

2010

The recognition of  
qualifications awarded by  
joint programmes



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european consortium for accreditation



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# The recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes

An analysis of current practices  
by national recognition centres



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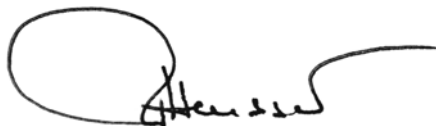
# Foreword

In 2006, the president of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, wrote: “There is no doubt that a link exists between quality assurance/accreditation on the one side and international recognition of individual qualifications on the other”<sup>1</sup>. He promoted the view that a closer cooperation between quality assurance agencies and recognition bodies could deliver one of the main goals of the Bologna Process: to ensure that qualifications awarded in one part of the European Higher Education Area will be recognised in all the other parts. He also identified two areas in which stronger cooperation between quality assurance and accreditation agencies would be required in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications. These two areas are the area of cross-border qualifications and the area of qualifications awarded by joint programmes.



The European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA) has responded to this appeal by the recognition bodies. In our TEAM<sup>2</sup> project<sup>2</sup> we therefore proposed to explore the cross-border recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes. These joint programmes are a challenge for national higher education systems and their quality assurance and accreditation agencies. Both have to meet that challenge but also need to make sure that qualifications rightly awarded by joint programmes are recognised across borders.

Closer cooperation between quality assurance agencies and recognition bodies is an essential characteristic of a good functioning European Higher Education Area. ECA has acknowledged this since its inception in 2003. Recognition bodies from partner countries take part in ECA meetings and projects. In 2005, ECA members and their respective recognition bodies signed the '*Joint Declaration regarding the Automatic Recognition of Qualifications*', the so-called Vienna Sententia. From the side of ECA, this declaration clearly underlines the important link we see between quality assurance and recognition. It is in this spirit of fruitful and long-term cooperation that this survey report was prepared.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Heusser".

Rolf Heusser  
(ECA chairperson)



# Project description and acknowledgements

The first objective of the TEAM<sup>2</sup> project is to develop a European methodology for quality assurance and accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes. Joint programmes are currently not able to apply for one single accreditation procedure that is able to satisfy or replace the different national procedures in the countries concerned. Each procedure should therefore take into account the totality of the joint programme. The inclusion of the learning outcomes aimed for by the joint programme irrespective of the individual study pathways should facilitate recognition of the outcomes of these accreditation procedures. By running pilot procedures and by publishing a methodological report, the project aims to provide the aforementioned European methodology with a view to the cross-border recognition of accreditation decisions regarding joint programmes.

The second objective of the project is to explore the cross-border recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes. Recognition procedures regarding qualifications awarded by joint programmes will be facilitated with the provision of transparent information on the quality and learning outcomes of these programmes. Quality assurance and accreditation agencies should provide this information to the ENIC-NARIC centres. By linking recognition to learning outcomes, through the sharing of good practices, by organising a workshop with ENIC-NARICs and a dissemination conference with accreditation organisations and institutions, the project should enable the facilitation of the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes.

This survey report is part of the work towards the second objective: to explore the cross-border recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes.

The third objective is the development of Qrossroads, a shared publication tool of ECA members. Qrossroads presents information regarding quality assured and accredited higher education in Europe. The information on Qrossroads is provided by quality assurance and accreditation agencies and specifically concerns qualifications from quality assured and accredited programmes and institutions. Qrossroads brings together information from the different databases of the quality assurance and accreditation agencies. Each of these agencies is responsible for the administration of their own database.

The main aim of Qrossroads is to present the qualifications awarded by programmes and institutions that were quality assured and accredited. These qualifications are presented in the perspective of the higher education system of which it is part together with information on the relevant accreditation organisation and recognition authorities.

Qrossroads will be developed to include all relevant institutional and programme information including the joint programme's learning outcomes from at least thirteen countries.

This part of the project can of course not be run without a group of enthusiastic partners. On behalf of the TEAM<sup>2</sup> Steering Group, ECA would like to thank the members of the Focus Group for their dedicated commitment and thoughtful contribution. The Focus Group consisted of the following members: Hanna Reczulska (ENIC-NARIC Poland), Carita Blomqvist (ENIC-NARIC Finland), Elizabeth Zamorano (CIEP, ENIC-NARIC France), Erwin Malfroy (ENIC-NARIC Flanders), Gunnar Vaht (ENIC-NARIC Estonia), Axel Aerden (NVAO, Qrossroads Supervisor) and, last but not least, Mark Frederiks (ECA coordinator and TEAM<sup>2</sup> project coordinator).

This report would not be as extensive as it is without the input of such a great number of ENIC-NARICs – who gave their precious time to share their experience with qualifications awarded by joint programmes with us.

# 1

## Introduction

Since the beginning of the Bologna Process, the number of joint programmes has increased notably and it seems that this trend will continue since their further development was encouraged by the European ministers responsible for higher education in their London Communiqué (2007) as well as in their Leuven/LLN Communiqué (2009). The Bologna Process Stocktaking report of 2009 points out that there could already be around 2500 joint programmes running in the European Higher Education Area: *“In a quarter of the countries, more than 50% of all higher education institutions are involved in [international] joint degree cooperation.”*<sup>3</sup>

Recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes can however be a challenge for credential evaluators who are mainly used to dealing with foreign national qualifications. A qualification awarded by a joint programme is however not a national one and - if a home institution is involved in the joint programme – it is not entirely foreign as well. The Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee on 9 June 2004 encourages to recognise joint qualifications at least as favourable as foreign national ones but this is not always easy.

The quality assurance and accreditation of a joint programme is another issue. A qualification awarded by a joint programme can only be recognised if the programme itself is recognised. In practice this usually means that the programme needs some kind of accreditation. But does that mean that the programme needs to be accredited by the accreditation agencies from all the countries involved or is it enough when it is accredited by only one agency?

And what do we know about the current state of affairs at ENIC-NARIC centres regarding the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes? In order to get this information an extensive survey was carried out. This survey explored issues regarding the existing procedures and assessment criteria used, the state of the national regulations and the role of accreditation and quality assurance in the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes.

This report presents that information from the point of view of 25 ENIC-NARIC centres. It shows us how they deal with such qualifications, the problems they encounter and the solutions they put forward.



# 2

## Executive summary

The purpose of the survey was to explore the ENIC-NARICs' current recognition procedures regarding qualifications (or degrees) awarded by joint programmes, the problems they encounter and the solutions they would propose.

The most important result of the survey seems to be that legal aspects regarding both the organisation of joint programmes and the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes are a serious obstacle towards recognition. Most ENIC-NARICs do not recognise qualifications awarded by a joint programme if that programme is not established or offered in accordance with the national legislation of one of the participating countries, if one of the involved institutions is not recognised or if one of the awarding institutions is not authorised to award that degree.

**Legal aspects are a serious obstacle towards recognition.**

In line with the obstacles mentioned above, ENIC-NARICs indicate that there are no problems with recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes as long as these qualifications are nationally recognised qualifications. One of the ENIC-NARICs clarified that *“the more the joint qualification is a part of the national systems of the countries involved in the joint programme, the easier is the assessment of the joint qualifications. Qualifications without reference to any national system have always the danger of being treated as ‘second-rate’ degrees”*. This seems to point towards a genuine weak point in current practice.

