The European Approach
for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

Outcomes Peer Learning Activity
5 - 6 October 2017, The Hague, The Netherlands

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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Ministerial agreement

In May 2015, the education ministers of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) have agreed to adopt the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. In specific, the ministers have agreed to:

- "dismantle an important obstacle to the development of joint programmes by setting standards for these programmes that are based on the agreed tools of the EHEA, without applying additional national criteria, and
- facilitate integrated approaches to quality assurance of joint programmes that genuinely reflect and mirror their joint character".[1]

Since then, however, only a few countries have acted on this agreement and changed their national legislation to implement the European Approach. This makes it very difficult for higher education institutions, quality assurance organisations and ministries of education to adopt the European Approach in practice.

This report aims to recommend the action points that are now necessary for implementing the European Approach. The report also serves as input for the next meeting of the education ministers of the European Higher Education Area in May 2018.

By then, it is not sufficient anymore to merely mention the importance of the European Approach. Three years will have passed since the Yerevan agreement, and not enough has been done to implement the European Approach. It is now time for all stakeholders to be aware of the added value of the European Approach, and to commit themselves to actively promote the implementation of the European Approach and to remove obstacles.

The European Approach

The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes is based on one single joint programme accreditation that is recognised in all EHEA countries involved. This approach reduces the need for separate programme accreditations in all countries where the joint programme is offered. The main characteristics of the European Approach are as follows:

- If some of the cooperating higher education institutions are required to undergo external quality assessment or accreditation at programme level, then the co-operating institution should select a suitable quality assurance agency from the list of EQAR-registered agencies;
- This agency will then use the agreed standards and procedures of the European Approach to carry out a single evaluation or accreditation of the entire joint programme;
- The external quality assurance decision is to be accepted and recognised in all EHEA countries where the programme is offered, as agreed in the Bucharest Communiqué. Countries may not apply any additional national criteria.

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[1] EHEA ministers of education (2015) 'European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes', approved by the EHEA ministers in Yerevan in May 2015. See Annex 1.

Continuing legal hindrances

Higher education institutions and quality assurance organisations keen to adopt the European Approach still face many hindrances, most due to national legislation: many countries still apply (many) additional national criteria, even though the EHEA education ministers have agreed to remove these.

Examples of national legislative hindrances are:

- Separate national programme accreditations are required, with different national criteria, rules, accreditation timelines and re-accreditation deadlines;
- National legislations requiring that recognition of an accreditation decision by a foreign quality assurance agency needs to be approved by the national quality assurance agency;
- The assessment report must be written in the national language;
- National quality assurance agencies are not allowed to coordinate an international procedure or undertake a site visit abroad;
- National criteria contradict each other (e.g. max 30 ECTS credits versus at least 35% of the total number of credits); and
- Very detailed national staff requirements.

Action points

The main outcome of this PLA is a list of concrete action points formulated by and for the four stakeholder groups: ministries of education, quality assurance organisations, higher education institutions, and the European Commission and EACEA. These action points are the following.

Action points for ministries of education:

1. Act on the Yerevan agreement: integrate the European Approach in national legislation and make sure that the results are accepted by national quality assurance organisations.

2. Raise awareness of the European Approach, highlighting its benefits to higher education institutions, and establish a joint promotion centre (for instance through the European Quality Assurance Register – EQAR).

3. Include the European Approach in national strategies to internationalise higher education.

4. Compile data and statistics, and monitor developments on joint programmes and joint programme accreditation following the European Approach.

Action points for quality assurance organisations:

1. Accept the results of the European Approach carried out by EQAR-listed agencies and facilitate the recognition of national decisions on the European Approach.

2. Create internal capacity building / training on the European Approach to strengthen its implementation.

3. Coordinate implementation strategies, building on experiences and sharing good practices. To this end, organise international meetings and networking between QA agencies, creating concrete results and

placing the European Approach and the role of quality assurance agencies on the agenda at the highest levels.

4. Promote the European Approach towards ministries of education and higher education institutions, and create a handbook with step-by-step guidelines for higher education institutions.

Action points for higher education institutions:

1. Ensure support from your institutional leadership in adopting the European Approach. Two aspects are fundamental: (i) institutional strategy must indicate which profile the institution must have, and (ii) how joint programmes and other international programmes help to strengthen this profile.

2. Offer appropriate incentives to implement the European Approach:
   - Ensure that your institution has adopted a coherent internal approach to quality assurance of joint programmes,
   - Make joint programmes and the European Approach part of staff development. Ensure that QA officers are involved in joint programme developments, and that there is at least one contact point within the institution.

