

Framework for Fair Recognition of Joint Degrees



Axel Aerden & Jenneke Lokhoff

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”

“As you will learn from this document, the best way to deal with joint degrees is (a) to accept you do not need to know everything, and (b) to know when the information and/or evidence gathered is sufficient to recognise or recommend recognition.”

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1. Introduction

The Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee on 9 June 2004¹ encourages to recognise joint degrees at least as favourable as foreign national ones. This is however not always a straightforward matter. To identify a joint degree, credential evaluators have to deal with a challenging amount of information. In recent years, several problems regarding the recognition of degrees awarded for joint programmes have been brought to light². An important finding has been that national information centres on recognition (ENIC-NARICs) dealt very differently with degrees awarded for joint programmes.³ The same problem was found even more clearly among credential evaluators at higher education institutions.⁴ There seemed to be a need to come to an agreement on how to deal with the recognition of joint degrees and degrees awarded for joint programmes in order to facilitate their fair and flexible recognition.

To facilitate the fair and flexible recognition of joint degrees, the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) and ENIC-NARICs have cooperated to provide more substantiation in recognition practices.

This publication intends to provide more substantiation to recognition practices regarding joint degrees.

¹ See: Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications. 2004. *Recommendation on the recognition of joint degrees*.

<https://wcd.coe.int/com.intranet.IntraServlet?command=com.intranet.CmdBlobGet&IntranetImage=320284&SecMode=1&DocId=822138&Usage=2>

² See for examples: www.ecaconsortium.net/main/news/detail/enic-narics:-help-us-facilitate-recognition-of-joint-degrees/9 and www.ecaconsortium.net/main/news/detail/report:-the-recognition-of-qualifications-awarded-by-joint-programmes/10

³ Aerden, A., Reczulska, H., 2010. *The recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes*. ECA Occasional Paper. The Hague, www.ecaconsortium.net/main/documents/publications#recognition

⁴ Aerden, A., 2010. *The recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes: the perspective of higher education institutions*. ECA Occasional Paper. The Hague, www.ecaconsortium.net/main/documents/publications#recognitionHEI

This publication is aimed at credential evaluators and explores the elements that play a role when evaluating a joint degree and introduces issues that might occur. Each issue is further explained through an example, then put into recognition practice and results in a conclusion.

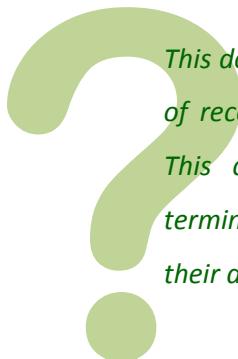
This publication is the result of the hard work of the so-called Recognition Group of the JOQAR project. All the project partners are very grateful for the work of **Inger Bruun** (Danish Agency for Universities and Internationalisation), **Jenneke Lokhoff** (Nuffic, The Netherlands), **Peder de Thurah Toft** (Danish Agency for Universities and Internationalisation), **Hanna Reczulska** (ENIC-NARIC Poland), **Gemma Zabbar** (UK NARIC) and **Tatsiana Zahorskaya** (UK NARIC).

The Framework for Fair Recognition of Joint Degrees would not be as complete without the input of such a great number of ENIC-NARICs. They gave their precious time to contribute and participated in a workshop (November 2012) where the framework was further developed. The project partners would like

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2. Setting the stage



This document links up with other developments taking place in the area of recognition and in the area of quality assurance and accreditation. This chapter outlines current relevant developments, explains the terminology used and explores the proliferation of joint programmes and their degrees.

2.1. Current developments

Two projects have created new circumstances for the recognition of joint degrees. The **European Area of Recognition (EAR) Manual** on the one hand codified good practice based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention while the **Joint Programmes Quality Assurance and Recognition (JOQAR) Project** is streamlining joint programme's external quality assurance, accreditation and joint degree awarding.

2.1.1. The European Area of Recognition (EAR) Manual

The European Area of Recognition (EAR) project started in 2009 with the aim to develop a manual providing a practical translation of the abstract principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the international treaty on recognition of foreign qualifications which is relevant to the European area. The EAR project was necessitated by the fact that although everything had been discussed and researched, there still were different recognition practices in the European Region. These differences in practice were preventing fair recognition across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and were as such a serious

The EAR manual provides practical recommendations on how to practice recognition.

obstacle for student mobility. The need was felt to focus on streamlining and convergence of the recognition practice according to the good practice available. To this end, the EAR project was started by a group of ENIC-NARICs, national information centres on recognition.

The ‘EAR manual’⁵ resulting from this project was published in the beginning of 2012. It provides practical recommendations on how to practice recognition, dealing with all relevant ‘recognition topics’ from the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The manual includes a specific recommendation on how to recognise degrees awarded for joint programmes and joint degrees.

The EAR Manual is the first manual to be based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention and on good practices developed thus far.

The EAR manual was endorsed by the ministers responsible for higher education from the 47 countries that make up the European Higher Education Area.

Moreover, the manual was developed in close cooperation with the individual centres making up the ENIC-NARIC networks. Its recommendations are supported by the entire networks and recommended as good practice, thus providing a good standard on practicing recognition. The use of the manual is supported

by different stakeholders including the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO, and has the interest of the other convention regions. Last, but not least, the use of the EAR manual is recommended by the 47 ministers of education in the EHEA. In their Communiqué of April 2012 they “recommend its use as a set of guidelines for recognition of foreign qualifications and a compendium of good practices”⁶.

As a result, it is clear that it is recommended to use the EAR manual for the recognition of joint degrees and other degrees awarded for joint programmes and that this publication complements the recommendations of the EAR manual. More information can be found on: www.eurorecognition.eu.

