

European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes: Current Status and Future Challenges

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european consortium for accreditation

ECA reports on joint programmes





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



SERVICES



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ABOUT US

Terminology

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

The Check-list

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

Practical guidelines

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

Key publications

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

Quality assurance

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

Erasmus Mundus

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

Recognition

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

Article overview

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

Current status of European Approach

- Joint programmes are confronted with different national QA regimes: fragmented assessments, multiple procedures, frameworks, visits, panels, reports
- European Approach provides a solution; adopted last May in Yerevan
- Not implemented yet; no experiences with application
- Discussion on European Approach is starting, e.g. PLA in Salamanca, EQAR Members Dialogue, ECA-NVAO seminar
- What emerges from these first discussions is that there are some challenges for the implementation

Implementation challenges European Approach

- Lack of awareness among HEIs (and QA agencies, Ministries, students, employers)
- Lack of information on how many JPs fall under the remit of the European Approach
- Legal and recognition challenges
- Operational/procedural challenges

Lack of awareness of European Approach

- Many HEIs are not aware that there is a European Approach
- QA agencies are becoming aware but do not yet present European Approach as an option to joint programmes
- Ministries have agreed on European Approach but are they also taking action to promote it?
- Students and employers do not know about European Approach

Lack of information on joint programmes

- There are hardly any reliable national data on the number of joint programmes and what type of degree(s) they award
- National databases and agencies' websites do not separately identify joint programmes
- “Joint programmes are understood as an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions from EHEA countries, and leading to double/multiple degrees or a joint degree”
- Lack of data may in some countries increase discussions on what constitutes an “integrated curriculum” and desirable type of degree awarded

Essence of European Approach

European
standards and
procedure

- Standards and procedure according to ESG, taking “jointness” into account

Decision/result

- By EQAR-listed agency
- Accepted in other EHEA countries by other agencies

No additional
national
criteria!

- “Setting standards...based on the agreed tools of the EHEA, without applying additional national criteria”

Legal and recognition challenges

- Legal changes in many (but not all) countries necessary before European Approach can be implemented
- Recognition status part of the Standards (1.1); important to check by agency before panel starts
- Ministries want to determine which joint programmes they fund; for that purpose some national criteria may remain when European Approach is applied
- Many national criteria are hampering European framework; examples from ECA's JOQAR project

Additional national criteria problematic

(Source: ECA's JOQAR project)

Too many national criteria and national requirements in external QA/accreditation of joint programmes

- Sometimes not about quality
- Not suited for joint programmes
- Contradict each other

Very long list of examples:

- The assessment report (expert report) is required to be in the national language;
- National QA agencies which are not allowed to coordinate an international procedure / undertake a site visit abroad;
- Master thesis:
“max. 30 ECTS credits” vs. “at least 35% of the total number of credits”;
- Very detailed, national staff requirements
- ...

Operational/procedural challenges

- Who chooses the EQAR-listed agency? What are the arguments for this choice (coordinator JP, reputation, costs,...)?
- Do agencies follow the preferences of joint programmes? Is charging fees an issue?
- 6 years accreditation validity advocated in European Approach; what happens if not each country with mandatory programme accreditation accepts this?
- What to do with countries/agencies outside EHEA?
 - Could bilateral or multilateral agreements (e.g. MULTRA) help?

Conclusions

- European Approach has the potential to solve many QA problems for JPs; it's worthwhile to implement
- ECA JOQAR pilots and NVAO accreditation of European Master in Strategic Border Management show that European framework can work
- But no results without promotion of European Approach by all stakeholders
- Inclusion and identification of joint programmes in national databases needed, as well as European links (e.g. Crossroads)
- Information on QA of JPs with European Approach has to be transparent and accessible

Conclusions (cont.)

- Involvement of ENIC-NARICs would be useful for checking recognition status in European Approach
- Ministries/BFUG need to monitor implementation: national criteria will not suddenly disappear!
- Can European Approach be part of Bologna Policy Forum to involve countries outside EHEA; supported by Erasmus+?
- Agencies can solve procedural questions collectively, but this implies some “market rules” (vs. “free market”)
- Implementation assistance is needed to overcome challenges but let's keep it simple and to the benefit of joint programmes!

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