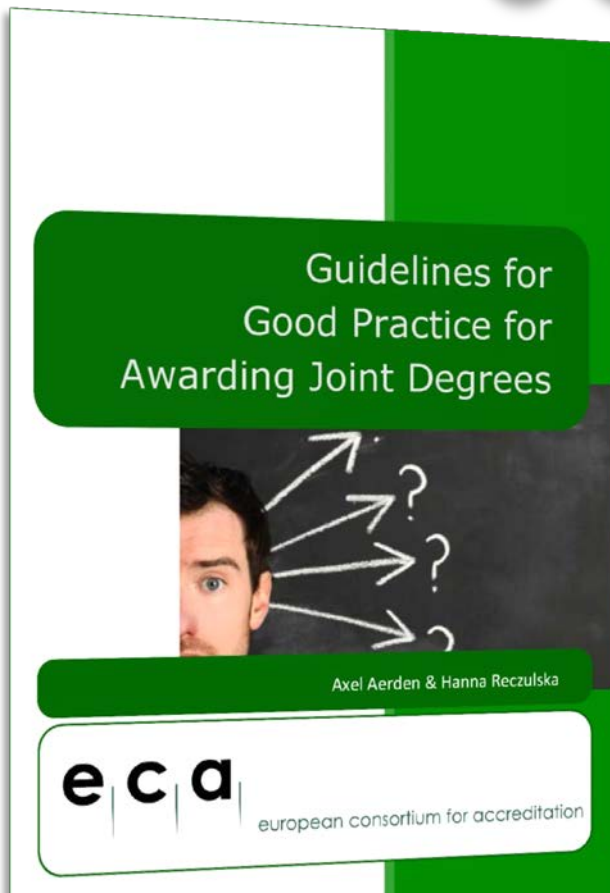
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“

*“How to award a joint degree in such a way that it is recognisable and indeed recognised? When is a joint degree regarded as an official degree in countries outside, but sometimes even inside, the joint programme consortium? How can the design of the joint degree and the Diploma Supplement facilitate access to the labour-market?”*

”



<http://ecahe.eu/guidelines-for-good-practice-for-awarding-joint-degrees>



## 1. Introduction

**T**he last decade has seen the rapid expansion of higher education institutions offering joint programmes. That these joint programmes have been and still are confronted with – often unforeseen – challenges, is now understood by

all stakeholders. Several higher education stakeholders have therefore cooperated to facilitate the activities of joint programmes. These initiatives and projects have focused on practices and activities: on how to manage joint programmes, on how to quality assure and

accredit joint programmes, on how to award and recognise joint programmes' degrees. These issues are of course important.

This publication is however intended to be neither policy-based nor policy-oriented. It aims to present what quality assurance agencies have learnt from assessing joint programmes. The presentation takes the form of a checklist since this makes the information easily accessible and digestible.

This checklist is intended to increase the success of joint programmes by presenting elements deemed to be good practices. The good practices presented here come from

assessment reports, the formal outcomes of external quality assurance and accreditation procedures. They were thus put forward by peers and experts. The appraisal as good practice can be very explicit (“The panel regards this as a good practice.”) but it can also be more

implicit (“The panel applauds the joint programme for this approach.”). Inclusion into the checklist therefore involves some interpretation by the author. In addition, some

**This checklist is intended to increase the success of joint programmes by presenting elements deemed to be good practices.**

**The checklist presents what quality assurance agencies have learnt from assessing joint programmes.**



elements (“criteria”) from (inter)national quality assurance frameworks specific for joint programmes have been included as a standard-setting practice.

It is important to note that the checklist presented here is not a “to do list”. The checklist is to be interpreted as a list of things that might be checked, not as a list of things to be done. Joint programme consortia can use the checklist as a list of elements that might inspire their practice. Each element includes a short explanatory note or substantiation, mainly for inspirational purposes.

To conclude, and especially from a quality assurance point of view, checklists should not be used as a replacement for common sense.

## 2. Defining quality

Is there a more fundamental question for quality assurance, than the question “How can we define quality?”. The question is also readily used to oppose any approach to value quality. If you cannot define quality, how can you then assess quality?

Already in 200 BC, the Han dynasty introduced a system of quality control in the



*"The wooden core by Yi, lacquering by Li, top-coat lacquering by Dang, gilding of the ear- handles by Gu, painting by Ding, final polishing by Feng, product inspection by Ping, supervisor-foreman Zong. In charge were Government Head Supervisor Zhang, Chief Administrator Liang, his deputy Feng, their subordinate Executive Officer Long, and Chief Clerk Bao."*

production of their lacquer cups.

The lacquer industry was organised under government control and using early processes of mass production. Each lacquer cup produced was neatly engraved around the side stating where that cup was made and which six craftsmen were responsible for each step of the manufacturing process. This created a strong system of ownership and responsabilisation. And then, each cup goes on to list

the seven product inspectors, whose responsibility it was to guarantee the quality of the cup.<sup>1</sup> The focus of quality control was thus mainly on the manufacturing process.

<sup>1</sup> The British Museum, Collection Online, [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=255610&partId=1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=255610&partId=1) (retrieved 1 February 2014)

In the fifties of the twentieth century, a customer's definition of quality was introduced, first in US industry. An distinction was made between *freedom from deficiencies* and *features which meet customer needs and provide customer satisfaction*. Here, fulfilling a customer's requirements is seen as a product's *fitness for purpose* or *fitness for use*.<sup>2</sup>

The discussion of quality was gradually taken up in higher education and moved centre stage in the eighties of the twentieth century. Quality was defined differently in different contexts and higher education systems. The following approaches were distinguished:

- x The notion of exclusivity and high class;
- x Conformance to specifications ("the process", legal framework);
- x Quality as fitness for purpose ("developmental", determining purpose);
- x Quality as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals;
- x Quality as meeting students' stated or implied needs (but not their wants);<sup>3</sup>

From the list above, it is clear that quality is a relative and contextual concept. The different stakeholders of higher education have different perspectives and priorities. It cannot be expected that employers and governments have the same perspective, let alone students and teaching staff. Quality is therefore never a one-dimensional concept. It is better to talk about the different dimensions of quality for higher education or the qualities of higher education. And even this is then for a given moment in time. Perspectives change, the dimensions of quality will also evolve.

When relating this to quality assurance, it must be clear that the basis for assessing quality is always a compromise. The different, competing perspectives are taken into account and priorities are attributed. By bringing the different dimensions of quality together we are temporarily creating a new dimension of quality. This is the defined quality.

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<sup>2</sup> Defeo, J., & Juran, J. M. (2010). *Juran's Quality Handbook: The Complete Guide to Performance Excellence 6/e*. McGraw Hill Professional.

<sup>3</sup> Green, D. (1994). *What Is Quality in Higher Education?*. Taylor & Francis, 1900 Frost Road, Bristol, PA 19007-1598.

### 3. Glossary

In previous projects regarding joint programmes<sup>4</sup>, quality assurance agencies and ENIC-NARICs explored the terminology involved in joint programmes. A glossary of terms and supporting background information was subsequently published<sup>5</sup>. The key terms are listed below. More information about joint programme terminology can be found on the ECApedia's Joint Programme Portal<sup>6</sup>.

#### Degree

Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme.

#### Joint programme

An integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions and leading to a (double/multiple or joint) degree.

#### Joint degree

A single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme.

#### Multiple degree

Separate degrees awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme attesting the successful completion of this programme.

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<sup>4</sup> *Transnational European Evaluation Project II (TEEP II, 2004-2006)*, coordinated by [ENQA](#) and *Transnational European Accreditation decisions and Mutual recognition agreements 2 (TEAM 2, 2008-2010)* coordinated by [ECA](#).