**Joint programmes and joint qualifications need to be better incorporated into the national higher education systems.**

National legislation is also an issue for establishing joint programmes. There is a need for a better incorporation of joint programmes and joint qualifications into the national higher education systems. Programmes offered jointly with other institutions across borders need to be nationally recognised as joint programmes and the qualification these institutions award jointly need to be formally recognised as a joint qualification in all the countries concerned.

For higher education institutions, there is a lesson to be learned. ENIC-NARICs are aware of the fact that some institutions use joint programmes to escape national legislation. An institution without the competence or appropriate recognition to offer a certain programme or award a degree, can use a joint programme to do so anyway. As long as the joint programme and its degree(s) are recognised in elsewhere, such an institution can still offer its national student a recognised (foreign) degree. But

**ENIC-NARIS are aware of the fact that some institutions use joint programmes to escape national legislation.**

when its graduates need to get their degrees recognised, they might run into serious problems.

The assessment procedure of any qualification starts with the verification of the status of the institution that offers the programme, the status of the programme itself and the qualification awarded. In case of qualifications awarded by a joint programme this procedure is of course more difficult. ENIC-NARICs as a result have to verify the status in several different countries (i.e. different legal systems). This means different legal frameworks regulating higher education, accreditation and quality assurance, the recognition of higher education institutions, (joint) programmes and (joint) degrees, etc.

This brings us to another point of attention raised by the ENIC-NARICs: the lack of adequate and transparent information about the joint programme itself and the

**The degree and the diploma supplement do not provide the necessary information about the joint programme.**

qualification awarded. ENIC-NARICs indicate that the documents they receive, such as the degree, the transcript and/or the diploma supplement, do not provide the information they need about the institutions involved and their role, the programme and its details and the awarded degree(s). The first shortcoming seems to be the information on the

degree. Such a degree needs to clarify a lot of elements but these are apparently not consistently published on that document. A second shortcoming concerns the Diploma Supplement. Two main issues were identified. First, the format used is not based on the European template and, second, the issued Diploma Supplement is a national one and does not cover the totality of the joint programme.

All ENIC-NARICs agree that a joint programme needs to be quality assured and/or accredited. They do have different ideas by whom this should be done: by all the agencies

**All ENIC-NARICs agree that a joint programme needs to be quality assured and/or accredited.**

of all the countries involved, by one agency, by a jointly recognised quality assurance and/or accreditation agency or by an internationally recognised quality assurance agency. This has of course major implications. A qualification awarded by a joint programme that is accredited by only one agency can be recognised in one country but can be

denied recognition in another country if that ENIC-NARIC requires that the programme should be accredited by appropriate agencies from all participating countries.

To conclude, ENIC-NARICs are confronted with very concrete issues. A way forward regarding some of these issues will be proposed in the concluding remarks.



# 3

## Methodology

This report is the result of a survey among bodies responsible for the recognition of foreign qualifications. Every European country has at least one these bodies. Most commonly we identify these bodies as ENIC-NARICs.

The survey was drawn up by a small focus group of representatives of ENIC-NARIC centres. (See 'Project description and acknowledgements' for the composition of the group.) This group first identified key issues related to the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes. Since only a limited number of issues could be covered by quantifiable indicators, they prioritised the issues they would like to deal with in a qualitative analysis. Each of these issues was then broken down into several questions.

Respondents were presented with closed questions (tick boxes) and where appropriate they were given the possibility to clarify their answers. The intention of this approach was not only to augment the comparability of the results but also to increase the response rate.

The project was first introduced at the annual ENIC-NARIC meeting and at the annual NARIC meeting. ENIC-NARICs were approached by the Polish ENIC-NARIC to fill in the questionnaire. Over a period of six weeks the survey was filled out by 25 ENIC-NARICs. Six responding ENIC-NARICs want to remain anonymous. The other respondents were from Austria, Australia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, the Netherlands, UK and United States of America.

The material gathered by the online survey and focus group discussions generated the results and conclusions detailed in this report. Although the respondents cover a large group of the recognition bodies, the report doesn't claim to be comprehensive. This report should be regarded as evidenced indicators of ENIC-NARICs' current recognition issues regarding qualifications awarded by joint programmes and the problems they encounter.

**ENIC-NARICs?** The European Network of Information Centres (ENICs) was established by the Council of Europe and UNESCO. An ENIC is a body set up by the national authorities which generally provides information on the recognition of foreign qualifications, education systems and opportunities for studying abroad. The network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICs), on the other hand, is an initiative of the European Commission. The network aims at improving the academic recognition of qualifications and periods of study in the Member States of the EU, the EEA countries and associated countries. In the majority of these countries, institutions of higher education are autonomous, taking their own decisions on the admission of (foreign) students. As a result, most NARICs do not take recognition decisions, but offer information and advice on foreign qualifications and education systems. ([www.enic-naric.net](http://www.enic-naric.net))

Here, it is also important to say something about the terminology used. When we presented the questions to the ENIC-NARICs we indicated which definitions we applied to terms like *joint programme* and *qualification*. You can read more about the terminology in the annex to this report or on ECA's online glossary on [www.grossroads.eu/glossary](http://www.grossroads.eu/glossary).

# 4

## Survey results

**A**s mentioned above, twenty five ENIC-NARICs have answered the survey. Since not all of the respondents have answered all the questions we have included the total amount of respondents in each figure. In the following text there are only seldom references to individual countries. This is not always possible since six of the responding agencies want to remain anonymous.

### 1. General information

80% of responding ENIC-NARICs already received qualifications awarded by joint programmes for assessment. 20% of ENIC-NARICs reported that they never received these types of qualifications for assessment.

There is a wide variety in the type of received qualifications awarded by joint programmes. 20% of the ENIC-NARICs that actually receive qualifications awarded by joint programmes report that none of these qualifications are joint qualifications. 35% of the ENIC-NARICs indicate that less than 5% are joint qualifications. 30% of the ENIC-NARICs have answered that 50% or more are joint qualifications. 10% of ENIC-NARICs even reported that all of these qualifications were joint qualifications.

The qualifications received were in the majority of the ENIC-NARICs (75%) at Master's level. Doctoral level qualifications awarded by joint programmes are rarely received by ENIC-NARICs (20%): some report sizable percentages (respectively 40 and 25%) while the some report 1% and less of all qualifications awarded by joint programmes received. 65% of ENIC-NARICs report the reception of Bachelor's level qualifications. The ENIC-NARICs from Australia and USA have an unusual pattern since the majority of their received qualifications are at Bachelor's level.

### The practice of ENIC-NARICs with experience with qualifications awarded by joint programmes

There are several ways qualifications awarded by joint programmes are awarded. Three cases were presented to the ENIC-NARICs. These cases are included in the table below.

