

Principles for accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes

1. Introduction

Joint programmes are programmes offered jointly by different higher education institutions irrespective of the degree (joint, multiple and double) awarded. Joint programmes could be subject to accreditation procedures by different accreditation organisations in each of the states where the joint programme is offered. These distinct accreditation jurisdictions imply the potential involvement of several accreditation organisations and therefore the execution of different accreditation procedures.

The members of ECA however agree that the Code of Good Practice applies to all accreditation organisations including their procedures regarding joint programmes. The principles set out below could be an integral part of a mutual recognition agreement. This implies that accreditation decisions regarding joint programmes are/should be subject to the relevant mutual recognition of accreditation decisions agreements.

In order to increase mutual trust and transparency, the members of ECA concur that accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes should take into account the following principles.

2. Principles for the accreditation of joint programmes

2.1. Information sharing and transparency

- On receipt of a request for the accreditation of a joint programme the accreditation organisation informs the other relevant accreditation organisation(s) about the request;
- The other relevant accreditation organisation(s) provide(s) information on:
 - Whether the programme is part of, has already undergone or is undergoing a quality assurance and/or an accreditation procedure;
 - Whether the relevant institutions can legally offer the joint programme (including the status of the degree involved).

2.2. The composition of the expert panel

- There should be particular emphasis on the inclusion of experts with relevant international experience and knowledge.

2.3. The assessment process

- The submitted documentation must include comprehensive information on the totality of the joint programme and not just the single contribution (national and/or institutional);
- The panel has to determine site visit(s) requirements;
- Any site visit(s) must include representatives of the programme who are able to present the totality of the joint programme across all sites (even if there are not representatives from all sites);
- The panel makes its assessment on the totality of the joint programme, including taking into account the learning outcomes aimed for by the joint programme irrespective of the individual study pathways;
- The assessment process should, where possible, include at least one observer from another relevant accreditation organisation.

2.4. The accreditation decision

- The accreditation decision is based on the assessment of the totality of the joint programme (even if the accreditation decision is only binding in the "jurisdiction" of the accreditation organisation that took the decision);
- The accreditation decision must be communicated to the relevant accreditation organisation(s).

3. Principles for the quality assurance of joint programmes through institutional accreditation

The principles below can be seen in the light of an institution undergoing institutional accreditation for the first time or an institution getting renewal of its institutional accreditation.

3.1. Information sharing and transparency

- A request for the accreditation of an institution offering or seeking to offer joint programme(s) should include information on the joint programme(s) involved;
- The accreditation organisation should inform the other relevant accreditation organisation(s) about such joint programmes;
- These other relevant accreditation organisation(s) should provide information on such joint programmes:
 - Whether the programmes are part of, have already undergone or are undergoing a quality assurance and/or an accreditation procedure;
 - Whether the relevant institutions can legally offer these joint programmes (including the status of the degree involved).

3.2. The composition of the expert panel

- There should be particular emphasis on the inclusion of experts with relevant international experience and knowledge.

3.3. The assessment process

- Accreditation organisations should assess whether an institution seeking accreditation pays regard to the following principles within their own quality assurance procedures:
 - The institution has the mechanisms to gather information on the totality of each joint programme and not just the single institutional contribution;
 - The institution has, or has the potential to put in place, quality assurance procedures that can consider its joint programme(s) or these procedures have been complemented/replaced by a quality assurance system set up by the joint programme itself;
 - The institution regularly assesses the totality of each joint programme, including taking into account the learning outcomes aimed for by each joint programme irrespective of the individual study pathways.

3.4. The accreditation decision

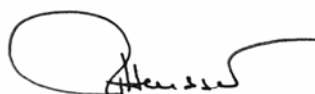
- The accreditation decision must be communicated to the relevant accreditation organisation(s).

3.5. The introduction of new joint programmes

- Accreditation organisations should inform accredited institutions that they are expected to quality assure any new joint programme(s) with a rigour equivalent to that which provided the basis of the institution's accreditation.

Approved in the plenary session of the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA) in Berlin on 14 June 2007.

On behalf of ECA,



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