<sup>5</sup> **Aerden, A., Reczulska, H.**, 2013. *Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees*. ECA Occasional Paper, The Hague, p. 11. <http://ecahe.eu/home/services/publications/guidelines-for-good-practice-for-awarding-joint-degrees/>

<sup>6</sup> Joint Programme Portal: [http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Joint\\_programme\\_terminology](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Joint_programme_terminology)

### Double degree

Two degrees awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme attesting the successful completion of this programme.

→ A double degree is a specific type of multiple degree.

### Dual degree

Two degrees awarded individually, attesting the successful completion of two separate curricula, with potential overlap and efficiencies in course-taking, and, if more than one institution is involved, each institution is primarily responsible for its own degree.

→ A dual degree is not awarded for a joint programme.

### Awarding institution

A higher education institution issuing qualifications, i.e. degrees, diplomas or other certificates. In the case of joint degrees, an awarding institution is one of the two or more institutions involved in conferring the joint degree thus formally recognising the achievements of a student enrolled in the joint programme.

### (Joint programme) consortium

A group of two or more higher education institutions and potentially other contributors (e.g. research centres) with the objective of integrating teaching and learning activities for providing a joint programme; although not all participants necessarily award a (joint) degree.

To be complete, the Lisbon Recognition Convention defines a **qualification** as “any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme”<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Council of Europe. 1997. *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region*, Art. 1.

## 4. The checklist

**T**he elements learnt by quality assurance agencies when assessing joint programmes are divided into three sections. The first section presents issues that directly relate to the joint programme consortium, while the second section presents issues that relate to the governance of joint programmes by their consortia. The last section presents the issues that fall under actually offering or managing the joint programme.

### 4.1. Consortium

The consortium refers to the group of higher education institutions and potentially other contributors (e.g. research centres) that have integrated some of their teaching and learning activities in order to provide the joint programme.

#### 4.1.1. Partner selection

- Partners have been preferentially selected from among the institutions, schools, research groups, or programmes with which good working relationships were already established.**

*Partner selection forms the heart of a well-functioning joint programme consortium. Even if selection comes more or less naturally, it needs to be handled carefully. Pre-existing good working relationships are an advantage since they are an indicator of the future potential of the cooperation. If at least one of the partners has such a relationship with one of the other partners, it provides a sound basis for cooperation. If not, partners will need to gather essential information about each other, such as academic and administrative organisation, quality and quantity of staff, facilities, (inter)national reputation, etc.*

- All institutions are recognised and/or accredited as higher education institutions in their (sub)national higher education systems.**

*It is important that the higher education institutions involved in the consortium are allowed to offer the joint programme. This refers first and foremost to the fact that each institution needs to be recognised and/or*

*accredited as a higher education institution in the higher education system in which they operate. This also refers to the fact that the higher education institutions recognise the joint programme as their own.*

- **Each institution can legally offer this type of programme (level, orientation, discipline) as a joint programme.**

*Each higher education institution is (legally) allowed to offer the joint programme, even if the institution is not involved in awarding a degree. This refers to the concern that higher education institutions without the competence or appropriate recognition to offer a certain programme (e.g. master's programme) or award a certain degree (e.g. Master of Science), can use a joint programme to do so anyway. Joint programmes then provide an unacceptable escape route out of the national legal framework and the awarded degree could be flagged as illegal in the higher education system of the institution that uses this escape route.*

- **The added-value of this joint programme is clear for all potential partners.**

*The added value for offering a joint programme might differ between partners and between people involved at institutional and at programme level. It might be necessary to grasp the added value for all those involved in order to build on and further strengthen these.*

*The institutional added-value can refer to internationalisation strategies (such as internationalising the campus), reputation building, and strategic networking (for example in research).*

*The added-value at programme level can refer to internationalisation objectives (such as internationalising the classroom, mobility, etc.), offering different perspectives (both theoretical and practical), research collaboration and establishing mobility windows.*

#### 4.1.2. The consortium agreement

- **The consortium agreement is signed by the competent authorities of the partner institutions.**

*The consortium agreement establishes a contractual relationship between the partner institutions. The agreement regulates the partners' responsibilities within the consortium and towards the joint programme. For an effective contractual relationship, the agreement needs to be signed by the competent authorities (rectors, vice-chancellors, etc.) of the partner institutions.*

- **The consortium agreement ensures the necessary and essential support and commitment from all partners.**

*It is clear from both the cooperation agreement and the subsequent implementation that the partners in the consortium agree on the following points:*



- x Overall coordination of the programme and/or sharing of responsibilities;
- x Admission and selection procedures for students;
- x Mobility of students and teachers;
- x Examination regulations, student assessment and recognition of credits in the consortium;
- x Type of degree (joint, multiple) and awarding modalities;
- x Teaching language(s);
- x Coordination and responsibilities regarding internal and external quality assurance;
- x Administration of student's data and performance records;
- x Support for student mobility;
- x Public information on the programme;
- x Financial organisation (including sharing of costs and incomes, charging registration and/or tuition fees, grants and fellowships);
- x Change in partnership;
- x Amending, renewing or terminating the agreement.
- x The relevant national laws and/or regulatory frameworks under which the programme falls;.

*Consortium agreements are regularly ratified (signed) before the competent body of the higher education institution has formally approved the joint programme and/or consortium agreement. The agreement can then include a clause indicating that the agreement enters into force once the relevant competent bodies have approved the joint programme and/or consortium agreement. Here, the full name of each competent body and its institution can be listed. An annex can then be added to the agreement outlining these bodies, their relevant approval and approval date.*

## 4.2. Governance

Governance relates to consistent coordination, solid policies, and reliable decision-making within the consortium. This is how the consortium organises itself, sets rules and policies and implements these.

### 4.2.1. Coordination

- Each partner has identified a local coordinator.**

*The overall agreement on how the consortium agrees to coordinate its activities is included in the consortium agreement. In addition, there are various approaches to coordinate the joint programme's activities within each partner. To smoothen practical matters and address accountability concerns, each partner identifies a person (or preferably a function) to act as the local coordinator. Local coordinators are responsible for the joint*

*programme within that partner institution and furthermore act as the main contact person for the other consortium partners.*

#### 4.2.2. Learning outcomes

- **The intended learning outcomes are developed and shared by all partners.**

*In European higher education, learning outcomes are considered the most transparent way to present a programme's aims and objectives. A joint programme's intended learning outcomes make clear what a student is expected to be able to know, to understand and to be able to do after having successfully completed the curriculum.<sup>8</sup>*

- **The intended learning outcomes align with the corresponding level in the relevant qualifications framework.**

*When defining the joint programme's intended learning outcomes, the consortium takes great care to align these to the corresponding cycle or level in the relevant national and/or overarching qualifications framework. This correspondence ensures that the level of the joint programme is indeed regarded as at Bachelor's, Master's or Doctorate level.*

- **The intended learning outcomes satisfy the requirements of the joint programme's (research) discipline(s) and, where applicable, the professional field.**

*The consortium takes into account the relevant requirements from the joint programme's field of study and underlying subjects or disciplines. These requirements come from current (research) development in that subject/discipline and from the professional field relevant for this joint programme. In addition, relevant regulatory frameworks regarding professional regulation and professional titles need to be accommodated. For example, if the joint programme's graduates are expected to fall under one of the professions included in the European Union Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications<sup>9</sup>, the consortium can demonstrate how it adheres to this directive.*

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<sup>8</sup> Bologna Working Group. (2005) *A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*. Bologna Working Group Report on Qualifications Frameworks (Copenhagen, Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation).