⁵ Nuffic, 2012. *European Area of Recognition Manual: Practical guidelines for fair recognition of qualifications*. 2012. Nuffic. www.eurorecognition.eu

⁶ EHEA Ministerial Conference, 2012. *Making the Most of Our Potential: Consolidating the European Higher Education (Bucharest Communiqué)* [www.ehea.info/Uploads/\(1\)/Bucharest%20Communique%202012\(2\).pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/(1)/Bucharest%20Communique%202012(2).pdf)

2.1.2. The JOQAR Project

Joint programmes involve many different countries. This necessitates either separate quality assurance and accreditation procedures in all relevant countries or the recognition of one agency's results by all other relevant agencies. Within the framework of the JOQAR project, European quality assurance and accreditation agencies have developed a multilateral mutual recognition agreement regarding these quality assurance and accreditation results. The multilateral mutual recognition agreement supports so-called single accreditation procedures, in which one agency undertakes the external assessment, and ensures that accreditation results are accepted across borders. To coordinate these types of procedures, a European Coordination Point for external quality assurance and accreditation of joint programmes has been established within the

A European Coordination Point has been established to facilitate the external quality assurance of joint programmes.

framework of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). The Coordination Point provides information and assistance on internal and external quality assurance of joint programmes. It will additionally publish relevant information concerning joint programmes and their degrees, such as national regulatory frameworks and the legal status of joint degrees. The

The ECApedia publishes relevant information concerning joint programmes such as national regulatory frameworks and the legal status of joint degrees.

Coordination Point will publish that information through the ECApedia (www.ecapedia.net), a higher education version of the Wikipedia. This means it focuses specifically on higher education, quality assurance and recognition issues. The content is maintained and edited by quality assurance and accreditation agencies and other relevant national organisations. In the near future the ECApedia intends to provide recognition bodies, such as ENIC-NARICs and higher education institutions, with all the information regarding the legal status and accreditation of joint degrees.

2.2. Glossary

In previous projects regarding joint programmes⁷, quality assurance agencies and ENIC-NARICs explored the terminology involved in joint programmes. A glossary of terms and supporting background information was subsequently published⁸. The key terms are listed below. More information about the terminology can be found in [Annex 2: Joint Programme Terminology](#).

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.

⁷ *Transnational European Evaluation Project II* (TEEP II, 2004-2006), coordinated by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and *Transnational European Accreditation decisions and Mutual recognition agreements 2* (TEAM 2, 2008-2010) coordinated by the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education.

⁸ **Aerden, A., Reczulska, H.**, 2013. *Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees*. ECA Occasional Paper, The Hague, p. 11. www.ecaconsortium.net/main/documents/publications#guidelines

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*”⁹.

⁹ **Council of Europe.** 1997. *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region*, Art. 1.

2.3. The proliferation of joint degrees

This chapter presents a very short overview of the proliferation of joint degrees. The full explanation and sources are available in [Annex 1: The proliferation of joint programmes](#).

2003

- the level of interest in joint degrees among Rectors' Conferences and Ministries is "medium to low";
- legislation in more than half of EHEA countries does not allow the awarding of joint degrees;

2005

- growing interest in joint degrees, attributed to the start of the European Union's Erasmus Mundus programme;

2007

- 66.3% of EHEA countries have legislation allowing and encouraging the establishment of joint programmes and joint degrees;
- In all these countries, institutions have already established joint programmes and are awarding nationally recognised joint degrees;
- 60% of institutions in the EHEA offer joint programmes;
- only 4% of institutions do not see the need for joint programmes;

2009

- 83.3% of EHEA countries have legislation allowing and encouraging the establishment of joint programmes and joint degrees;
- in a quarter of the EHEA countries, more than 50% of all higher education institutions are involved in awarding joint degrees;
- around 2500 joint programmes are running in the EHEA;

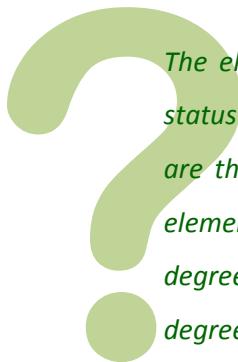
2011

- 84% of universities offer joint programmes;
- 33% of institutions award joint degrees; all others are developing or planning joint degrees;

2012

- all but one EHEA country has implemented legislation allowing the establishment of joint programmes and joint degrees;
- in four EHEA countries none of the institutions participated in joint programmes;
- in addition to these four countries mentioned above, none of the institutions in four additional EHEA countries participate in awarding joint degrees;

3. Recognising joint degrees



The elements that play a role when evaluating a degree (such as the status of the institutions, the awarding of the degree, the quality, etc.) are the same for both regular and joint degrees. The context of these elements is however quite different. This makes the recognition of joint degrees not always as straightforward as the recognition of regular degrees.

This chapter provides a dissection of distinctive elements that can play a role when dealing with the recognition of joint degrees. It presents a substantiation of the elements that might influence how credential evaluators look at an awarded joint degree. All these issues are then dealt with separately through examples. Each issue or example presents a conclusion for recognising the joint degree discussed.

The rationale behind the presented issues is that joint degrees should be treated at least as favourable as foreign national ones. In addition, the underlying principle is to be fair and to be flexible. We therefore encourage gathering evidence for recognition and recognising or recommending recognition when sufficient relevant evidence is available. This means that it is not always necessary to comprehend every single detail if you already have sufficient relevant evidence.

The following elements are dealt with: the joint programme consortium, the awarding institutions, the joint programme and the joint degree itself. Each issue is analysed and then summarised in a corresponding example. To facilitate dealing with all these issues, each subchapter concludes with instruments that could facilitate answering the issue raised.