**Table 1. Which of the following situations were the most and least common when dealing with qualifications awarded by joint programmes?**

<b>Cases</b>	<b>Answers</b>	<b>#Respondents</b>
<i>A joint qualification was issued <u>in addition to one or more national qualifications</u></i>	Most common	1
	Least common	4
<i>A joint qualification was issued by the institutions offering the study programme in question <u>without being accompanied by any national qualification</u></i>	Most common	12
	Least common	2
<i>One or more national qualifications were issued officially as the <u>only attestation</u> of the joint programme in question</i>	Most common	4
	Least common	7

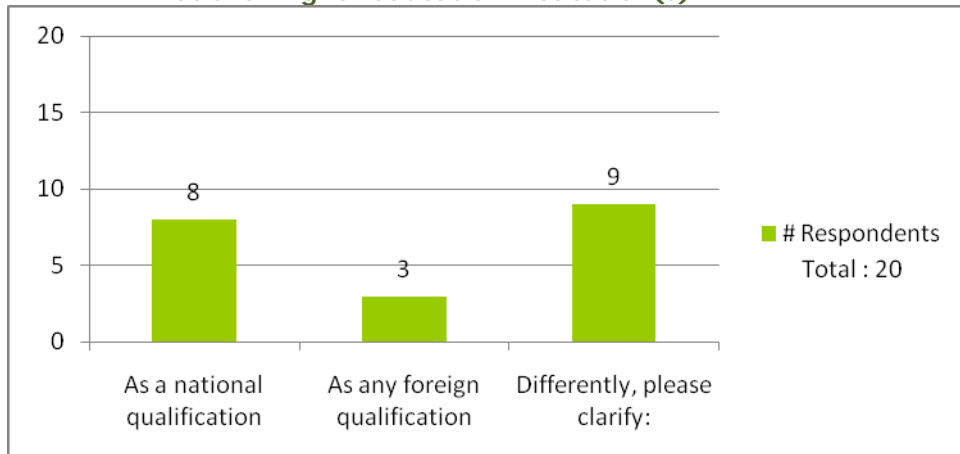
60% of responding ENIC-NARICs report that the most common qualifications awarded by joint programmes that they deal with are joint qualifications issued by all the institutions offering the study programme in question without being accompanied by any national qualification. 20% of ENIC-NARICs report that they most commonly deal with one or more national qualifications issued officially as the only attestation of the joint programme in question. Only 5% of ENIC-NARIC reported that the most common situation when dealing with qualifications awarded by joint programmes were joint qualification issued in addition to one or more national qualifications.

From these results we can conclude that the most common qualification awarded by joint programmes presented for recognition are what commonly is referred to as *real joint degrees*.

ENIC-NARICs that had experience in dealing with the assessment of qualifications awarded by joint programmes (20 respondents) were presented with three cases. They were asked how they would deal with a qualification from a joint programme in each of the following cases.

Case for ENIC-NARICs with experience in dealing with qualifications awarded by joint programmes: When the joint programme was at least partly provided by a national higher education institution(s)

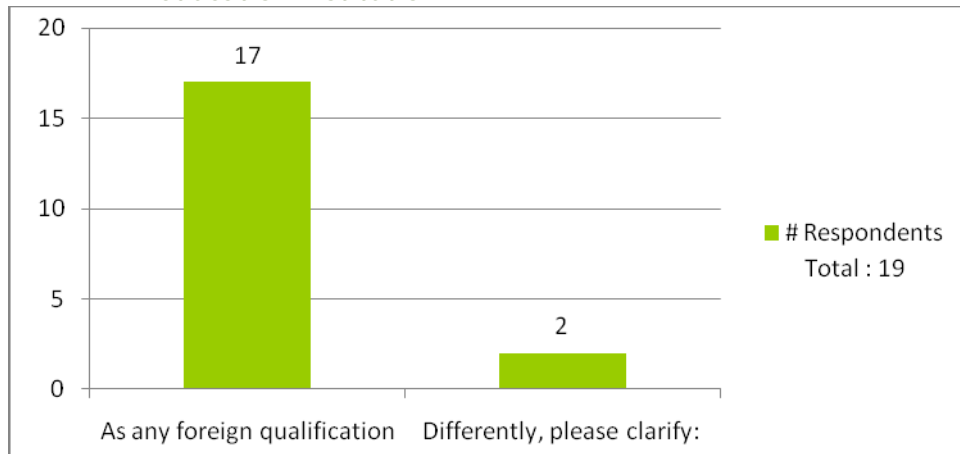
**Figure 1. When the joint programme was at least partly provided by a national higher education institution(s)**



45% of ENIC-NARICs don't regard qualifications awarded by a joint programme that was at least partly provided by a national higher education institution as a national qualification or as any foreign qualification. 40% of ENIC-NARICs consider these qualifications a national one while 15% consider them to be a foreign qualification. Most of these ENIC-NARICs have clarified that this depends entirely on the status of the awarding institution and programme. ENIC-NARICs seem to be concerned about the recognition of either the involved national institution or the programme concerned in its national system. This seems to point to an important issue with institutions and programmes that don't have the right to offer the programme or award that qualification. Even without this right, some institutions still take part in joint programmes. This undermines the recognition of the awarded qualification(s), even if other involved institutions have the appropriate rights or competences.

Case for ENIC-NARICs with experience in dealing with qualifications awarded by joint programmes: When a joint programme was provided by several foreign institutions without involvement of a national higher education institution

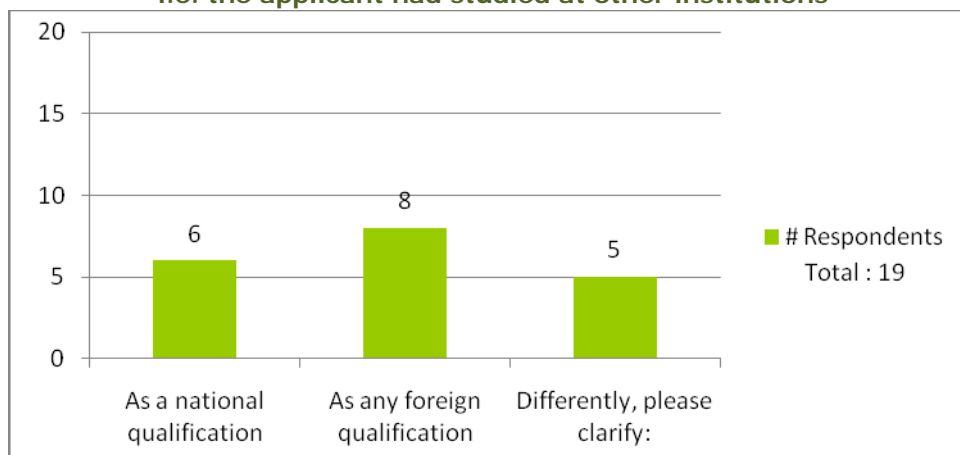
**Figure 2. When a joint programme was provided by several foreign institutions without involvement of a national higher education institution**



Almost all ENIC-NARICs indicated that they would treat qualifications awarded by joint programmes provided by only foreign institutions as any foreign qualification. The other ENIC-NARICs, who treat these qualifications differently, clarified that treatment depends on the status of the awarding foreign institutions. This seems to be in line with the normal treatment of foreign qualifications.

Case for ENIC-NARICs with experience in dealing with qualifications awarded by joint programmes: When a joint programme was provided by a consortium when one of your national institutions was a member of the consortium but did not provide any part of the qualification, i.e. the applicant had studied at other institutions

**Figure 3. When a joint programme was provided by a consortium when one of the national institutions was a member of the consortium but did not provide any part of the qualification, i.e. the applicant had studied at other institutions**



A majority of ENIC-NARICs (68%) consider the involvement of a national higher education institution but without offering a part of the curriculum not sufficient to consider the qualification from a joint programme as a national qualification. 26% of ENIC-NARICs don't treat the qualifications awarded by joint programmes as either national qualification or as any foreign qualifications. These ENIC-NARICs indicated that their treatment depends on the status of the programme or qualification in the national system. Some pointed out that to be treated as a national qualification the programme needs to be recognised or accredited nationally.