<sup>9</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/qualifications/policy\\_developments/legislation/](http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/policy_developments/legislation/) (retrieved 1 February 2014)

- **The relevance of the joint programme’s learning outcomes is confirmed by alumni, employers, professional organisations and/or a specific professional field.**

*To nurture sustainability and effectiveness, the programme’s intended learning outcomes are shared by the joint programme’s (external) stakeholders. Shared means that all stakeholders can identify and confirm the relevance of the joint programme’s intended learning outcomes. This can be done in many different ways: an advisory body, a regular survey, focus groups, sporadic questionnaires, etc.*

#### 4.2.3. Financial issues

- **The consortium recognises the required financial (and administrative) resources**

*The consortium clarifies the financial (and administrative) resources required at the level of the consortium and, where necessary, at the level of the partners. Especially during the development phase, the resources required will come from the individual partners and not from the joint programme as such. To avoid financial complications, these resources are budgeted beforehand and allocated accordingly. Once the joint programme is offered, the required resources are included in the consortium’s budget.*

- **The consortium applies clear and transparent budgeting.**

*The joint programme budget includes all flows of money. This refers first to incoming and outgoing flows of money but it also refers to the identification of flows of money between partners.*

*The incoming flow of money refers to all income received for the joint programme by the whole consortium. It includes external funding and tuition fees but also the contribution of partners, both financially and in kind (e.g. staff). The outgoing flow of money refers to all expenses. This includes both direct and indirect costs<sup>10</sup> incurred by the consortium in offering the joint programme. (Some indirect costs might be balanced out across all partners and might therefore be perceived as virtual. In reality, this largely depends on usage and thus student mobility.) Specific attention can be given to the way insurance is dealt with by the consortium and whether this needs to be covered and budgeted.*

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<sup>10</sup> Direct costs are directly attributable to the joint programme. Direct costs are those for activities or services that benefit the joint programme, for example salaries for dedicated joint programme staff and facilities required only for the joint programme. Because these activities are easily traced to the joint programme, their costs are usually charged directly. Indirect costs are not directly attributable to the joint programme. They are typically allocated to the joint programme on some basis. They are for activities or facilities that benefit more than just the joint programme. Their precise benefits to the joint programme are often difficult or impossible to trace. For example, it may be difficult to determine precisely how much activities of administrative faculty staff benefit the joint programme.

*The identification of flows of money between partners ensures transparent information regarding each partner's contributions and returns.*

#### 4.2.4. Internal quality assurance

- The consortium has a common understanding of the joint programme's internal quality assurance system.**

*The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area<sup>11</sup> state that higher education should commit itself explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, joint programmes develop and implement a strategy for the continuous monitoring and enhancement of quality.*

*Since each of the partners needs to know that the quality is actually assured, this requires governance of quality assurance at the consortium level. This might include reports, peer reviews, cross-partner analysis of data (from for example questionnaires), etc.*

- Responsibilities for internal quality assurance are clearly shared and coordinated.**

*Two main approaches towards internal quality assurance of joint programmes can be distinguished. First, a system build on existing institutional procedures. In this approach, each partner uses its own approach to quality assure that part of the joint programme for which they are responsible. In this case, all partners need to know exactly what each partner is responsible for and how the outcomes of each partner's procedures are shared. Partners jointly discuss these outcomes and jointly decide on relevant improvement measures. Second, the consortium can establish a dedicated internal quality assurance system. In this approach, the partners use a joint approach to quality assure the totality of the joint programme. In this case, responsibilities can be attributed to specific persons (functions) and/or group of persons (commissions, etc.). Most often, a dedicated internal quality assurance system is actually developed from a system in place at one of the partner institutions.*

*In both cases, consistency, reliability and simplicity are keywords for the quality assurance of joint programmes. A consortium knows whether its internal quality assurance system functions if it can demonstrate effectiveness ("we know when things go wrong") and continuous improvement ("we act when things go wrong").*

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<sup>11</sup> ENQA (ed.) (2005) *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area*. Brussels. [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/ESG\\_3rdedition.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/ESG_3rdedition.pdf) (retrieved: 1 February 2014)

- **The consortium's quality assurance policy covers both the academic and administrative aspects of the joint programme.**

*When joint programmes commit themselves to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, they develop and implement a policy for the continuous monitoring and enhancement of the quality of all aspects of the joint programme. Academic aspects are readily included in quality assurance approaches of joint programmes. Administrative aspects can however also have an impact on quality. It is important to be selective. Not all administrative aspects of the joint programme need specific and continuous attention. A consortium is however able to monitor administrative processes enabling a response when the monitoring shows significant variations. An example of the latter would be quantitative data and automated (comparative) reports regarding application, selection and enrolment figures.*

- **The stakeholders are involved in internal quality assurance activities.**

*The stakeholders of the joint programme can play an active role in any of the quality assurance activities. A joint programme of course identifies its stakeholders itself but typically includes at least students, staff, employers and graduates.*

*Stakeholder groups prioritise differently and can therefore define the quality of the joint programme in a different way. These different perspectives are beneficial for joint programmes. It gives the joint programme more information to deal with stakeholder input. If a joint programme for example asks the employers about the employability of its graduates, it needs to contrast the employers' input with responses from graduate surveys regarding employability issues.*

#### 4.2.5. External quality assurance (and accreditation)

- **The joint programme is offered in accordance with the relevant legal frameworks.**

*Some higher education legal frameworks have specific requirements regarding joint programmes. In these systems, a joint programme needs to be explicitly identified, recognised and/or accredited as a joint programme.*

*In the most restricted interpretation, 'relevant legal frameworks' refers to the frameworks in place in the locations where students actually study.*

- **The joint programme is quality assured and/or accredited as a joint programme.**

*In higher education systems where programme assessment is required, the totality of the joint programme is taken into account. This prevents the assessment of only the credits offered at partner institutions, while the quality of the joint programme is directly linked to its joint offering.*

*But joint programmes can then be subjected to external quality assurance by different quality assurance agencies; once in each of the higher education systems where the joint programme is offered. These external quality assurance procedures can lead to the accreditation of the joint programme, but normally only in one higher education system.*

*This issue has been tackled by a group of quality assurance agencies. They established a formal agreement (“MULTRA”) through which accreditation decisions are recognised (more or less) automatically in several countries.<sup>12</sup> For ad hoc procedures, the single accreditation framework has been developed. This framework complements the MULTRA and prevents the need for joint programmes to still undergo accreditation procedures in the higher education systems that are not part of the MULTRA.<sup>13</sup>*

*The European Consortium for Accreditation offers guidance and assistance for quality assurance and accreditation of joint programmes: <http://ecahe.eu/services-for-joint-programmes/>.*

#### 4.2.6. Information provision

**The partners agree on the proactive and reactive provision of information.**

*Information provision is proactive when it precedes demand. This refers to establishing and updating a dedicated website, the use of recruitment portals and the production of (downloadable and/or printed) brochures. Information is provided consistently by all partner institutions.*

*Information provision is reactive when it is the result of demand. Partners agree on who is responsible for answering questions which come in via e-mail and the website. It is important to distinguish between types of questions. Answering potential applicants is different from answering employers about degrees and diploma supplements.*

**The consortium has a dedicated website.**

*The joint programme information is provided by one original source, preferably a dedicated website. The original source enables localising information for the (websites of) participating institutions.*

*The joint programme website at least outlines the application and selection procedure, the programme’s learning outcomes, the course catalogue (including the credit system(s), workload and student assessments), relevant academic policies, mobility (study path ways) and corresponding visa requirements, the degree awarded (and awarding institutions), services to support mobility (e.g. information about*

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<sup>12</sup> Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes (MULTRA), <http://ecahe.eu/home/services/joint-programmes/multra/> (retrieved: 1 February 2014)