The underlying principle when recognising joint degrees is to be fair and to be flexible.

3.1. The joint programme consortium

The consortium traditionally refers to the group of higher education institutions who offer the joint programme, irrespective of whether they are involved in awarding the joint degree. When solely looking at this consortium, the following issues come into play: the recognition and/or accreditation as a higher education institution of the consortium partners and the (legal) competence to offer the joint programme.

3.1.1. Issue: Institutional recognition

This issue refers to the concern that education providers which are not nationally recognised or accredited take part in joint programme consortia in order to gain de facto recognition. Even without taking part in awarding any degree, this institution would be able to advertise a recognised but foreign degree. This facilitates the operation of unrecognised providers.

Example #1

A joint programme consortium consists of an English, a Swedish and a Belgian institution. The English and Belgian institutions are recognised higher education institutions. The Swedish institution is however not. The joint degree is awarded by the English and the Belgian institution. A significant part of the joint programme is offered by the Swedish institution.

Example #2

A joint programme consortium consists of institutions from France, Italy, The Netherlands and Slovenia. All institutions are well-established research universities except the consortium partner from The Netherlands. This is in fact a training provider with facilities for the joint programme offered but without recognition as a higher education institution. The joint degree is awarded by all the institutions involved.

Recognition practice

In both examples, the information gathered demonstrates that all but one of the institutions involved are recognised. To avoid the operation of unrecognised providers, the

status of that institution is further investigated. The aim is to check whether this institution is a legitimate but non-recognised provider and thus not a degree mill, a bogus institution or a rogue provider. The EAR Manual refers to non-recognised but legitimate institutions as "*institutions which are not formally recognised by the authorities officially responsible for the accreditation and recognition of institutions in a given system, but which may offer study programmes of comparable level to other formally recognised programmes. Such institutions may include government or military institutions, adult education centres or religious seminaries.*"¹⁰

To conclude, if this institution is a legitimate provider, the joint programme consortium should not be an issue in the further recognition procedure. The credential evaluator can then decide to start the evaluation of the degree and the learning outcomes obtained by the applicant.

The rationale for this approach is that in this case the other recognised (and degree-awarding) institutions are responsible for the joint programme provided. This means they are responsible for the quality of the programme and for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the joint programme. It also means that these institutions are responsible for awarding a joint degree that is nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme.

In the second example you might even say that you do not need to gather all the details regarding the recognition of all the institutions involved. Once a credential evaluator has sufficient evidence of the quality of the consortium and of the relevant national recognition of the institution, the recognition procedure can continue.

Conclusion regarding institutional recognition

The participation of a legitimate but non-recognised provider can be accepted if the other recognised and degree-awarding institutions have assumed full responsibility for the joint programme provided.

¹⁰ More information about legitimate non-recognised providers can be found in Chapter 16 of the EAR Manual, p. 69.

3.1.2. Issue: Legal entitlement

This issue refers to the concern that according to the legal framework a higher education institution cannot offer a certain programme. This refers to the competence to offer a programme at a certain level (e.g. master's programme), in a certain field of study (e.g. Engineering) or award a certain degree (e.g. Master of Science). An institution without such competence could use a joint programme to offer a programme anyway. This institution becomes a consortium partner but does not take part in awarding the joint degree. As long as the joint programme and its joint degree are recognised elsewhere, such an institution could then offer its students a recognised ("foreign") degree. Joint programmes could then provide an unacceptable escape route out of the national legal framework and the awarded joint degree would raise recognition concerns in the higher education system of the institution that uses this escape route.

Example #1

A joint programme (in this case, an Erasmus Mundus Master) is offered by an English, a Dutch and a Czech institution. The programme is 90 credits and each institution offers one full semester of the curriculum (30 credits). Graduates receive a joint degree. Programme accreditation is mandatory for recognition in the Netherlands; in this case that would mean joint programme accreditation. The programme does not need accreditation in the other countries. The joint programme is not accredited in the Netherlands and the institution from The Netherlands awards a certificate, thus not a degree. The joint degree is awarded by the English and Czech institutions.

Example #2

A joint programme consortium consists of institutions from Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Norway, the UK, Spain and Switzerland. All institutions are recognised universities. All students start their curriculum in Switzerland, then have to choose between the Norwegian and Belgian partner and finally do their thesis research at any one of the seven partner institutions. The consortium partner from Spain does not have the appropriate accreditation to offer this programme and does not take part in awarding the joint degree.

Recognition practice

In both examples, the information gathered demonstrates that all but one of the institutions involved have the legal entitlement to offer the joint programme. To avoid this institution operating out of its national legal framework, it is further investigated whether the awarded joint degree would raise recognition concerns in that legal framework. The aim is to check whether this institution is taking part in the joint programme consortium without the intent to break the law and thus not exploiting an unacceptable escape route. If the participation of this institution is justifiable, the fact that it does not have the appropriate legal entitlement should not be an issue in the further recognition procedure. The credential evaluator can then proceed with the assessment of the degree.

The rationale for this approach is the same as above: the other recognised, legally entitled and degree-awarding institutions are responsible for the joint programme provided.

Conclusion regarding legal entitlement

The participation of an institution without the legal entitlement to offer certain types of (joint) programmes can be accepted if this institution operates in compliance with its legal framework.

3.2. The joint programme

Most higher education systems have specific requirements in their regulatory framework regarding joint programmes or joint degrees. It is important to distinguish both issues since not all legal frameworks equate the right to offer the joint programme with the right to award a joint degree.