### **The practice of ENIC-NARICs without experience with qualifications awarded by joint programmes**

ENIC-NARICs that didn't have experience in dealing with the assessment of qualifications awarded by joint programmes were presented with the same three cases. They were asked how they would deal with a qualification from a joint programme in each of these potential cases.

*Case for ENIC-NARICs without experience in dealing with qualifications awarded by joint programmes: When the joint programme was at least partly provided by a national higher education institution(s)*

In contrast with ENIC-NARICs with experience, the responding ENIC-NARICs without experience in dealing with qualifications awarded by joint programmes either regard these qualifications as a national qualification (75%) or as any foreign qualification (25%).

*Case for ENIC-NARICs without experience in dealing with qualifications awarded by joint programmes: When a joint programme was provided by several foreign institutions without involvement of a national higher education institution*

The responding ENIC-NARICs without experience in dealing with qualifications awarded by joint programmes all consider a qualification awarded by a joint programme provided by only foreign institutions as any other foreign qualification.

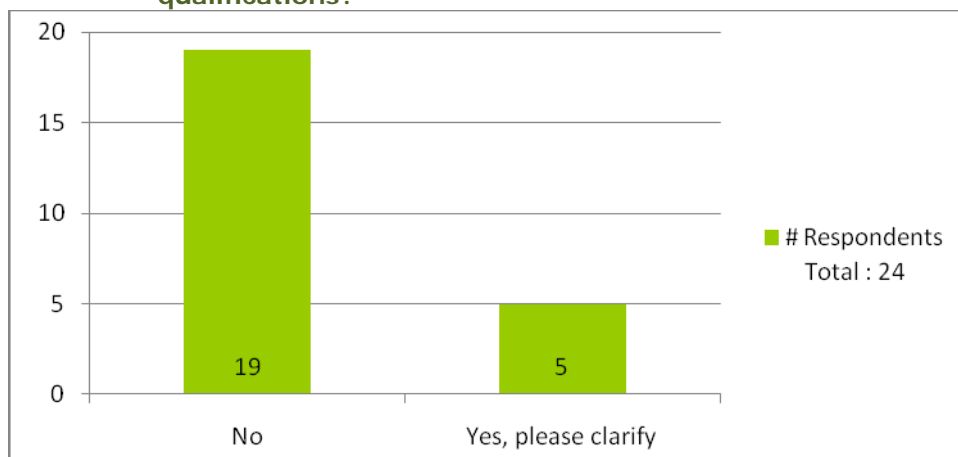
*Case for ENIC-NARICs without experience in dealing with qualifications awarded by joint programmes: When a joint programme was provided by a consortium when one of your national institutions was a member of the consortium but did not provide any part of the qualification, i.e. the applicant had studied at other institutions*

80% of responding ENIC-NARICs consider the involvement of a national higher education institution (without offering a part of the curriculum) not sufficient to consider the qualification from this joint programme as a national qualification. ENIC-NARICs who indicated it would consider this qualification differently, did not clarify this response.

## 2. Legislation

ENIC-NARICs were asked if their higher education system had legal provisions facilitating the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes, such as joint qualifications.

**Figure 4. Do you have any legal provisions facilitating the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes, such as joint qualifications?**



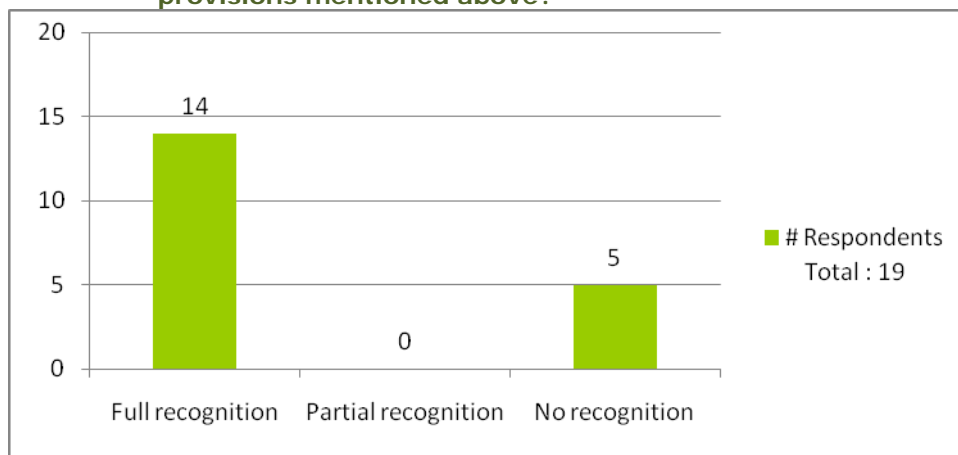
79% of responding ENIC-NARICs indicate that there are no legal provisions facilitating the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes, such as joint qualifications.

21% of ENIC-NARICs did report such legislation.

Some of the ENIC-NARICs clarified their response and pointed out that although there was no national legislation their current legal framework was no impediment to the recognition of qualifications from joint programmes.

The ENIC-NARICs that reported the absence of legislation facilitating the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes were asked what kind of recognition is then possible regarding these qualifications.

**Figure 5. What kind of recognition is possible without the legal provisions mentioned above?**





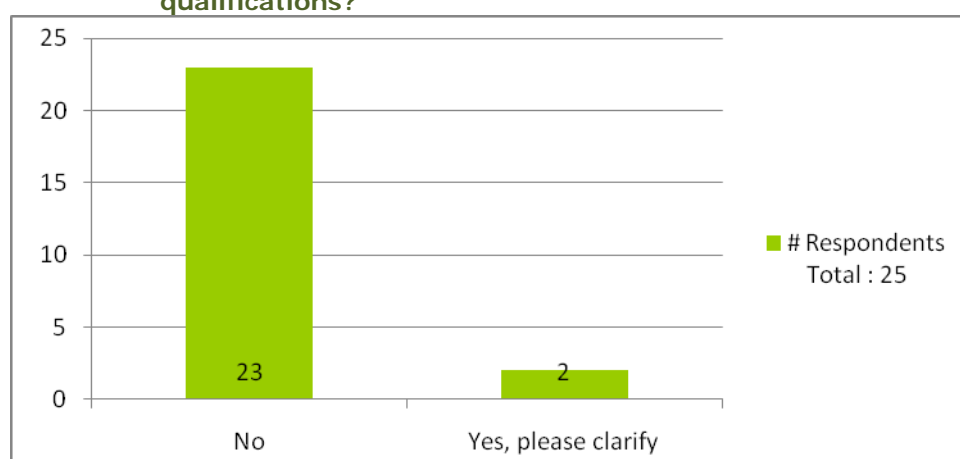
Of the ENIC-NARICs that indicated the absence of facilitating legislation, 74% of ENIC-NARICs indicated that full recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes would be possible. 26% of ENIC-NARICs reported that this meant that they could not recognise these type of qualifications at all.

### 3. Assessment criteria and procedures

In order to analyse the assessment criteria and the procedures applied by the ENIC NARICs, they were asked if they had a special procedure for the evaluation of qualifications awarded by joint programmes, such as joint qualifications. Only 8% of the ENIC-NARICs reported having special procedures, while 92% of the ENIC-NARICs apply their regular procedure to evaluate qualifications awarded by joint programmes.

One of ENIC-NARICs that applies a special procedure clarified that they had worked out specific guidelines on recognition of joint degrees as well as transnational education.