<sup>13</sup> Assessment framework for joint programmes, <http://ecahe.eu/home/services/joint-programmes/single-accreditation/> (retrieved: 1 February 2014)

*housing), relevant labour-market (employability) and (financial and practical) facilities to foster accessibility.*

*The website can be offered in different languages since this can be useful for recruitment purposes. Limiting the website to the language(s) of instruction might however also function as an informal selection tool.*

**Localised information is easily available.**

*Localised information is information which is only relevant when studying at one of the participating institutions. Since students in a joint programme regularly study at different locations, they need to have access to all relevant information regarding these locations. Such information can be national, such as visa requirements, and institutional, such as academic policies. Academic and other relevant policies of partner institutions are particularly relevant when incoming students fall under these institutional policies.*

**Student information is jointly archived.**

*Some joint programmes regularly change their coordinator and/or coordinating institution. This might make it difficult for employers and recognition bodies (e.g. ENIC-NARICs) to contact the joint programme regarding (the degree of) one of their graduates. To overcome this, the information regarding the joint programme and the graduates (archive) is kept available by one partner. This partner (“archive keeper”) is explicitly mentioned on the Diploma Supplement.*

### 4.3. Management

Management is understood to be the continuous enactment of the consortium to run the joint programme. This is how the consortium deals with the lifecycle of offering the joint programme itself.

#### 4.3.1. Application

**The application procedure is outlined on the joint programme website.**

*The information presented includes the application process, the timeline with application deadlines and periods of communication, the admission document and document requirements, the selection criteria, the date(s) of selection and the expected arrival dates at the start of the programme.*

**Whether the application process is organised centrally or decentrally, all partners are informed of or have access to the application information.**

*Applications can be organised centrally or decentrally. A centralised application approach aims to unify application information and communication. This increases the transparency and consistency of the*



*procedure for all applicants. The centralised application procedure is organised by the responsible partner institution(s). In all cases, each consortium partner is informed of or has access to the application information.*

*If all partners organise their own application procedure, the consortium establishes a system to keep all partners informed about the applications received. In addition, the partners understand how each partner's application system works.*

**The application procedure is organised transparently for all those involved.**

*A database-driven online system facilitates the application and selection procedure. The database can make application information accessible to all relevant consortium partners and it can be used throughout both the application and the selection procedure.*

*This system can also be used to update applicants about the procedure in a standardised manner.*

**The consortium has agreed on responsibilities regarding the verification and evaluation of documents submitted during the application procedure.**

*Verification of documents relates to credential evaluation and the detection of fraud. All institutions already have systems in place to deal with this. Consortia agree on how this is handled during the application procedure. In addition, communication with recognition bodies (such as ENIC-NARICs) is agreed upon beforehand and can be channelled through one of the partners.*

#### 4.3.2. Selection

**All responsibilities for (and in) the selection procedure are clearly assigned.**

*Selection acts as a gatekeeper to the joint programme and requires the involvement of all partner institutions. It is clear to all concerned who will assess applications on behalf of the partner institutions. "Who" here refers to individuals or to positions in the joint programme and/or partner institutions. In case a selection commission is responsible for this procedure, it is clear for all (internal and external) stakeholders which persons actually sit on this commission.*

**The selection criteria are shared and unambiguously understood by all involved in the selection procedure.**

*Selection criteria relate to formal academic requirements (level and disciplines or subjects), language proficiency (achievement level and scale) and experience (such as in research). In addition, motivation and references can be included as distinguishing criteria. Shared criteria are essential to match incoming students knowledge and skills with the joint programme's curriculum. It is important that the consortium is aware of*

*regulatory requirements of participating institutions. These may influence the overall selection criteria or demand a certain level of flexibility.*

**□ The same evaluation scale and decision rules are used when assessing students' applications.**

*To ensure consistency, the consortium agrees on an assessment methodology that includes a system of evaluation and the manner in which decisions are taken.*

*Final decisions are formally taken by or on behalf of the relevant governing body (of the joint programme or institutions). In case decisions are taken on behalf of the governing body, this body has mandated persons, partners or a body, such as a selection commission, with this task.*

### 4.3.3. Enrolment

**□ It is clear where students are enrolled and, if relevant, registered.**

*Enrolment is defined as the inclusion of a person on the roll of the higher education institution thus granting student status resulting in entitlements and commitments. Entitlements refer to access to teaching, facilities and services while commitments refer to issues such as fees and credit attainment. Registration is used to refer to the inclusion of a student, someone already enrolled elsewhere, in the records of the higher education institution thus conferring certain entitlements. The entitlement of an enrolled and a registered student are most often identical.*

*Students cannot be enrolled by the consortium since enrolment is typically regulated by national or institutional legislation. Students thus need to be enrolled in at least one of the participating institutions and most often at all the institutions where the student studies or which award a degree to the student.*

**□ The consortium's approach to enrolment and registration take into consideration the manner in which degree awarding takes place.**

*Degree awarding impacts the way enrolment and registration is organised by the consortium. The award of joint degrees on the one hand might require registration (not necessarily enrolment) at all partner institutions which award the joint degree, even if the student has not studied at all the institutions in the consortium. A joint degree here demonstrates that all partner institutions are jointly responsible for the programme, the students and the awarded degree.*

*The award of multiple degrees on the other hand is dealt with differently and mainly depends on the relevant national regulatory framework. Most often, only institutions where the student has had a period of study will award their degree. In that case, it is sufficient that the student is at least registered at those institutions.*

- **Student visa requirements of all the relevant countries are taken into consideration when organising enrolment and registration.**

*The way enrolment and registration is organised by the consortium depends largely on national and/or institutional regulations. In addition to regulations regarding tuition fees and degree awarding, student visa requirements play a pivotal role. These requirements are of primary consideration when developing the enrolment and registration approach. This is essential for a smooth and unburdened mobility experience by all students.*

#### 4.3.4. Tuition fee

- **The consortium has a common policy on tuition fees.**

*A common policy on tuition fees does not necessitate a common fee structure. Such a common fee structure can be difficult as a result of national and institutional regulations. A common policy outlines how tuition fees are calculated irrespective of the actual approach for individual students. Several different fees policies are possible: from quasi individually tailored fees to the same fee for all students.*

*Many consortia have a differential approach to tuition fees based on student nationalities, for example between state and non-state, national and non-national and between European Union and Non-European Union citizens. It might be necessary to have national students of partner institutions enrol at their national institution in order to apply the national tuition fee, e.g. when a country does not allow or has very low tuition fees. This is however not always a solution and consortia regularly opt to (partly) reimburse students from countries with a completely incompatible tuition fee regime.*

- **The published fee takes into account any supplementary fees.**

*Institutions can charge supplementary fees on top of regular tuition fees. These fees can play an important role when the payment of tuition fees is decentralised in the consortium. In general, these supplementary fees will not be calculated as income for the consortium.*

- **Tuition waivers are budgeted and determined before applications open.**

*Tuition waivers can be granted on both socio-economic and performance criteria. Socio-economic criteria can relate to both personal aspects (e.g. income) as well as collective aspects (e.g. GDP per head of a country/region). Performance criteria can relate to prior degrees and to received awards.*

#### 4.3.5. Teaching and learning

- **The content and structure of the curriculum offered across all partner institutions provides the necessary means for achieving the joint programme's intended learning outcomes.**

*A curriculum is understood to be the coherent and structured set of educational content (courses, modules, etc.) covered by a programme and, when completed successfully, leading to a degree. The curriculum provides students with the necessary learning opportunity to achieve all the intended learning outcomes.*

*For example, if a joint programme intends its student to acquire intercultural competences, intercultural learning needs to be integrated in the curriculum (i.e. addressed in specific courses) and in the joint programme's pedagogical approach (e.g. group work).*