In some countries joint programmes might need to be accredited as a joint programme, while in other countries joint programmes might need to be explicitly registered as a joint programme.

3.2.1. Issue: Joint programme recognition

This issue refers to the concern that joint degrees might be awarded for joint programmes which are not (nationally) recognised as a joint programme.

Where the accreditation and/or recognition of a joint programme is explicitly included in the regulatory framework, a joint programme should be offered accordingly. If this is not the case, credential evaluators might however still grant recognition to joint degrees awarded for joint programmes which are not nationally recognised as such.

Example #1

An institution offers a programme with two distinct specialisations. These specialisations are in fact a regular curriculum and a joint curriculum. The joint curriculum is a joint programme half of which is offered at a partner university abroad. According to the regulatory framework, such programmes can issue joint degrees to graduates of the joint curriculum but the joint curriculum needs to be accredited as a joint programme. The programme is indeed accredited but only the regular curriculum is. The joint curriculum is not included in the accreditation decision.

Example #2

A German institution offers a joint programme without any national accreditation. The higher education system has mandatory accreditation. The German Accreditation Council additionally states that institutions can offer programmes without accreditation and an academic title granted by these programmes can be

legitimate if that title has been granted by a state or state certified private higher education institution. In that case "*you are naturally entitled to use the title bestowed on you - irrespective of, whether the study programme completed by you bears the quality seal of the Accreditation Council or not*".¹¹

Recognition practice

The information gathered demonstrates that the joint programme is provided by recognised institutions and that one part of the joint programme is offered without satisfying certain requirements regarding joint programmes included in the relevant regulatory framework. To avoid undermining these requirements in the regulatory framework, the overall organisation of the joint programme needs to be legitimate and bona fide. This means the joint programme is offered in good faith and without the intent to deceive.

In the first example above there might be a number of legitimate reasons why the specialisation, which is part of the joint programme, is not accredited. It might for example be scheduled for an accreditation procedure in the future. In some cases, this specialisation is deemed accredited if the curriculum is identical to the accredited specialisation. Here, the only difference is the degree awarded. Even if the joint programme is not (yet) recognised as a joint programme in all the relevant regulatory frameworks, the awarded joint degree can be further considered in the recognition procedure.

The second example demonstrates that legal frameworks are not always as straightforward as they seem to be. The information available can be out-dated or comes with many exceptions and exclusions.

The circumstances in which the joint programme is organised might overrule the lack of specific joint programme recognition in one of the relevant regulatory frameworks. In the first example above, the fact that the joint programme satisfies all requirements in at least one of the regulatory frameworks and the fact that the regular specialisation is indeed

¹¹ Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany, Frequently Asked Questions, <http://akkreditierungsrat.de/index.php?id=faq&L=1#c1461> (retrieved 29 May 2013)

accredited can serve as sufficient evidence of joint programme recognition and overrule other specific requirements.

Conclusion regarding joint programme recognition

It can be accepted that a part of the joint programme's curriculum does not yet satisfy certain requirements in the corresponding regulatory framework, if the overall organisation of the joint programme is legitimate and bona fide.

3.3. Awarding the joint degree

The institutions that award the joint degree are not necessarily the same as the institutions in the joint programme consortium. Some legal frameworks do not allow their higher education institutions to award joint degrees, while other legal frameworks limit the award of a degree to those students that have actually studied at that institution. In such cases, one group of institutions can award the joint degree while the other group respectively awards their national degrees or does not award any degree.

3.3.1. Issue: Multiple degrees

This issue refers to the concern that the submitted joint degree is in fact not the only document “attesting the successful completion of this joint programme” and that there are other recognised degrees awarded. If these degrees are awarded by the institutions not involved in awarding the joint degree, we are in fact dealing with a multiple degree. In case of a multiple degree separate documents are awarded after successful completion of the joint programme. These separate documents can be national degrees but can also be, for example, a combination of a joint degree with one or more national degrees.

Example #1

A joint programme is offered by five institutions from Belgium (one from the Flemish Community and one from the French Community), France, Germany and The Netherlands. Each offer courses included in the curriculum but graduates do not necessarily visit each institution. Graduates receive a joint degree awarded by the institutions from Flanders, France and Germany. In addition they receive a national degree from either The Netherlands or Belgium (French Community) depending on where they have studied their last semester.

Example #2

A joint programme is offered by four institutions from Finland, Hungary, Portugal and the UK. Each offer courses included in the curriculum but graduates do not necessarily visit each institution. Graduates receive a multiple degree. The multiple degree consists of one joint degree of two institutions and two national degrees

(from Finland and the UK). The awarded joint degree is a Master of Science, a degree which the Hungarian institution is not allowed to offer.

Recognition practice

In both examples, the information gathered demonstrates that there are additional degrees awarded alongside the joint degree. If these other degrees are legitimate, nationally recognised degrees, we are dealing with a multiple degree. The joint degree is just one of the legitimate degrees awarded. In case the joint degree cannot be immediately recognised, the nationally recognised degree(s) awarded alongside the joint degree can be used to continue the recognition procedure.

The rationale for this approach is that even individual degrees which are part of a multiple degree arrangement can on its own merits be regarded as attesting the successful completion of the joint programme in question.

Conclusion regarding multiple degrees

If a joint degree presents difficulties for recognition and this joint degree is part of a multiple degree arrangement, the additional degree(s) awarded can be used to continue the recognition procedure.

3.3.2. Issue: Cover certificates

This issue refers to the concern that the submitted joint degree is in fact not the document “attesting the successful completion of this joint programme” and that there are other recognised degrees awarded. If these other degrees are awarded by the same institutions that award the alleged joint degree, we are in fact dealing with a cover certificate. We refer to a cover certificate when the institutions in the joint programme award their own nationally recognised degrees and in addition award a joint certificate. The cover certificate is however not a recognised award, the underlying national degrees are.