**Figure 6. Do you have a special procedure for the evaluation of qualifications awarded by joint programmes, such as joint qualifications?**



#### Verification of the authenticity of the qualifications concerned

The responding ENIC-NARICs were additionally asked if they encountered problems with the verification of the authenticity of the qualifications awarded by joint programmes (e.g. Apostille of The Hague, legalisation) when these qualifications were not accompanied by any national qualification.

28% of ENIC-NARICs reported problems verifying the authenticity of these types of qualifications. Their clarifications mainly point to issues regarding the status of the involved institutions or programme and not to the verification of the authenticity of the awarded document. Here, one ENIC-NARIC pointed out that the status of the document itself can raise questions while another ENIC-NARIC wrote that *“in some cases the program is not the same as the nationally accredited program”*. Other clarifications point to the

same issues: “Some institutions seem to award degrees that they are not allowed to award.” and “The status of the programme is sometimes difficult to understand.”

**Elements checked when establishing the status of a qualification concerned**

ENIC-NARICs were asked which elements they checked when establishing the status of a qualification awarded after the completion of a joint programme.

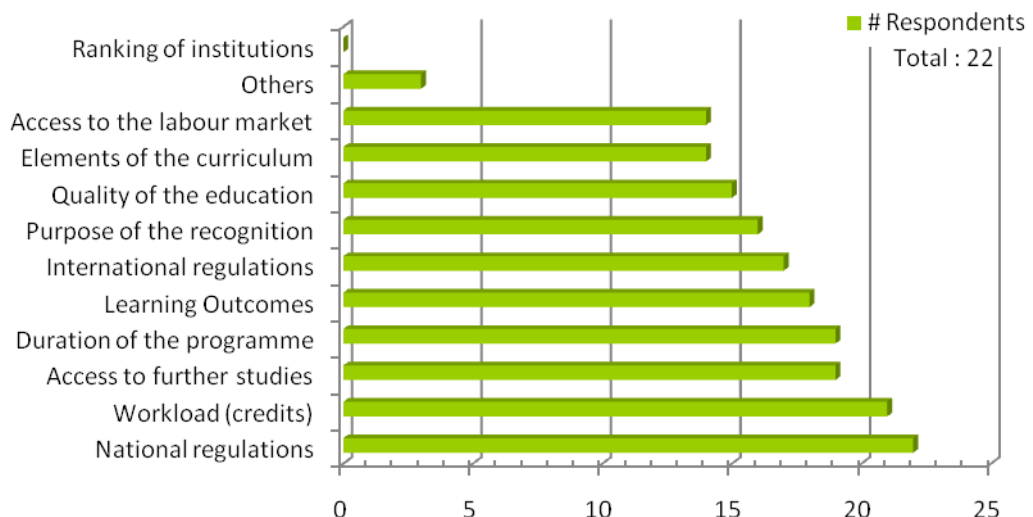
All the responding ENIC-NARICs check the status of all the awarding higher education institutions. A further 92% of ENIC-NARICs check the status of the joint programme in the higher education systems where it is offered while 67% of ENIC-NARICs check whether the arrangements through which the joint programme was established complies with the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good practice in transnational education.

Two ENIC-NARICs explicitly specified that they do not check the status of the joint programme in the higher education systems where it is offered. There was no opportunity to clarify this answer but it seems to indicate that these two ENIC-NARICs would be satisfied with a recognised status for the joint programme in one of the higher education systems concerned.

**Criteria taken into account when assessing individual qualifications concerned**

ENIC-NARICs were presented with a list of criteria that could be assessed. They were asked to point out which of these they take into account when assessing the individual qualification awarded by a joint programme.

**Figure 7. Which of the below listed criteria do you take into account when assessing the individual qualification awarded after the completion of the joint programme?**



All responding ENIC-NARICs reported that they take into account national regulations when assessing the individual qualification awarded after the completion of the joint

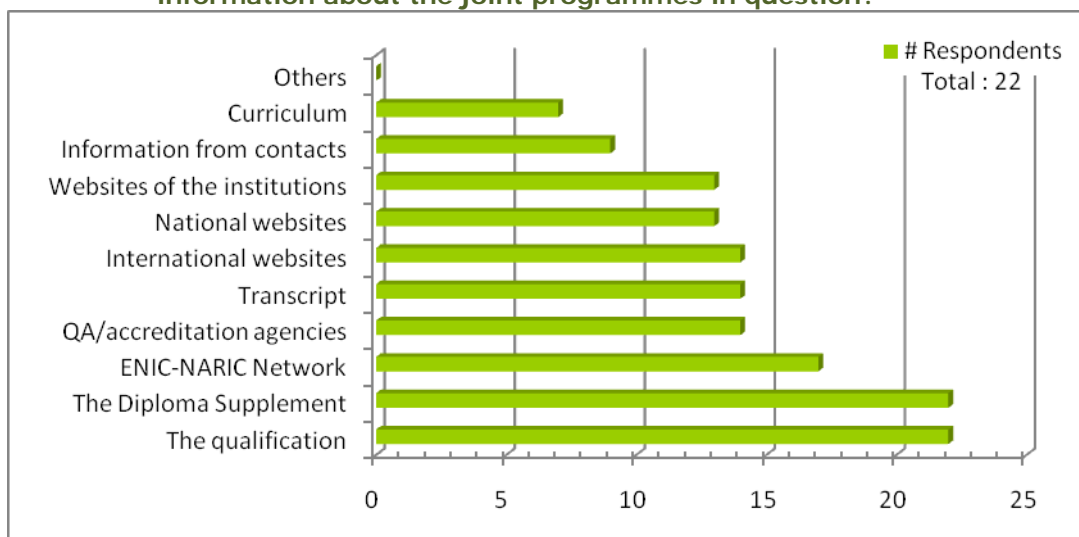
programme. More ENIC-NARICs take into account workload (credits) and access to further studies than the duration of the programme. Interestingly, 82% ENIC-NARICs state that they also take learning outcomes into account. None of the ENIC-NARICs take the ranking of institutions into account.

A small number of ENIC-NARICs (14%) clarified that there are of course also other criteria to take into account. The criteria mentioned were: the status of the institutions providing the programme (Are they accredited? What is the legal agreement between them?), student performance and record of any subsequent studies.

### Potential sources of information when assessing individual qualifications concerned

ENIC-NARICs were additionally presented with a list of potential sources of information. They were asked to point out which of these they consider the main sources of information about a joint programme of which they were asked to assess the qualification.

**Figure 8. From your point of view, what are the main sources of information about the joint programmes in question?**



All responding ENIC-NARICs consider the Diploma Supplement and the qualification the main sources of information about joint programmes. The ENIC-NARIC Network is an important source of information for 77% of the responding ENIC-NARICs. A further 64% of ENIC-NARICs consider quality assurance and accreditation agencies, the transcript and international websites (such as Crossroads) as one of the main sources of information. Just 32% of ENIC-NARICs consider the curriculum one of the main sources of information about a joint programme.