- **A common thread in the curriculum facilitates mobility throughout the joint programme.**

*A common thread can help students in understanding the curriculum's coherency. It prevents students from losing the thread and facilitate students to pick up the threads when moving between partner institutions.*

*A common thread is a theme or pattern included in the courses offered throughout the curriculum. It offers a means of interconnecting courses and/or partners and these connections can be made through topics, skills or concepts.*

- **A joint teaching methodology supports the jointly offered curriculum.**

*The teaching methodology refers to the principles and methods of instruction and to the ways of presenting teaching materials or conducting teaching activities. The choice of the teaching methodology depends mainly on the joint programme's intended learning experience, but it may also be heavily influenced by the aptitude and interest of the students.*

*The overall methodology corresponds with the intended learning outcomes of the joint programme and answers the question "How do we need to teach for our students to achieve our intended learning outcomes?"*

*Teaching methods need not be identical across all partner institutions. They do need to be compatible though. A well implemented compatibility between teaching methods strengthens the learning experience of all students.*

#### 4.3.6. Student assessment

- Student assessments are joint programme-specific and applied in a consistent manner.**

*Suitable assessments transparently demonstrate whether students achieve the learning outcomes the joint programme aims for. All types of assessments are here taken into account (such as interim assessments, final examinations, final projects, research assignments, theses and performance evaluations).*

*The examination regulations and the student assessments are applied in a consistent manner among partner institutions and need to be oriented to the intended learning outcomes of the course/module or overall curriculum. Where the same courses/modules are offered by different partners, the same assessment methodology is applied.*

- The consortium has a transparent and common policy on grading.**

*A common policy on grading does not imply the same grading across all locations. When partners apply their own national or institutional grading scale, the system their staff is most familiar with, they develop an interface. The staff involved in the joint programme is familiar with this interface. The ECTS grading scale is the most often referred to as the interface between these grading systems.*

*Some consortia apply a dedicated joint programme grading system and then convert grades to the relevant national or institutional grading scales.*

*A common policy on grading also implies that the consortium recognises how student failure (course/module, internship, thesis) is dealt with, since retaking courses might be unfeasible and resitting exams might not be allowed at some partner institutions.*

- An appeals procedure is available for students.**

*The fact that assessments lead to formal decisions necessitates an appeals procedure. An appeal is a process for requesting a formal change to an official decision. Decisions can for example be challenged by arguing that the assessment regulations or procedures were misapplied.*

#### 4.3.7. Students

- Students receive all the necessary and relevant information before (and on) arrival.**

*Students receive necessary and relevant information before arrival. This explicitly includes information regarding visa requirements throughout*

*the joint programme (such as applying for visa when already in Europe<sup>14</sup>), regarding practical issues when studying (such as housing and student welfare) and regarding introductory courses (such as language courses). Students receive necessary and relevant information on arrival. This usually concerns a welcome package and practical information about being a student in this joint programme.*

**□ The model of student mobility is clearly outlined**

*Mobility is organised in either a fixed or an elective system. In a fixed system, the students follow predefined study paths across the partner institutions. In this case, student mobility will follow clear trajectories.*

*In an elective system, students are free to choose and build their own study path throughout the partner institutions.*

*A combination of both offers students the possibility to choose from a set of fixed study pathways.*

**□ The programme provides adequate services to students in order to facilitate mobility.**

*The student group, types of study pathways and mobility directly affects the range of student services. Different types of study pathways and mobility require different services, such as housing assistance, guidance for incoming and outgoing students, visa support, etc.*

*Students are provided with a range of integrated services before, during and even after their mobility. These services can be offered reactively, when demanded by students, but also proactively, in advance of demand and to ensure better students' use.*

*A wide range of extra-curricular services can provide additional support. Red-tape-to-red-carpet initiatives are an example of how mobility can be streamlined.*

**□ The joint programme has a dedicated alumni network**

*Joint programmes develop and coordinate an alumni network. This ensures that alumni do not need to start their own network (and the joint programme consortium loses a central role in this network). The most common approach to network alumni nowadays is via social media (LinkedIn, Facebook, Google+, etc.). International alumni networks can include national and regional chapters with dedicated activities.*

*The alumni network is a valuable resource for a joint programme. Members of the network are used in feedback panels (for quality assurance purposes) and on the joint programme's "advisory board". Specific members of the network are asked to act as "joint programme ambassador" (with title) on social media.*

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<sup>14</sup> Generally, non-European students must apply for student visa from their home country. Students need to be informed whether there are exceptions for students admitted to a joint programme and whether the joint programme facilitates this in any way.

*The alumni network enables the monitoring of alumni and their career paths, for example through regular surveys. This provides information about the joint programme's labour-market relevance and employability. An alumni network offers its members benefits beyond the social networking component: professional networking (with relevant captains of industry, research groups, etc.), career guidance (events), status (member, chair of a national/regional chapter, "joint programme ambassador"), privilege (e.g. seat on the joint programme's advisory board), etc.*

#### 4.3.8. Degree and diploma supplement

- **The degree is awarded in accordance with the legal frameworks governing the awarding institutions and is recognised as a degree in the higher education systems of the awarding institutions.**

*In order for a degree to be recognised and recognisable, it needs to be acknowledged as the recognised award for this joint programme. This means that the joint degree or each individual degree, in case of multiple degrees, is issued and signed as stipulated in the relevant national legislation.*

- **The joint degree is awarded in accordance with good practices.**

*Degree awarding powers are still -most often- a national competence. The award of a degree, even a joint degree, is therefore regulated. This means that there are no common regulations for awarding joint degrees. To facilitate and improve the full recognition of joint degrees, these degrees need to be awarded in line with the relevant legal frameworks and in accordance with good practice.*

*The European Consortium for Accreditation in cooperation with the ENIC-NARIC network developed Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees.<sup>15</sup> These guidelines provide higher education institutions (and their joint programmes) that award joint degrees with good practices. They clarify the expectations regarding the design and the content of the degree and the Diploma Supplement.*

- **Multiple degrees are clearly identified as being awarded by a joint programme.**

*If the consortium partners are not able to award a joint degree, they can each issue their own degree: a multiple degree. To avoid misinterpretations (e.g. employers) and misrepresentations (e.g. CVs), each of the degrees making up the multiple degree includes a statement*

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<sup>15</sup> Aerden, A., Reczulska, H., 2013. *Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees*. ECA Occasional Paper, The Hague. <http://ecahe.eu/home/services/publications/guidelines-for-good-practice-for-awarding-joint-degrees/>



*that (1) this degree has been awarded for the successful completion of a joint programme; (2) other identified degrees have been awarded; and (3) this degree is presented together with these other degrees.*

- **The Diploma Supplement enables individuals with no prior knowledge of the joint programme to fully comprehend the awarded degree(s).**

*Joint programme consortia bear in mind that those reading their documents need to be able to authenticate that information. The perspective of the potential recipient (credential evaluator, employer, professional body, etc.) is taken into account when designing the Diploma Supplement. It therefore presents the joint programme information as clear and concise as possible.*

## 5. Conclusion

It cannot be stressed enough that the Joint Programme Checklist is not a “to do list”; it should not be regarded as a list of things to be done. Since all items on the list are inspired by quality assurance, the list needs to be interpreted as the elements that

might inspire joint programme practice.

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**All practices in this publication need to be regarded as contextual.**

Although this publication mainly endeavours to present what quality assurance agencies have learnt from assessing joint programmes, the overall intention has been to demonstrate that

there are many joint programme practices which can be regarded as good practices. A good practice can take many different forms and surpasses singular activities. It is a practice that has been demonstrated by an independent source to reliably lead to positive and intended results and to be transferable to other contexts.

