



Protocol for Dutch Applications for Initial Accreditation leading to a Joint Degree

7 June 2010
version February 2011

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Foreword

NVAO grants initial accreditation to a new programme based on the framework for applying for initial accreditation applicable at the moment the application is submitted. For programmes that are offered in collaboration with one or more other institutions and which lead to a joint degree, there is also an assessment procedure based on the present protocol.

This protocol is focused on the joint character of the programme and the associated quality assurance.

1 Introduction

On 1 July 2010, Article 7.3c of the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (*Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek*) took effect. This article regulates the 'joint programme', often referred to as a 'joint degree'.

A joint programme is a programme that is offered by a Dutch institution in collaboration with one or more other Dutch or foreign institutions of higher education, for which the collaborating institutions bear joint responsibility and for which each collaborating Dutch institution offers a substantial part of the programme. This means that the programme must be offered at a minimum of two locations.¹

Offering a joint programme and degree should have significant advantages for an institution/the institutions. At a national level, it might provide qualitatively added value or there could be financial or educational reasons for offering the programme. Joint degrees can also strengthen the international dimension of higher education.

A joint programme is not necessarily defined as a full Bachelor's or Master's degree programme. It can also pertain to a part of a programme, such as a specialisation or a specific track within the degree programme.

Because a joint degree is coupled with this joint programme or the joint track by two or more institutions, hereafter we will use the term *joint degree programme*.

The design of joint degree programmes should take into account the fact that the Dutch institution(s) is (are) jointly responsible for ensuring compliance with Dutch legal regulations. The Dutch institution(s) is (are) liable for the entire programme.

In the case of a joint degree programme for which only Dutch institutions are involved, these institutions are jointly responsible for tasks and responsibilities related to initial accreditation, accreditation, registration in the CROHO, a recommendation regarding the continuation of studies, workload, the award of the degree and enrolment of students. For some topics the

¹ In a letter of 16 December 2010 the Director of Higher Education and Study Finance specified this condition for national joint degree programmes. Each participating Dutch institution must be responsible for a substantial part of the education, but when it concerns a national joint degree programme this can be offered in one municipality, at one location. Nonetheless, the teachers of each of the institutions involved must be responsible for a substantial part of the programme.

boards of the institutions can agree on who should be responsible for carrying out the respective tasks. This can be established in a cooperation agreement between the institution boards involved.

Of course, these topics can also be carried out in collaboration. The rights and obligations with respect to one another and in relation to the students, as agreed between the institutions, should be clear to the participating institutions and to the student.

If it involves collaboration between one or more Dutch institutions and one or more foreign institutions, then there are a number of significant points that play a role in the choice of partner. Agreement must be reached on these points before the start of the collaboration. Obviously, the Dutch institution(s) should ensure that it (they) meet the legal provisions in the Netherlands. This could include the following aspects:

- a) the name of the programme and the duration of the programme;
- b) the manner in which foreign diplomas are structured (is the joint degree the only diploma that the foreign institution links to the programme and may it be awarded in all countries involved?);
- c) clear-cut aims and objectives, development of the tracks and assessment of the achievement of performance levels and learning outcomes;
- d) the manner in which the internal quality assurance is organised and ensured;
- e) position of the examining board;
- f) funding status of the programme in each of the other countries in which a participating institution is established; possibilities for registration/tuition fees and the conclusion of financial agreements between the partners;
- g) possibilities concerning the use of other languages;
- h) teaching and examination regulations and possibilities for deviations from them.

As European consultation processes progress on how foreign accreditations are to be accepted, the easier it will become to form joint degree programmes with foreign institutions. As long as this is still an ongoing process, obstacles for the joint degree programmes will be removed as much as possible – while retaining quality guarantees. It goes without saying; Dutch law can only regulate the situation in the Netherlands.

It is not possible to award a joint degree for a combined HBO track (professional orientation) and a WO track (academic orientation). This conflicts with the binary distinction within the Dutch higher education system.

The joint degree programmes are accredited or assessed at the level of the joint programme. If the joint degree is structured through a joint track within two (or more) programmes, then in fact the regular accreditation or initial accreditation procedure applies. The joint character is included in the accreditation or initial accreditation of the individual Dutch programme(s).

Registration in the CROHO as a joint degree can only be done if it is based on an accreditation or initial accreditation decision taken by NVAO.

This protocol focuses on the assessment by NVAO of new, jointly offered programmes or tracks for which institutions wish to award a joint degree.

2 When can one apply for an initial accreditation leading to a joint degree?

It is possible to apply for an initial accreditation of a joint degree programme in the following situations:

1. Two or more Dutch institutions intend to:
 - a. link a joint degree to a new, jointly offered programme (not registered in CROHO or not registered in CROHO at all participating institutions);
 - b. link a joint degree to a new, jointly offered track within two or more Dutch programmes.

The contribution of each institution should be substantial enough to justify a joint degree application.

2. In collaboration with one or more foreign institutions, one or more Dutch institutions intend to:
 - a. link a joint degree to a new, jointly offered programme (not registered in CROHO);
 - b. link a joint degree to a new, jointly offered track within two or more programmes.