### Main problems associated with the assessment of qualifications concerned

ENIC-NARICs were also invited to illustrate the main problems they associate with the assessment of qualifications awarded by joint programmes in general. Fifteen ENIC-NARICs responded and their answers were very diverse. The first group of problems covers the

lack of information about the joint programme, the qualification or the institutions. One ENIC-NARIC stated: *“The status of the awarding body, the consortium, the number of higher education institutions (and agreement on which cooperation is based) is sometimes unclear from the qualification.”*

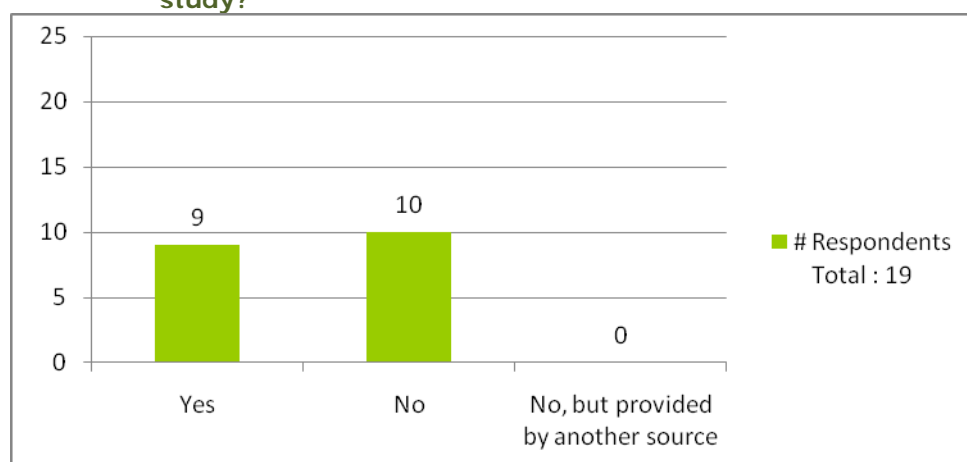
The second group of problems refer to the (lack of) recognition or accreditation of the joint programme (or the awarded qualification) in the countries concerned. One of the ENIC-NARICs clarified: *“It is sometimes difficult to identify if the qualification is part of a national degree system and publicly recognised in the country/countries of the degree awarding institution(s).”* Another one added: *“The main difficulty is ascertaining that the programme is formally agreed to and recognised by the participating institutions and their respective accreditation/quality assurance bodies.”*

The third group of problems include the lack of legislation or the lack of a corresponding national qualification. One ENIC-NARIC clarified that their problems with qualifications awarded by joint programmes are the same as dealing with other “normal” degrees.

### The Diploma Supplement

The survey shows further that ENIC-NARICs are not fully informed by the Diploma Supplement. 53% of responding ENIC-NARICs report that the Diploma Supplement does not provide all the necessary information about the joint programme while the other halve (47%) respond that they are fully informed by the Diploma Supplement.

**Figure 9. In case the qualification awarded by a joint programme is accompanied by a diploma supplement. Does it provide all the necessary information about the curriculum and the places of study?**



The main issues clarified by ENIC-NARICs are the format used and the fact that the issued Diploma Supplement is a national one and doesn’t cover the totality of the joint programme.

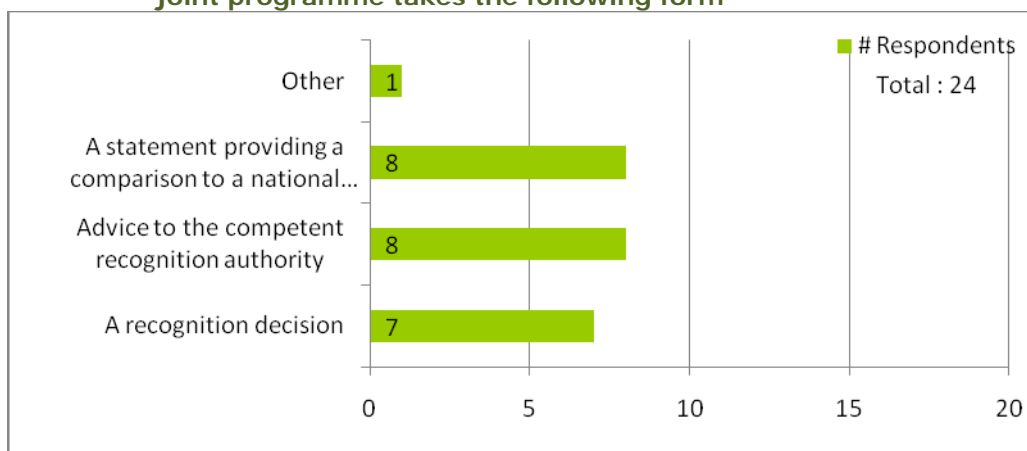
Of the six ENIC-NARICs that did not respond to this question, only one already received qualifications awarded by joint programmes for assessment. This ENIC-NARIC clarified that

they had not received Diploma Supplements yet in cases where joint programmes were concerned.

### The outcome of an assessment of a qualification awarded by a joint programme

The survey demonstrates that the outcome of an assessment of a qualification from a joint programme can take any form but there seem to be three main types: a recognition decision, an advice to the competent recognition authority making the decision and a statement providing a comparison to a national qualification. ENIC-NARICs additionally clarified they can apply various types of outcomes. The figure below only shows the most common outcome for each of the responding ENIC-NARICs.

**Figure 10. The outcome of an assessment of a qualification awarded by a joint programme takes the following form**

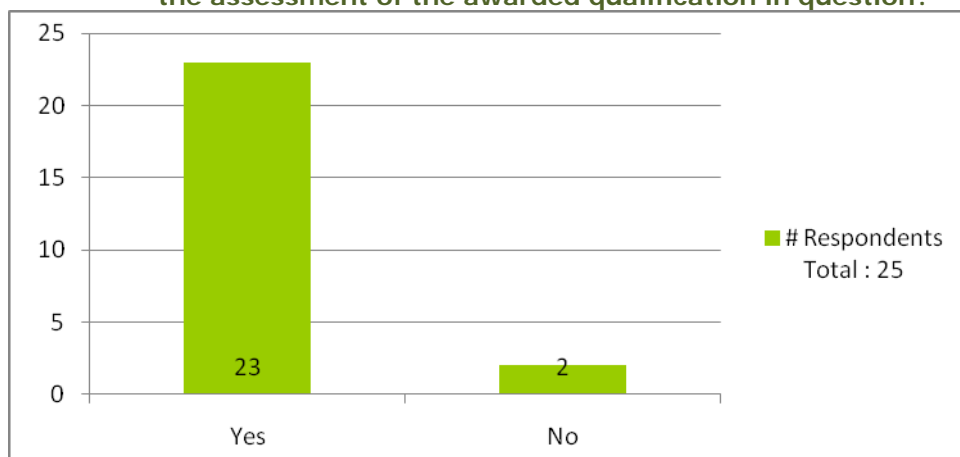


All the responding ENIC-NARICs report that if they (would) assess a qualification from a joint programme the outcome is or will be the same as in the case of a standard qualification.

#### 4. Quality assurance and accreditation

In order to analyse trends on quality assurance and accreditation followed by the ENIC-NARICs, they were asked if quality assurance or accreditation of the joint programme or institutions involved influences the outcome of the assessment of the awarded qualification in question.