All practices in this publication need to be regarded as contextual. The reports outlining the results of joint programme assessments show how creative joint

programmes are in developing new approaches, approaches that fit their reality. That also means that some of these approaches are not transferable to other circumstances. In this sense, and in its strictest interpretation, such intransferable practices are not good practices.

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**The practices presented are thus intended to inspire good practice and increase the success of joint programmes.**

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inspire good practice and increase the success of joint programmes.



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# European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

October 2014

*approved by EHEA ministers in May 2015*

Joint programmes are a hallmark of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). They are set up to enhance the mobility of students and staff, to facilitate mutual learning and cooperation opportunities and to create programmes of excellence. They offer a genuine European learning experience to students. Joint degrees express the “jointness” also in the awarding of the degree.

The present European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes has been developed to ease external quality assurance of these programmes. In particular, it will:

- 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.

The EHEA is characterised by a diversity of approaches to external QA, including accreditation, evaluation or audit at the level of study programmes and/or institutions. While responding to the needs and requirements of their respective context, these different approaches find their “common denominator” in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The ESG apply to quality assurance procedures of joint programmes as to all other types of programmes. Thus, the European Approach is mainly based on the ESG and on the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). In addition, the European Approach takes into account the distinctive features of a joint programme and, thus, specifies the ‘standard’ approach accordingly. The procedure and criteria are closely based on those developed and tested within the JOQAR project.

“Joint programmes” are understood as an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions from EHEA countries<sup>1</sup>, and leading to double/multiple degrees<sup>2</sup> or a joint degree<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This proposal relates only to joint programmes offered jointly by higher education institutions from two or more countries, and does not address the quality assurance of programmes delivered jointly by different institutions from a single country.

<sup>2</sup> Separate degrees awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme attesting the successful completion of this programme. (If two degrees are awarded by two institutions, this is a ‘double degree’).

<sup>3</sup> A single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme.

## A. 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:

- 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<sup>4</sup> from the list of EQAR-registered agencies.

The agency will use the Standards (part B) and the Procedure (part C) 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 **all cooperating higher education institutions** are subject to **external quality assurance at institutional level** only and have “self-accrediting” status, 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.

Hence, in these cases no additional external evaluation or accreditation procedures at the programme level are necessary.

- The European Approach may also be used for joint programmes that are offered by higher education institutions from both within and outside the EHEA. Involved institutions from non-EHEA countries are encouraged to inquire whether their national authorities would accept the Standards (part B) and be able to recognise the decision of an EQAR-registered agency, if applicable.

## B. Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA

### 1. Eligibility

#### 1.1 Status

The institutions that offer a joint programme should<sup>5</sup> 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.

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<sup>4</sup> In the case of joint programmes that lead to qualifications aiming to satisfy the minimum agreed training conditions in a profession subject to the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC, the joint programme would need to be notified to the European Commission by the competent authority of one EU Member State. The cooperating institutions will need to bear this in mind when identifying and contacting an agency to conduct the review.

<sup>5</sup> The Standards use of the common English usage of “should” which has the connotation of prescription and compliance.

### 1.3 Cooperation Agreement

The terms and conditions of the joint programme should be laid down in a cooperation agreement. The agreement should in particular 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.

## 2. Learning Outcomes

### 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.

## 3. Study Programme [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.

#### **4. Admission and Recognition [ESG 1.4]**

##### 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.

#### **5. Learning, Teaching and Assessment [ESG 1.3]**

##### 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.

#### **6. Student Support [ESG 1.6]**

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

#### **7. Resources [ESG 1.5 & 1.6]**

##### 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.

#### **8. Transparency and Documentation [ESG 1.8]**

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.

#### **9. Quality Assurance [ESG 1.1 & part 1]**

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

#### **C. 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<sup>6</sup> be based on a self- evaluation report (SER) jointly submitted by the cooperating institutions. The SER 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).

In addition, the report should 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.

The SER should 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.

### **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.

Through their international expertise and experience the panel should be able to take into account the distinctive features of the joint programme. Collectively, the panel should possess knowledge of the HE systems of the HEIs involved and the language(s) of instruction used. The panel should include members from at least two countries involved in the consortium providing the programme. The panel should include at least one student.

The agency should ensure the impartiality of the experts and observes fairness towards the applying higher education institutions. To this end, the institutions should have the right to raise well-grounded objections against a panel member, but not a right to veto their appointment.

The agency should brief the experts on the review activity, their specific role, and the specifics of the quality assurance procedure. The briefing should focus particularly on the distinctive features of a joint programme.

### **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).

The site visit should therefore 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, such as alumni and the professional field.

Although the site visit should normally be restricted to one location, the provision at all locations has to be taken into account.

### **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). The report should also contain

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<sup>6</sup> The Procedure uses of the common English usage of “should” which has the connotation of prescription and compliance.

recommendations for developing the programme further. In case the review results in a formal outcome the review panel should make a recommendation for the decision.

The conclusions and recommendations should pay particular attention to the distinctive features of the joint programme.

The institutions should have the opportunity to comment on a draft version of the review report and request correction of factual errors.

### **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.

### **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.<sup>7</sup> During the 6-year period, the agency should be informed about changes in the consortium offering the joint programme.

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<sup>7</sup> A period of 6 years is widely applied in EHEA countries.

# Background Report on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

(July 2014)

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## 1. Mandate of the expert group

In the Bucharest Communiqué (April 2012), ministers agreed on the following:

*„We will allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements. In particular, we will aim to recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes. (...)*

*We encourage higher education institutions to further develop joint programmes and degrees as part of a wider EHEA approach. We will examine national rules and practices relating to joint programmes and degrees as a way to dismantle obstacles to cooperation and mobility embedded in national contexts.”*

The Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) consequently included in its work programme 2013-2015 the task to:

*“Develop a policy proposal for a specific European accreditation approach for Joint programmes, which should be applied to all those Joint programmes that are subject to compulsory programme accreditation at national level.”*

The BFUG commissioned a small ad-hoc expert group to draft such a policy proposal, and to report back to the BFUG Working Groups on “Structural Reforms” and “Mobility and Internationalisation”.

The expert group was composed of:

- Mark Frederiks (Structural Reforms WG, The Netherlands)
- Achim Hopbach (Structural Reforms WG, ENQA)

- Andrejs Rauhvargers (Reporting WG, Latvia)
- Colin Tück (Structural Reforms WG, EQAR)

The expert group presented this report and the proposal for a European Approach at several meetings of the BFUG Working Groups on “Structural Reforms” and “Mobility and Internationalisation”, and revised the proposal based on the working groups' feedback. The final report and proposal were submitted to the BFUG in 2014.

## 2. Introduction

Joint programmes are set up to enhance the mobility of students and staff, to facilitate mutual learning and cooperation opportunities and to create programmes of excellence. Joint degrees express the jointness also in the awarding of the degree.

While in the EHEA the political will to increase the number of joint programmes and joint degrees is evident through various Ministerial Communiqués, the implementation of these initiatives is still hampered by serious problems.

A significant amount of these problems concentrate around issues of recognition and quality assurance (QA). These problems are mainly rooted in the different national legislations in the EHEA and the existing heterogeneity of QA systems in the countries concerned.<sup>1</sup>

A number of projects have been initiated to investigate and tackle problems with setting up, quality assuring and recognising joint programmes. An overview of current projects can be found in Annex 6 of the BRIDGE Handbook<sup>2</sup>. Important steps forward regarding the recognition of joint degrees have been made through the development of the European Area of Recognition (EAR) Manual<sup>3</sup>, and a report by ENIC-NARICs on fair recognition of joint degrees as an outcome of the ECA project “Joint programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of degrees awarded” (JOQAR)<sup>4</sup>.