Example

An Erasmus Mundus programme is offered by a consortium of five institutions from respectively France, Germany, Hungary, Spain and the UK. A joint degree is awarded. The degree specifies explicitly that it is a joint degree. It includes the names, logos

and signatories of the awarding institutions. The joint degree is however not in line with the regulatory framework in France and the Spanish signatory is not the competent authority to sign this degree. This document is apparently not a valid joint degree. It is in fact a cover certificate awarded in addition to the national degrees. All institutions award national degrees to the students that studied at their institution.

Recognition practice

The information gathered demonstrates that there are degrees awarded in addition to what appears to be a joint degree. If all institutions award both a regular degree and a joint degree, we are normally dealing with a cover certificate. The cover certificate can be disregarded and the other degrees can be used to continue the recognition procedure. The rationale for this approach is that even if an invalid joint degree is awarded, the other awarded degrees should be regarded as the attestation of the successful completion of the joint programme in question.

Conclusion regarding cover certificates

If a joint degree is in fact a cover certificate and thus not recognised as the only attestation of the successful completion of the joint programme in question, this degree can be disregarded. The other awarded degrees are used to continue the recognition procedure.

3.4. The joint degree

As with any degree, a joint degree should be awarded in accordance with the legal frameworks governing the awarding institutions. Legal frameworks can actually include specific requirements. These requirements can relate to the recognition of the joint degree but also to other more regular elements part of awarding degrees.

Joint degrees might for example be required to register as a joint degree in national legislation or in a higher education register, to use a joint degree template or to publish the joint degree programme agreement. More regular features of an awarded (joint) degree might be the orientation (of the programme provided) and the access to further studies.

3.4.1. Issue: joint degree recognition

This issue refers to the concern that a joint degree might have been awarded without fulfilling all the national requirements. This might mean that the joint degree is not formally recognised as such in one (or more) of the concerned higher education systems.

Where national requirements regarding the joint degree are explicitly included in the regulatory framework, a joint degree should be awarded accordingly. If this is not the case, credential evaluators might however still grant recognition to these joint degrees.

Example

A joint programme is offered by a consortium of six institutions. These six institutions award a joint degree. One of the participating institutions should use a specific joint degree template and in a specific language. This template is used for the joint degree but not in the stipulated language.

Recognition practice

The information gathered demonstrates that the joint degree is awarded by recognised institutions but that one of the awarding institutions has failed to fully comply with requirements regarding joint degrees included in the relevant regulatory framework. To avoid undermining these requirements in the regulatory framework, the overall award of the joint degree needs to be legitimate and bona fide. This means the joint degree is awarded in good faith and without the intent to deceive.

The rationale for this approach is the fact that the other institutions awarding the joint degree legitimately facilitate the acceptance of a discrepancy in one of the relevant regulatory frameworks. In the example above, the fact that the joint degree satisfies all requirements in all but one of the regulatory frameworks can serve as sufficient evidence of joint degree recognition and overrule other specific requirements.

Conclusion regarding joint degree recognition

Failure to fully satisfy requirements regarding the award of a joint degree included in the corresponding regulatory framework can be accepted if the overall joint degree awarding is legitimate and bona fide.

3.4.2. Issue: Further studies

This issue refers to the concern that a joint degree might grant graduates different rights to further studies in different institutions and higher education systems.

Example

A joint master's programme is offered by a consortium of six institutions. The underlying national components and regular national degrees grant students different rights to further studies. In four countries, the awarded joint degree would give access to further studies at doctoral level, while in two countries the awarded joint degree is regarded as a specialised degree. Here, this degree would normally not be considered sufficient to access a PhD programme.

Recognition practice

The information gathered demonstrates that the joint degree is awarded by recognised institutions but that it consists of components granting different rights to further studies. If the joint degree does indeed give access to further studies in any of the institutions involved in the joint programme, the degree holder can be granted the corresponding rights.

The rationale for this approach is the fact that if any of the institutions indeed assume the responsibility for the degree and grants the graduates the corresponding right to access further studies at their institutions, this overrules the lack of these rights in other

components that make up the joint programme. In the example above, the fact that the joint degree indeed gives access in four institutions (and – most probably – in four corresponding higher education systems) can serve as sufficient evidence to grant access to further studies, to recognise the degree as giving access or to recommend the degree for appropriate recognition.

Conclusion regarding joint degree recognition

If a joint degree grants graduates different rights to further studies, the joint degree can be recognised with all the corresponding rights if these are authentic rights in the corresponding institutions.

4. Information and evidence



The elements that play a role when evaluating a joint degree can require information and evidence not always readily available. The issues dealt with in this publication are therefore corresponded to sources of information. These sources are not exhaustive but should facilitate gathering sufficient relevant evidence.

In case of doubt, or when having difficulty finding or confirming information, we highly recommend to contact the relevant ENIC-NARIC centre(s), via www.enic-naric.net.