**Figure 11. Does the quality assurance or accreditation of the joint programme or institutions involved influence the outcome of the assessment of the awarded qualification in question?**

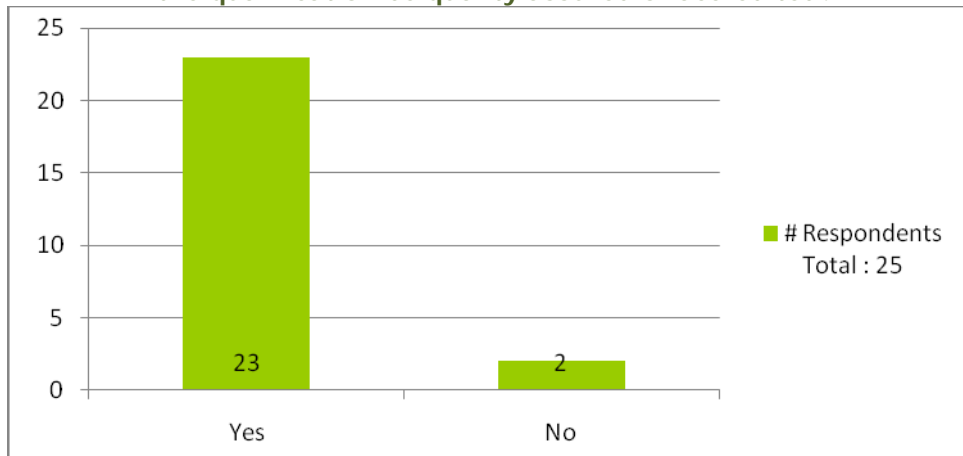


Here, 92% of responding ENIC-NARICs confirm that quality assurance or accreditation influences the outcome of their assessment of the awarded qualifications. Only 8% of ENIC-NARICs report that this does not influence their assessment. Here there was one clarification: this ENIC-NARICs looks for state recognition and this might or might not mean quality assurance or accreditation.

Most ENIC-NARICs have clear ideas of what quality assurance and accreditation actually means for them. Some state that the ideal situation would be if joint programmes or the awarding institutions were quality assured or accredited by all the participating countries. As one of the ENIC-NARICs clarified: *“If any institution, of those that provided joint study education, is not accredited/recognised, decision on recognition will be negative”*. Or put more strongly by another respondent: *“Without quality assurance of the higher education institutions involved: no recognition”*.

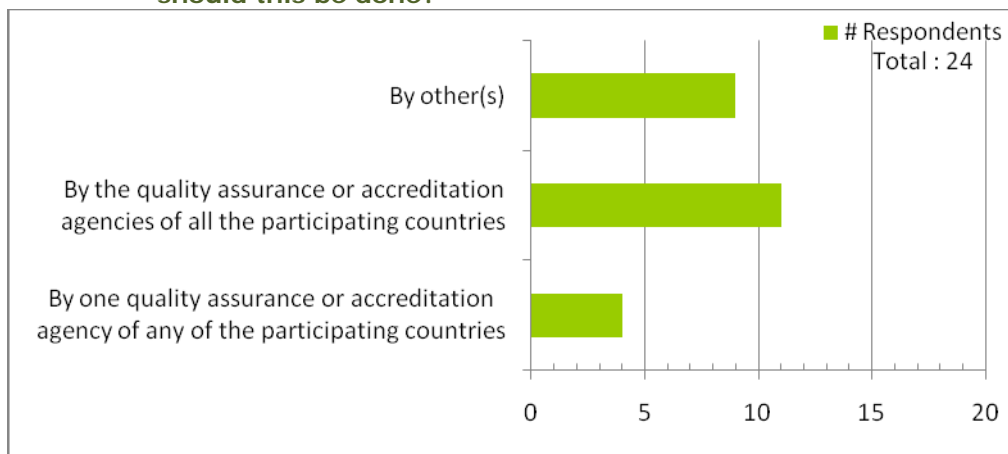
But quality assurance and accreditation of the joint programme or the institutions involved doesn't only influence the assessments of the awarded qualifications. Exactly the same amount of ENIC-NARICs (92%) state that joint programmes and/or the institutions involved should actually be quality assured or accredited.

**Figure 12. Should the joint programme and/or the institutions awarding the qualification be quality assured or accredited?**



The question that comes out of this is, of course, who should quality assure or accredit the joint programme or the institutions awarding the qualification(s)? As we can see from figure 13, it seems that 46% of ENIC-NARICs currently prefer that this is taken care of by agencies in all the participating countries while 17% of respondents indicate that it would be sufficient if this is taken care of by one of the quality assurance or accreditation agencies of any of the participating countries. One ENIC-NARIC explained: *“Each institution should be accredited in its own country. All of the elements of the study program should be accredited and quality assured at least in one of the participating countries”*.

**Figure 13. If the joint programme and/or the institutions awarding the qualification should be quality assured or accredited, by whom should this be done?**



29% of responding ENIC-NARICs specified other arrangements of quality assurance or accreditation. Here some ENIC-NARICs refer to agreements between accreditation agencies. Then one accreditation would be *“considered to be enough”*. One ENIC-NARIC stated: *“It should be done by the respective accrediting agencies of the participating institutions or via agreement between accrediting bodies or institutions permitting cross-jurisdictional accreditation”*.

## 5. Conclusion

Finally, all ENIC-NARICs were asked if they had any additional comments about the survey or the issue of the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes. The following two comments were received regarding the issue of recognition:

*“The assessment is easier the more the joint qualification is part of all the national qualification systems of the countries concerned; qualifications without this reference to a national qualification system have always the danger of being treated as 'second-range' ones.”*

*“The specific guidelines in Denmark on recognition of qualification from joint programmes (joint degree and transnational education) distinguishes between degree awarding institutions and providing institution. A condition for recognition is that the degree awarding institution and the programme is publicly recognised in the degree awarding country(ies). The programme shall respect national legislation in both degree awarding and non degree awarding countries (e.g. not be established illegally).”*



# 5

## Concluding remarks

The main problem with joint programmes and the degrees they award seems to be that they are not merely national. They are neither plain national programmes nor simply national degrees. ENIC-NARICs are therefore confronted with very concrete issues.

### NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND RECOGNITION

The legal aspects regarding both the organisation of joint programmes and the recognition of joint qualifications are a serious obstacle to recognition. One of the preconditions for recognition would be conformity to national legislation when establishing and offering a joint programme and when awarding a (joint) qualification. This has numerous implications. First, all the institutions involved need to be nationally recognised as higher education institutions. If one of the institutions involved is not recognised - even if it is not involved in the award of the qualification - it may raise questions. Second, these institutions should be allowed to offer the joint programme concerned. Do the national regulations allow the organisation of international joint programmes? Are these programmes also recognised as such? This means that recognition of a similar national programme is not sufficient; it is not considered equivalent to full-fledged recognition of the joint programme. It also indicates that re-using parts of the curriculum of a recognised national programme in a joint programme is not the same as recognition of the joint programme. Third, the institutions and programmes involved should be allowed to (jointly)

**Example :** A joint programme provided by a consortium of three institutions, of which two are not recognised in their home countries. The final degree is awarded by the recognised institution, which is accordingly authorised to award the degree. Recognition of the qualification may be denied because two of the institutions involved in the programme were not recognised. These institutions are seen as making use of joint programme arrangements to flee the national regulatory framework.

**Example:** A joint programme offered by a consortium of several institutions of which one is not recognised. The name and the logo – and in some cases a signature of the head – of the not recognised institution appears on the joint qualification. Recognition of this qualification will be denied in the country where the not recognised institution was based and –more than probably- also in other countries.

award the qualification. There are two important elements in this precondition: the national recognition of the qualification concerned and, where relevant, the legal

**Example :** If national legislation of one of the countries involved in a joint programme requires a permit from a certain authority (e.g. minister) to enter into an agreement being a basis for a joint programme and the permit was not given, the programme will not be recognised in the country whose legislation was not respected. This in turn will have an impact on the recognition in third countries, even if such a permit is not required in the other countries involved.

authorisation to award a joint qualification.