### Definitions

There is often confusion in the use of terminology regarding joint programmes and degrees. To make it clear from the outset what types of programmes are addressed by this recommendation a definition of the terms is provided. These definitions are in line with Bologna policy documents and are being used, for instance, by the ENIC-NARICs<sup>5</sup>.

#### Joint programme:

An integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions and leading to double/multiple degrees or a joint degree.

#### Joint degree:

A single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme.

<sup>1</sup> ENQA (2012), Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (ENQA workshop report 19)

<sup>2</sup> Luca Lantero (ed.) (2012), BRIDGE Handbook. Joint programmes and recognition of joint degrees.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.eurorecognition.eu/>

<sup>4</sup> Axel Aerden & Jenneke Lokhoff (2013), Framework for Fair Recognition of Joint Degrees, ECA Occasional Paper, The Hague. For a description and outcomes of the JOQAR project see: <http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/JOQAR>

<sup>5</sup> Axel Aerden & Hanna Reczulska (2012), Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees. ECA Occasional Paper, The Hague, p. 33-40: 2013.

### Multiple degree:

Separate degrees awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme attesting the successful completion of this programme. (If two degrees are awarded by two institutions, this is a 'double degree').

Hence, the common characteristic of joint programmes is that they are offered jointly whilst the degree awarding can be different (double/multiple or joint). Joint degrees are therefore a specific subset of joint programmes, as it applies only to those joint programmes that lead to the award of a joint degree. These distinctions are important because the consequences for the external quality assurance, in particular for accreditation and/or approval of the various types of joint programmes differ significantly.

### **Numbers**

In 2009 the number of joint programmes was estimated by Rauhvargers et al (2009) to be around 2,500 in the EHEA<sup>6</sup>. As a consequence the actual number may now be above 3,000. In a survey results report by Obst et al (2011)<sup>7</sup> it was found that 84% of responding higher education institutions offered joint programmes. Thirty three per cent of the responding higher education institutions were involved in awarding joint degrees.

Many more joint programmes could, however, be provided as joint degrees if national legislation, accreditation and recognition practices would become more suitable for awarding joint degrees. This proposal aims to serve as one step in dismantling these existing obstacles.

## **3. Current practices of external quality assurance of joint programmes**

Joint programmes challenge the existing national quality assurance systems: institutions from different higher education systems, with different political and legal systems as well as different quality assurance regimes, jointly develop and offer a study programme.

The European higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies accepted this challenge and made a great effort in the last years to analyse the specific issues of quality assurance in joint programmes.

In those cases where all cooperating institutions are subject to obligatory external quality assurance at institutional level only (e.g. institutional audit or accreditation), and thus bear "self-accrediting" powers for their programmes, joint internal quality assurance arrangements for the joint programme can be agreed among them. Institutions have been using, for instance, the Guidelines for Quality Enhancement in European Joint Master Programmes developed by the EUA<sup>8</sup>.

For those cases where quality assurance or accreditation at programme level are required in one or more countries involved, several approaches for joint programmes have been established in the past years: national, joint or single processes.

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<sup>6</sup> Andrejs Rauhvargers, Cynthia Deane & Wilfried Pauwels (2009), Bologna Process Stocktaking Report. Report from working groups appointed by the Bologna Follow-up Group to the Ministerial Conference in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Obst, Matthias Kuder & Clare Banks (2011), Joint and Double Degree Programs in the Global Context, Institute of International Education.

<sup>8</sup> See [http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/EMNEM\\_report.1147364824803.pdf](http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/EMNEM_report.1147364824803.pdf)

## **Several national quality assurance processes**

Several national agencies from the countries of the higher education institutions involved quality assure a joint programme in separate processes. Commonly, each agency reviews only the part of the provision offered by the higher education institution(s) in the country that falls under the agency's remit. As a consequence, the assessment of the provision is fragmented (between different agencies and countries), which neglects the crucial characteristic of the programme, namely that it is offered jointly. Furthermore, several agencies and experts review parts of the programme, but the programme as a whole is not evaluated externally. For instance, a joint programme has its learning outcomes defined for the programme as a whole, but in several, fragmented quality assurance processes there is no comprehensive review of the entire programme's curriculum and whether it is fit to achieve these outcomes and objectives. In every process, only a small part of the programme is reviewed, without taking into account the joint programme in its entirety.

From a viewpoint of quality (and of the students enrolled) the quality assurance of a joint programme should cover the entire programme that leads to awarding the degree(s).

## **Joint quality assurance process**

In a joint quality assurance process several agencies work together and agree on a common assessment framework, e.g. by taking one agency's framework and adding additional elements of the other agency/-ies, or by agreeing on a new framework which takes the requirements of all agencies into account.

They can jointly install a panel of experts who will commence a site visit at one location (although in practice visits at two or more locations also occur) resulting in one panel report (although sometimes reporting requirements are so different that two reports are written).

Whilst joint processes have the advantages that they look at the entire programme and avoid duplication in national processes, there are also some setbacks. Experience shows that, especially when agencies cooperate for the first time, comparing frameworks and agreeing on the specifics of the procedure mean quite an investment in time for agencies, experts and the institutions involved. Nearly for every programme a new process needs to be established on an ad-hoc basis, depending on the institutions and countries involved, as there is no standard process. If several locations are visited or multiple reports written, the reduction of costs and efforts is limited.

In addition, problems in the decision-making phase may loom if the agencies attach different conclusions to the results of the joint procedure. It is possible that the cooperating agencies take different quality assurance decisions which may be detrimental for both the institutions and the future cooperation between the agencies.

## **Single quality assurance procedure**

In a single quality assurance procedure there is only one agency and one assessment framework for carrying out the procedure. The framework consists of two building blocks: the European shared component (the "core") and the relevant national components (the "plus").

The European shared component covers the essential standards and criteria that need to be taken into account in all single quality assurance processes, and is based on the ESG and the QF-EHEA. The national components cover additional, particular national requirements. These national components include the elements of the assessment criteria and/or the assessment procedure that need to be included in a quality assurance procedure in a specific national higher education system. One panel is deployed for the assessment of the entire programme and this panel will usually only visit one location of the joint programme.

Nevertheless, the aim is that the results of a single procedure are accepted by all countries where the joint programme is provided. Therefore, the panel writes one report which should be the basis for the quality assurance decisions of the other agencies.

### **Erasmus Mundus programmes**

For joint programmes that have been co-funded by the European Union as part of the Erasmus Mundus programme<sup>9</sup> (2009-2013), specific external quality reviews were conducted to inform decisions on continued funding. These reviews were carried out with a peer-review methodology and on the basis of processes and criteria specifically established by the responsible EU authorities for those reviews. These reviews, however, were not intended to replace obligatory evaluation or accreditation of the Erasmus Mundus joint programme as required by national legislations. The reviews thus took place in addition to the “statutory” external QA, rather than being seen itself to fulfil that purpose.

## **4. Lessons Learnt**

Today one can rely on ample experience with quality assurance of joint programmes. Two main lessons learnt are as follows:

### **The design of the procedure**

In principle, part II of the ESG is applicable to quality assurance of joint programmes. Experience clearly shows that the conduct of quality assurance of joint programmes in itself does not constitute the problem many HEIs are facing in particular when it comes to the accreditation of joint programmes. ESG are applied widely in the EHEA and national specificities in the conduct of quality assurance processes are within acceptable boundaries.

### **The criteria**

What remains the major impediment for both cooperating institutions and agencies are rather the national regulations for approval of the different joint programmes and, thus, the additional national criteria that need to be applied. This is the clear outcome of the above mentioned JOQAR, the most profound project on quality assurance of joint programmes.