4.1. The relevant (sub)national higher education systems

The joint programme (cooperation) agreement, often available on the joint programme's official website or the website of the coordinating higher education institution;

The joint degree, which should include reference to all relevant (sub)national legal frameworks in accordance to which the degree was awarded;

If the Diploma supplement is issued, Section 2.1. of the Diploma Supplement, which should include the qualification's original full name(s) with reference to all relevant (sub)national legal frameworks;

The ECAPedia (www.ecapedia.net);

The relevant national information centre (e.g. via www.enic-naric.net);

4.2. The recognition of higher education institutions

If the Diploma supplement is issued, Section 2.3. and 2.4. of the Diploma Supplement, which should include the name and status of the awarding institutions and (if different

from these awarding institutions) the name and status of the institutions where the joint programme is actually offered;

Official (sub)national register of recognised higher education (institutions and/or programmes);

Qrossroads (www.qrossroads.eu);

The relevant national information centre (such as an ENIC-NARIC, via www.enic-naric.net);

4.3. The entitlement to offer a joint programme

Official (sub)national register of recognised higher education institutions and/or programmes;

The website of the higher education institution offering the joint programme can be used as a source of referral to the regulation in question, thus not as an original source;

4.4. Other degrees awarded for a joint programme

The joint programme (cooperation) agreement, often available on the joint programme's official website or the website of the coordinating higher education institution;

If a Diploma Supplement is issued:

- Section 6.1 of the Diploma Supplement should specify whether there are other members in the joint programme consortium which are not involved in awarding the joint degree;
- Section 2.1. of the Diploma Supplement should state whether a graduate receives other national degrees alongside the joint degree (i.e. the joint degree is part of a multiple degree arrangement);

If other explanatory documentation is issued, information whether a graduate receives other national degrees alongside this joint degree should be included under the headline where the awarded qualification is identified.

4.5. Specific requirements regarding joint programmes

Information regarding the legal framework can be provided by the relevant national information centre (via www.enic-naric.net);

The ECAPedia (www.ecapedia.net);

4.6. Quality assurance of joint programmes

If a Diploma Supplement is issued, section 6.1 of the Diploma Supplement should outline whether the joint programme was quality assured and/or accredited as such, with reference to the responsible quality assurance and accreditation agencies;

The websites of quality assurance and accreditation agencies, via ECAPedia (www.ecapedia.net);

Grossroads (www.grossroads.eu).

4.7. Specific requirements regarding the award of joint degrees

Information regarding the legal framework can be provided by the relevant national information centre (i.e. ENIC-NARIC), via www.enic-naric.net;

The ECAPedia (www.ecapedia.net);

5. Conclusion

In the chapters above, we have explored the elements that play a role when evaluating a joint degree and introduced the issues that might occur. This is not an exhaustive list. The recognition of joint degrees can indeed be a complex endeavour. Fortunately, joint degrees are increasingly awarded with recognition in mind. The Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees should further contribute to reducing the complexity of joint degrees and their recognition.

As with any degree, joint degrees should be assessed in a flexible manner.

The best way to deal with joint degrees is therefore (a) to accept you do not need to know everything, and (b) to know when the information and/or evidence gathered is sufficient to recognise or recommend recognition.

As with any degree, joint degrees should be assessed in a flexible manner. Here, the Lisbon Recognition Convention's basic rule applies: a degree should be recognised unless there is a substantial difference. Joint degrees are no exception to this rule. The issues presented in this publication are intended to provide more substantiation to recognition practices regarding joint degrees. Since not all information and/or evidence regarding a joint degree will always be readily available, and since not all information is always relevant, it is recommended to only identify those substantial differences which are relevant to the purpose for which recognition is sought. The best way

to deal with joint degrees is therefore (a) to accept you do not need to know everything, and (b) to know when the information and/or evidence gathered is sufficient to recognise or recommend recognition.

Annex 1: The proliferation of joint programmes and joint degrees

Although joint programmes are a hot topic in Europe (and beyond) up-to-date figures are not available. The last calculated estimate can be found in the Bologna Process Stocktaking Report of 2009¹² and thus only concerns the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Based on the estimated total numbers of joint programmes per country, Rauhvargers et al. estimated that there were around 2500 joint programmes running in the EHEA in 2009. That figure is even more interesting if we look at how joint programmes and joint degrees evolved.

The European University Association's (EUA) Trends III report of 2003¹³ revealed that the level of interest in joint degrees among Rectors' Conferences and Ministries was "medium to low". The authors found that in more than half of the Bologna Process countries, the legislation did not allow the awarding of joint degrees. The official Bologna Process Stocktaking Reports of 2003 and 2005 did not consider joint programmes or joint degrees as a specific area of interest. The EUA's Trends IV report of 2005¹⁴ reported growing interest in joint degrees and attributed this to the start of the European Union's Erasmus Mundus programme. This EU programme is a cooperation and mobility programme in the field of higher education in which the funding of joint programmes was then the most visible action line. The Trends IV report however does not present any concrete figures. If the assumption in the Trends IV report is correct, the Erasmus Mundus programme caused a major breakthrough for joint programmes and joint degrees in the EHEA. The Bologna Stocktaking Report of 2007¹⁵ reported that 66.3% of EHEA countries had

¹² **Raugvargers A., Deane C., Pauwels W.**, 2009. *Bologna Process Stocktaking Report 2009*, Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve.