The contribution of the Dutch institution(s) should be substantial enough to justify a joint degree application by a Dutch institution(s).

A joint degree programme is *not* possible in the following cases (*grounds for exclusion*):

- If the intention is to link a joint degree to a combined Dutch HBO programme/track (professional higher education) and a Dutch WO programme/ track (academic higher education);
- If the joint programme/ track is offered jointly with one or more foreign institutions that is (are) not recognised in their own country or is (are) not entitled to take part in this joint degree programme.

Before an application is submitted, the applying institution(s) is (are) required to ascertain that the aforementioned grounds for exclusion do not occur and that the joint programme/ track is offered in accordance with the laws and regulations in the Netherlands and in the other countries involved.

For the international acceptance of the joint degree it is necessary that when international students enrol, the Dutch institution(s) involved is (are) registered in the Code of Conduct Register (<http://www.internationalstudy.nl/Paginas/Register%20gedragscode.htm>) and complies (comply) with its provisions.

If it concerns publicly funded education a macro-efficiency check must first be requested by the Dutch institution(s). Following a successful macro-efficiency check, an application for an "initial accreditation leading to a joint degree" can be submitted by the Dutch institution(s) to NVAO.

If it concerns privately funded education, a request for "initial accreditation leading to a joint degree" can be submitted by the Dutch institution(s) directly to NVAO.

The joint degree can only be awarded to students who have successfully completed the programme or track jointly offered at the institutions involved.

3 How can one apply for the initial accreditation of a joint degree programme?

The application is submitted to NVAO by the relevant Dutch institution if one institution is involved, or by the Dutch institutions together if several Dutch institutions are involved.

The information file should relate to the entire joint programme/track (i.e. including the parts offered in the Netherlands and any parts offered abroad). A list of who the foreign partners are, must be included in the file.

The following information – of course in addition to the information necessary for a ‘regular’ initial accreditation – should be included with the application so that the application can be processed:

- the name and the degree earned on completion of the joint programme or track;
- the names and locations of the applying Dutch institution(s);
- the names and locations of the foreign partner institution(s);
- information on the recognition of the foreign partner institution(s) in its (their) own country;
- information on recognition as a Erasmus Mundus programme (if applicable);
- information on foreign accreditation decisions, periods and reports that pertain to the foreign part of the joint programme;
- the cooperation agreement between the boards of the institutions in which the mutual responsibilities are recorded (see paragraph 1).

4 How is the assessment carried out?

The assessment by NVAO is carried out according to the frameworks applicable at the moment the application is submitted. In addition to this, the following provisions apply to the assessment:

1. *Assessment of legitimacy.*

NVAO will assess whether the grounds for exclusion named in paragraph 2 are present or not. NVAO will also advise on the classification in the CROHO.

2. *Principles for accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes*

(<http://www.eacaconsortium.net>).

NVAO agreed to these principles for the accreditation of international joint programmes with a number of European partners. This is intended to establish a good and internationally respected assessment practice. The *principles* state that the programme should be assessed in its entirety and that foreign accreditation organisations should be informed and, if desired, involved (e.g. as observers) in the assessment by the panel.

3. *Assessment of joint character*

In the panel recommendation, the joint programme (i.e. including the parts offered abroad) should be assessed in its entirety by the standards of the Assessment

Framework. The joint character of the programme or track can be gleaned from; the cooperation agreement (see paragraph 1) and from coordination and shared responsibility between the partners with respect to the intended learning outcomes, the content-related cohesion of aims and objectives and the curriculum, the assessment of students, the services, the internal quality assurance, the personnel and the guarantees for the achievement of the learning outcomes at different locations.

4. *Site visit made by panel to the participating institutions.*

The joint programme should be assessed in its entirety. But this does not mean that all locations must be visited by the panel. A visit to one location *may* suffice if there is sufficient written information available about the different locations and if it is ensured that representatives of the management, teachers and students from other locations are available during the site visit (in person or electronically). The panel recommendation will state why this particular location was visited (as opposed to a different one).

5. *Use of foreign accreditation reports.*

The panel may make use of foreign accreditation reports recently issued, provided these accreditation reports or the bodies that assess these reports, in the judgement of NVAO, provide a sufficient guarantee of the quality assurance. NVAO can obtain information from foreign accreditation organisations and cooperate with these organisations in the context of an application. If the foreign accreditation falls under a mutual recognition agreement signed by NVAO, then NVAO will in principle adopt the results of the assessment. The institution is responsible for keeping NVAO informed if it thinks that a foreign accreditation report falls under a mutual recognition agreement.

5 What should be done if an institution withdraws or is replaced by another institution?

When a partner withdraws or is replaced, this information should be passed on to NVAO immediately along with the new cooperation agreement between the collaborating institutions. If the joint degree programme is offered by two institutions and one of these institutions withdraws, it is clear that the accreditation as a joint degree programme will have to be withdrawn.

In other cases, the situation must be left to the judgement of NVAO. Any changes will be considered within the current accreditation period.

N.B. The participating institutions are listed in the CROHO and will also have to be altered if a change occurs.