### **Remaining Obstacles**

Various evaluations of quality assurance of joint programmes led to a positive conclusion on the use of shared European standards and criteria (based on ESG, QF-EHEA and ECTS).

With regard to the additional national criteria it was concluded that these should be removed when assessing joint programmes in single quality assurance processes. Agencies and experts agreed that these additional national criteria were not suitable for assessing joint programmes and in many cases made the development of such programmes impossible.<sup>10</sup>

The following examples can be given of such additional, national requirements that currently constitute obstacles in particular in common assessment processes for joint programmes. The list is based on the JOQAR project, which covered 9 countries from the EHEA: Belgium (Flanders), Czech Republic, France, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Portugal.

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<sup>9</sup>

[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus\\_mundus/results\\_compendia/selected\\_projects\\_action\\_1\\_master\\_courses\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus_mundus/results_compendia/selected_projects_action_1_master_courses_en.php)

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Blanc de la Carrere and Mark Frederiks (2013), “Single Accreditation of Joint Programmes: Pilots Evaluation Report”, ECA, The Hague.

- National QA agencies which are not allowed to coordinate an international procedure or undertake a site visit abroad (although the coordinating institution that provides the joint degree is located in another country)
- Substantial changes that have occurred since the last accreditation (curriculum, subjects, staff, etc.), must be stated and described in the reaccreditation application (Czech Republic)
- The report by the experts has to be translated in the national language (Lithuania)
- A specific assessment scale is necessary:
  - o This translated document needs to follow the six areas included in the Lithuanian framework and each of these six areas shall be assessed on a four-point scale (Lithuania)
  - o The assessment panel needs to come to a general conclusion regarding the joint programme. This general conclusion is either unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good or excellent and needs to be weighted and substantiated (The Netherlands)
- Specific requirements regarding handicapped students and equal opportunity (Germany)
- Formal requirements regarding ECTS:
  - o A Master's qualification requires 300 ECTS credits including the preceding programmes for the first qualification for entry into a profession (Germany)
  - o Second cycle studies take at least 90 ECTC (Poland)
  - o The number of ECTS credits attributed to the joint master's programme must be in the range from 90 to 120 credits (Portugal)
  - o The Master's dissertation should range from 15 to 30 ECTS credits (Germany),
  - o the curriculum should include an original dissertation or project, worth at least 35% of the total number of credit units (e.g. 42 credits in a programme of 120 credits) (Portugal) – as can easily be seen, these requirements are contradictory.
  - o A module is generally concluded with one examination and should account for at least five ECTS credits (Germany)
  - o Specific requirements regarding the curriculum (Lithuania): a semester should consist of not more than 5 subjects (with a minimum of 3 ECTS per subject). This poses a problem if a programme wants to offer e.g. 6 subjects with 5 ECTS in a semester.
- Specific requirements regarding staff:
  - o The joint programme has its „guarantee“(coordinator) at the Czech partner institution. This refers to a professor or an associate professor who is a full-time employee at the institution and not more than half-time employed at some other institution and whose research and publishing activities are closely connected to the specific joint programme<sup>11</sup> (Czech Republic)
  - o The study programme is provided by the staff meeting legal requirements (Lithuania)
  - o At least 50 per cent of the academic FTEs allotted to the provision (*of the part(s) that are provided by the Norwegian institution(s)*) must be members of the institution's own academic staff. Of these, professors (full or associate) must be represented among those who teach the core elements of the provision<sup>12</sup> (Norway)

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<sup>11</sup> Note: If the professor/associate professor is employed at different institutions and the total time is more than 70hrs/week, then s/he can be counted as a PhD holder, not a habilitated teacher.



- The minimum core staff consists of at least six teachers which hold the academic title of professor or doktor habilitowany and six teachers which hold the academic degree of Ph.D (Poland)<sup>13</sup>
- The majority of the academic staff must hold a PhD degree (for a joint master's programme offered with a Portuguese university) or be a PhD holder or a specialist (for a joint master's programme offered with a Portuguese polytechnic) (Portugal)
- Specific requirements regarding the achievement of learning outcomes<sup>14</sup> (Flanders and the Netherlands).

Undoubtedly many more examples from other countries can be given. The list is not exhaustive and presents only examples which can easily be complemented by examples from other countries in the EHEA.

Specific national criteria are sometimes in contradiction with other national criteria, as can be clearly seen in the case of different national ECTS requirements. Moreover, such very detailed criteria – which sometimes only make sense within the national context – are very difficult to evaluate for international experts. Although a few countries allow that these specific criteria do not have to be applied if these are conflicting with criteria in other countries, this often requires a separate administrative procedure and causes uncertainty for the institutions and agencies involved. Some of the requirements significantly limit the flexibility that is deliberately granted by what has been agreed in the Bologna Process (e.g. QF-EHEA), and are thus difficult to justify, especially for joint programmes.

The problems are even more significant for those HEIs that have to obtain compulsory accreditation for joint programmes. Since accreditation decisions are in most of the cases statutory acts and, thus bound to national legal requirements, these decisions need to be taken in all countries where the institutions that provide the joint programme are based. Although a single accreditation procedure means that these decisions can be taken on the basis of one and the same experts' report, it still requires multiple national administrative procedures to apply for accreditation by the institutions involved. There is hence a risk that multiple accreditation decisions do not point in the same direction.

In some countries accreditation decisions are of a binary nature (positive or negative) whilst in other countries there are also other possibilities (e.g. conditional accreditation). This means that in one country the decision could be conditional, whilst in another country it could be either positive or negative, depending on how serious the shortcomings are perceived by that national agency.

In addition, different accreditation periods apply, e.g. in some countries the accreditation is valid for 6 years, in other countries accreditation periods may vary from 4 to 10 years. Variety in the duration of accreditation makes it more difficult to plan single accreditation processes.

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<sup>12</sup> For the different cycles specific demands apply: For first cycle provision, at least 20 per cent of the relevant discipline community/-ies must have competence as professors (full or associate); For second cycle provision, at least 10 per cent of the relevant discipline community/-ies must be full professors, and an additional 40 per cent associate professors; For third cycle provision, PhD or stipend programme for artistic development work, at least 50 per cent of the relevant discipline community/-ies must be full professors, and the rest associate professors.

<sup>13</sup> The members of the minimum core staff have to be full-time employees of the higher education institution that offers the joint programme, and at least since the beginning of the semester. This institution has to be their primary employment. Each member of the minimum core staff has to teach at least 30 (for a professor or doktor habilitowany) or 60 hours of class during the academic year and within the programme.

<sup>14</sup> The assessment panel should select, randomly and differentiated by marks achieved, fifteen students from a list of graduates for the last two completed academic years. For each student selected, the panel examines the meaningful students' work, including the completed and signed assessment forms.

## 5. Conclusion

Especially in those countries where programmes have to be approved by accreditation bodies or ministries, different national legislation and formal criteria represent one major obstacle for the development of joint programmes and, in particular, joint degrees.

Such specific and sometimes contradictory national requirements inhibit cooperation in the development and quality assurance of joint programmes. Moreover, they cause a situation where quality assurance of joint programmes is often fragmented: different quality assurance agencies each look at the provision in their country, but not at the programme as a whole – its “jointness” is thus neglected.

At the same time, the approaches developed and piloted by QA agencies and stakeholders (see above) have demonstrated that the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) together form a sound basis for QA of joint programmes.

The expert group, therefore, proposed a European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, consisting of a set of shared European standards and criteria, to be adopted by EHEA ministers. The European Approach would help address the existing difficulties described in the present report and should be based exclusively on the ESG and the QF-EHEA, representing the agreed European framework, without additional national criteria.