¹³ **Reichert S., Tauch C.**, 2003. *Trends 2003: Progress towards the European Higher Education Area*, European University Association, Brussels

¹⁴ **Reichert S., Tauch C.**, 2005. *Trends IV :European Universities Implementing Bologna*, European University Association, Brussels

¹⁵ **Raugvargers A., Deane C., Pauwels W.**, 2007. *Bologna Process Stocktaking Report 2007*, London.

implemented legislation allowing and encouraging the establishment of joint programmes and joint degrees. In these countries, higher education institutions had already established joint programmes and were awarding nationally recognised degrees jointly with higher education institutions of other countries. This is quite a contrast with the figures in 2003 when legislation in more than half of the EHEA countries did not allow the awarding of joint degrees. The Trends V report of 2007¹⁶ puts the implementation of new legislation in perspective and provides actual figures. EUA's research found that 60% of higher education institutions in the EHEA offered joint programmes. More significantly, they found that only 4% of institutions at that time did not see the need for joint programmes. Then in 2009, the Bologna Stocktaking Report indicates an increase to 83.3% of EHEA countries with legislation allowing and encouraging the establishment of joint programmes and joint degrees. The report further points out that in a quarter of the EHEA countries, more than 50% of all higher education institutions are involved in awarding joint degrees. Since 2009, there have not been any real figures published about the further growth of joint programmes and joint degrees in the EHEA. Neither the preparatory reports for the Bologna Ministerial Anniversary Conference of 2010 in Budapest and Vienna nor those for the Bologna Ministerial Conference of 2012 in Bucharest provide any real quantitative insight into these developments. The Bologna Process Implementation Report of 2012¹⁷ highlights the countries where the institutions do not yet participate in joint programmes, i.e. Albania, Andorra, Liechtenstein and Montenegro. In addition to these countries, the report mentions Cyprus, Finland, Latvia and Moldova as countries in which none of the institutions are involved in awarding joint degrees.

This seems to suggest that higher education institutions cautiously adapt to new legislation and therefore take their time to take part in joint programmes and joint degrees. It therefore seems safe to assume that if the amount of joint programmes was estimated at 2500 in 2009, this amount has since then increased significantly. But this does not tell us that much about the development of joint degrees. A recent report presents the result of a survey conducted by the Institute of International Education (IIE) and Freie Universität

¹⁶ **Crosier, D., Purser, L., Smidt, H.**, 2007. *Trends V: Universities Shaping the European Higher Education Area*, European University Association, Brussels

¹⁷ **Crosier, D., ea.,** 2012. *The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report*, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, Brussels

Berlin in the spring of 2011.¹⁸ The survey aimed to assess the global landscape of joint programmes and joint degrees. The survey found that 84% of responding higher education institutions offered joint programmes. Additionally, the report reveals that 33% of the responding higher education institutions are involved in awarding joint degrees. All the other respondents reported that they were in the developing or the planning stage. It is therefore safe to conclude that joint programmes and also joint degrees have moved from the fringes of higher education to the centre of recent higher education policy and that the number of joint programmes –awarding either joint or multiple degrees– continues to grow considerably.

¹⁸ **Obst, D., Matthias, K., Banks, C.**, 2011. *Joint and Double Degree Programs in the Global Context*, Institute of International Education, New York.

Annex 2: Joint Programme Terminology¹⁹

There seems to be a lot of confusion regarding joint programmes and their degrees. Most of the confusion is caused by an indistinct use of terminology. From current literature, university websites and higher education conferences, we find a whole list of terms that in some way relate to joint programmes and their degrees. In addition to *joint programmes*, *joint degrees* and *multiple degrees*, a whole list of confusing terms are being used. To name just a few: collaborative programmes, dual degrees, integrated programmes, double degrees and common degrees. None of these terms have an agreed meaning and therefore mean different things in different contexts.

To begin clarifying the concepts used and to come to a more or less common ground for terminology, we need to first distinguish between a programme and a degree.

Programme

The Lisbon Recognition Convention has a clear and relevant definition of a programme:

“A programme refers to a higher education curriculum leading to a degree. It has co-ordinated elements (courses). The completion of a programme provides the student with a higher education qualification.”²⁰

A detailed definition has been proposed by UNESCO’s International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED):

“A coherent set or sequence of educational activities designed and organized to achieve pre-determined learning objectives or accomplish a specific set of educational tasks over a sustained period. Within an educational programme, educational activities may also be grouped into sub-components variously

¹⁹ This chapter is reproduced from: **Aerden, A., Reczulska, H.**, 2013. *Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees*. ECA Occasional Paper, The Hague, p. 33-40.
www.ecaconsortium.net/main/documents/publications#guidelines

²⁰ **Council of Europe**. 1997. *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region*, p. 4

described in national contexts as ‘courses’, ‘modules’, ‘units’, and/or ‘subjects’. A programme may have major components not normally characterized as courses, units, or modules – for example, play-based activities, periods of work experience, research projects and the preparation of dissertations.”²¹

From both definitions it will be clear that a programme refers to teaching and learning activities.

Degree

The most simple definition of a degree would be:

“A higher education qualification.”²²

A more comprehensive definition of a degree is put forward by UNESCO’s ISCED:

“Educational qualification awarded upon successful completion of specific educational programmes in tertiary education (traditionally by universities and equivalent institutions).”²³

In both definitions there is a clear link between the degree and a qualification: a degree is a qualification at higher education level. The most authoritative definition of a qualification is included in the Lisbon Recognition Convention:

“Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme.”²⁴

A qualification is here a broader concept than degree since it also includes diplomas and certificates. UNESCO’s ISCED has elaborated on this and specifies:

“Qualifications can be obtained through: i) successful completion of a full programme; ii) successful completion of a stage of a programme (intermediate qualifications); or iii) validation of acquired knowledge, skills and competencies, independent of participation in such programmes.”²⁵

From all these definitions it is however clear that a degree refers to the award, the element that provides evidence of successful completion of a programme.

²¹ UNESCO. 2011. *International Standard Classification of Education*, p. 79.

<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-standard-classification-of-education.aspx>

²² Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. 2012. *Glossary*, <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AboutUs/glossary>

²³ UNESCO. 2011. *Ibid.* p. 83.

²⁴ Council of Europe. 1997. *Ibid.*, p. 4

²⁵ UNESCO. 2011. *Ibid.* p. 83.