According to the survey, the legal issues mentioned above are assessment criteria applied by all ENIC-NARICs. This in turn suggests that if a qualification doesn't comply with these criteria it will not be recognised (in

most – if not all - countries). A joint programme should therefore be established and the degree awarded in such a way that the qualification can be recognised. The impression of ENIC-NARICs is however those institutions that establish a joint programme think about the recognition of their degrees only when recognition is denied. This seems to be the wrong way about. The issue of recognition should be an issue even before the first student is admitted. A joint programme should therefore be established and the degree awarded in such a way that the qualification can be recognised.

#### THE NEED FOR INFORMATION

ENIC-NARICs need to gather a great deal of pertinent information when assessing qualifications. Qualifications awarded by joint programmes are not treated differently in recognition procedures but the amount of information needed does increase tremendously. ENIC-NARICs need to verify the status of the institution that offers the programme, the status of the programme itself and the qualification awarded. This also means identifying whether the qualification is part of a national degree system and publicly recognised in the country or countries of the degree awarding institution(s).

ENIC-NARICs indicate that here they are faced with both a lack of transparency and a lack of information. This is of course a shared responsibility of the national education authorities, the quality assurance and accreditation agencies and the institutions. The main source of information is the degree itself. This document needs to already clarify a lot of elements. The main elements seem to be the awarding institution(s) and -where appropriate- their status, the actual qualification in the different higher education systems and the legislation governing the award.

A second important source of information is the Diploma Supplement. This document should be published in the agreed European format or contain all the information that this template puts forward. It is also very important that the issued Diploma Supplement covers the totality of the joint programme. Even if more than one qualification is awarded,

ENIC-NARICs would appreciate a Diploma Supplement that informs them about the totality of the programme and its position in the countries concerned.

**AND FINALLY...**

It should be stressed that the responsibility for the recognition of qualifications awarded by a joint programme lies not with ENIC-NARICs or other competent bodies. They only deal with the final product. The real responsibility for the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes lies with the institutions that offer the joint programme. They should therefore establish the programme and award their qualifications in such a way that recognition is facilitated.



# Annex: Terminology

**A**s mentioned in the chapter on methodology, we presented the respondents with a set of concepts and their definitions without further discussing the terminology used. Some of this terminology will be further explored below.

## QUALIFICATION

Higher education in Europe predominantly uses “degree” when they refer to the award issued by a higher education programme. ENIC-NARICs on the other hand commonly refer to qualifications. There seems to be only a slight difference between these two terms. In the Lisbon Recognition Convention, a qualification is defined as *“any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme”*<sup>4</sup>. From this definition, we can see that the term qualification is a broader concept than degree. In general, diploma is not used for higher education and certificate is not used for regular higher education programmes.

The definition of qualification has been redefined in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area as: *“Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting that particular learning outcomes have been achieved, normally following the successful completion of a recognised higher education programme of study”*<sup>5</sup>. This definition follows the development in the European Higher Education Area and more particularly those concerning qualification frameworks and learning outcomes. More importantly, the definition explicitly refers to recognised higher education.

## JOINT PROGRAMME

The term joint programme and joint degree are regularly mixed up in European higher education. Joint programme and joint degree are however not synonyms. A programme refers to the offered education while a degree refers to the award itself attesting successful completion of a programme. A joint programme can lead to a joint degree but not necessarily. As it happens, a degree from a joint programme can be either single, joint, multiple or double degrees.

The term joint programme is widely used but rarely defined. EUA’s Guidelines for quality enhancement in European joint master programmes refers to joint programmes as *“programmes which are developed and implemented jointly by several institutions in different countries”*<sup>6</sup>. This definition is of course correct. It however also makes offering joint programmes a closed shop since it seems to exclude the possibility that other institutions join the consortium after the development phase. As reported in ENQA’s TEEP II project<sup>7</sup> and seen in the second phase of Erasmus Mundus, late joiners are a reality.

The focus therefore needs to be more on the joint offering and not on the development and implementation. The European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education proposed a definition with this focus in their Principles for accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes:

*“A joint programme is a programme offered jointly by different higher education institutions irrespective of the degree (joint, multiple and double) awarded”<sup>8</sup>*

This definition is quite straightforward and seems to suit the reality of the European Higher Education Area.

### JOINT QUALIFICATION (ALSO KNOWN AS “JOINT DEGREE”)

In the Analytical Quality Glossary<sup>9</sup> a joint degree is defined as *“a degree awarded by more than one higher education institution”*.

From this definition we could conclude that there is no link with a specific type of programme. The programme in question then doesn’t have to be offered jointly by the degree awarding institutions. Do overseas programmes validated by British universities offer joint degrees? And what makes such a degree a joint degree? Can it be issued on different documents? The fact that the definition doesn’t make reference to joint programmes seems to be problematic. In fact, the term joint programme is not included in the Analytical Quality Glossary.

The Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees<sup>10</sup> gives the following definition of the term joint degree:

*“A joint degree should, for the purposes of this Recommendation, be understood as referring to a higher education qualification issued jointly by at least two or more higher education institutions or jointly by one or more higher education institutions and other awarding bodies, on the basis of a study programme developed and/or provided jointly by the higher education institutions, possibly also in cooperation with other institutions.*

*A joint degree may be issued as*

- a) a joint diploma in addition to one or more national diplomas;*
- b) a joint diploma issued by the institutions offering the study programme in question without being accompanied by any national diploma;*
- c) one or more national diplomas issued officially as the only attestation of the joint qualification in question.*

Generally, the use of *diploma* is not encouraged since most ENIC-NARICs consider diplomas to be qualifications of lower levels of education, thus not higher education. Part a of the definition seems to indicate that there are institutions that award two degrees: a national degree and a joint degree. It is very unlikely that both these degrees would be acknowledged as the nationally recognised higher education qualification. Part c of the

definition is nowadays not regarded as a joint degree but rather as the award of multiple degrees.

The Methodological Report<sup>11</sup> of ENQA's TEEP II project also assessed the validity of the Recommendation's definition and reported that the definitions do not take into account the legality of the diploma or the document(s) issued. The report concluded that *"the definitions in the Recommendation are therefore not as widely accepted as they could have been"*.

The Methodological Report of the TEEP II project therefore proposed its own definition of a joint degree: "a joint diploma issued by the institutions offering a joint programme in place of all the national diplomas, attesting the successful completion of this joint programme".

This definition brings us closer to the current realities of joint qualifications or joint degrees across Europe. We can see the following characteristics:

- A joint degree is awarded after successful completion of a joint programme;
- The joint degree is awarded jointly by higher education institutions that offer the programme (but not necessarily by all);
- The institutions involved in the joint degree do not award any other (national) degree indicating that the awarded joint degree is nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme;
- The joint degree is the recognised and only attestation of the qualification.

We can therefore conclude that a joint degree is a recognised degree awarded by higher education institutions that offer the joint programme, attesting the successful completion of this joint programme. It is a single document nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme and signed by the competent authorities (rectors, vice-chancellors, ...) of the institutions involved in the joint degree.

# Annex: End notes

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6. **European University Association**, *EMNEM - Guidelines for quality enhancement in European joint master programmes*, 2006
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