Joint Programme

The term joint programme is widely used but not clearly defined. The European University Association'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."*²⁶

This definition focuses on development and implementation. It does not focus on the programme as included in the definitions above. If we look at the definition of a programme included in the Lisbon Recognition Convention, there seem to be three essential elements that make up a programme: (1) a higher education curriculum with (2) co-ordinated elements (courses) which (3) leads to a degree. A joint programme is a programme of which the curriculum is coordinated and offered jointly by two or more institutions and which leads to a degree. That puts the focus on the joint offering or delivery and not necessarily on the development and implementation. In its *Principles for Accreditation Procedures regarding Joint Programmes* the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education puts forward the following definition:

*"A joint programme is a programme offered jointly by different higher education institutions irrespective of the degree awarded."*²⁷

This definition is quite uncomplicated and seems to suit the reality of the European Higher Education Area. But it is perhaps too straightforward to capture the complex reality. A better definition for a joint programme can therefore be formulated. **A joint programme is defined as follows:**

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

Joint Degree

The Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees²⁸ gives the following definition of the term joint degree:

²⁶ European University Association. 2006. EMNEM - *Guidelines for quality enhancement in European joint master programmes*.

²⁷ European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education. 2007. *Principles for accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes*, p. 1.

"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."*

It is generally understood that this definition has tried to capture all the types of documents awarded upon successful completion of joint programmes.

Part a) of the definition seems to indicate that institutions involved award two degrees: a national degree and a joint degree. It is unlikely that both these degrees would be acknowledged as the nationally recognised higher education qualification. This type of joint award is now referred to as **a cover certificate**. The institutions award their own national degrees and in addition they award a cover certificate jointly. The cover certificate is however not a recognised award, the underlying national degrees are.

Part b) of the definition is now commonly understood to refer to **a joint degree**.

Part c) of the definition is nowadays regarded as the award of a single or **a multiple degree**.

The Methodological Report of ENQA's TEEP II project²⁹ 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*".

²⁸ Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications. 2004. *Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees*.

²⁹ European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. 2006. *Methodological report of the Transnational European Evaluation Project II*, p. 10

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 defined as follows:**

"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

In the case of a multiple degree, it is agreed that separate documents are awarded after successful completion of a joint programme. The higher education institutions involved in the joint programme therefore do not award a degree jointly but award their own degree individually. One of these degrees can however be a joint degree. In such a case a multiple degree is a combination of a joint degree and (a) national degree(s). Each degree is nationally and separately acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme.

A multiple degree is defined as follows:

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

Double degree

Double degrees are understood to be two degrees awarded after successful completion of a joint programme. It is however recommended to refer to these two documents as a multiple degree. This avoids the confusion brought about by the concept dual degrees. **A double degree is defined as follows:**

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

Dual degree

Although the concept dual degree is in regular use at higher education institutions, there does not seem to be an agreed definition. The following definition is put forward by Georgia State University:

*"Dual degree programs include separate, but affiliated degree programs that are linked through shared curricular offerings and collaborative administrative processes. Dual degrees may be awarded concurrently or one degree may be awarded prior to the second. A dual degree program should be differentiated from a joint degree."*³⁰

The following characteristics are however prevalent in all definitions: two programmes form the basis for awarding the dual degree, the curricula of these programmes are not integrated³¹ and a graduate receives two separate degrees.

It is important to note here that dual degrees can also be offered by the same institution. The definition above might not make that immediately clear. The definition used by the University of Queensland actually limits dual degree programmes to its own institution:

*"A combination of two UQ degree programs undertaken at the same time which have a single set of program rules."*³²

The most recent definition for a dual degree was published by Kris Olds on Inside Higher Ed, the online website for higher education news:

³⁰ **Georgia State University**, Glossary, <http://www.gsu.edu/apguide/glossary.html>.

³¹ **Temple University**, Academic Program Definitions, <http://www.temple.edu/provost/aaa/academic-proposals/aaa-academicprogramdefintions.htm>

³² **University of Queensland**, Dictionary of UQ terminology, <http://www.uq.edu.au/study/index.html?page=116591#D>

“Students complete the requirements for two degrees from two institutions, with efficiencies in course taking. Each institution is primarily responsible for its own degree.”³³

From these definitions we can conclude that dual degrees are actually not awarded for joint programmes. Dual degrees are therefore awarded by two programmes separately and these two programmes have some coordination and coordinated elements but have not integrated their curriculum. **A dual degree is defined as follows:**

“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 misleading concept: The Joint Degree Programme

The concept joint degree programme is misleading. Is a joint degree programme a degree programme offered jointly or a (joint) programme which awards a joint degree?

What is nowadays commonly referred to as *a programme* used to be more regularly referred to as either a *degree programme* or a *degree course*. Both these terms are actually still in use. North-American authorities³⁴ and UNESCO’s ISCED on the one hand still refer to *degree programmes*. In the case of ISCED, this is probably a leftover of the original versions since the glossary no longer includes a definition for degree programme and now refers to (educational) programme. The term *degree course* on the other hand is still regularly used by institutions and authorities in the UK.³⁵

In all its official publications, the Bologna Process now consistently refers to *joint programmes* and not to joint degree programmes.

³³ Olds, Kris. 2011. *What are international dual and joint degrees*, Inside Higher Ed, http://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/globalhighered/what_are_international_dual_joint_degrees. Retrieved: 1 November 2012.

³⁴ Example: Indiana College Network. 2007. *Glossary*. <http://www.icn.org/about/glossary.html>

³⁵ Higher Education Funding Council for England. *Glossary*. <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/glossary/#letterD>

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european consortium for accreditation

www.ecaconsortium.net
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