3. At degree programme level:
   - Integrate the joint programme within regional programmes,
   - Involve institutional support,
   - Fully acknowledge the competences of your partner institutions, and
   - Focus on coordination for real institutional development;

4. Organise central support for joint programmes and the European Approach:
   - Provide information on procedures and workflow management,
   - Collect and share experience, good practices, and possibilities.

Action points for the European Commission and EACEA:

1. Keep the European Approach on the policy agenda.

2. Do further awareness raising of the European Approach, and follow the European Approach up with the Bologna E-4 (the consultative members of Bologna: the EUA, ESU, ENQA and EURASHE) and EQAR.[2]

3. Consider the European Approach as a possible priority of the Bologna reform implementation projects.

4. Suggest a target for Bologna ministers for the minimum number of joint programmes using the European Approach.

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[2] These abbreviations refer to the European University Association (EUA), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

Action point for the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR):

1. Promote the European Approach, e.g. through the website, a brochure highlighting the benefits of the European Approach, and a European database of joint programmes.

1. Context

Joint programmes form an integral part of the development of the European Higher Education Area. However, problems regarding quality assurance (and as a consequence recognition) form a serious obstacle toward widespread implementation. To address this issue, a specific European quality assurance approach for joint programmes has been developed, which has been adopted in April 2015 by the Ministers of Education from the European Higher Education Area in the Yerevan Communiqué.

This 'European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes' (see Annex 1) laid down the principles and standards for a single quality assurance procedure for joint programmes to be accepted in all EHEA countries. A framework for a single accreditation procedure and mutual recognition was piloted in the JOQAR project of ECA. The FaBoTo II (Facilitating the use of Bologna Tools for HEIs and Quality Assurance Agencies II) project – co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme, organised a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) to evaluate the experiences with the implementation of the European Approach so far.

Efforts to stimulate implementation of the European Approach

After the adoption in Yerevan. At least three international conferences have been organised to identify hindrances and to encourage the implementation of the European Approach:

1. A Spanish Peer Learning Activity on Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, organised on 9-10 November 2015 as part of the HERE-ES (Higher Education Reforms in Spain) project. The main conclusion of the conference report[3] is the recommendation to ministries of education to fully support implementation of the European Approach.

2. A conference organised by Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, on 'single accreditation of joint programmes – turning Bologna guideline into reality' (Vilnius, 30-31 May 2017). Frontex coordinates a European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management (EJMSBM), which is offered in collaboration with partner institutions from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Spain. According to the conference outcomes, the EJMSBM consortium has realised amendments in national legislation in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Spain (Dutch legislation already supports the European Approach), and requested the national quality assurance agencies involved to harmonise the accreditation terms in all consortium countries involved.

3. The Peer Learning Activity on the European Approach that this report is based on. This conference has been organised by the Dutch Erasmus+ National Agency, Nuffic, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, in collaboration with NVAO. The Agenda of the PLA meeting is given in Annex 5.

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[3] Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports (Spain) (2016) Higher Education reforms in Spain: HERE-ES Project Peer Learning Activity on Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

2. Aim and Structure

2.1 Aim

The Peer Learning Activity (PLA) in The Hague was organised to reflect on the implementation of the European Approach since its adoption two years ago. The aim of the PLA was threefold, namely to:

- identify obstacles to the European Approach,
- identify good practices on how to use the European Approach, and
- formulate a concrete action list for the four stakeholders: higher education institutions, quality assurance organisations, ministries of education, and European Commission and Agency.

A selected group of 43 participants from 10 European countries shared experiences and jointly identified obstacles, good practices and action points for improving the implementation of the European Approach. This was done from the viewpoints of quality assurance organisations, European ministries of education, and higher education institutions (the target group of participants). The PLA participants were selected based on their particular experience with, and expertise in, the European Approach and quality assurance of joint programmes in general. The issue of geographical balance was addressed by including representatives from South, North, East and West Europe in the PLA. The participation ratio has been included in table 1. The full list of participants is included in Annex 4.

Table 1: Participant ratio and countries of origin

14	higher education institution representatives	(AT, BE, DE, ES, FR, NL, PL)[4]
10	quality assurance agency representatives	(AT, DE, ES, FR, NL, PL)
6	ministry of education representatives	(BE, DE, ES, FR, NL, PL)
9	European experts on quality assurance of joint programmes	(BE, FI, NL, LT)
2	European Commission / EACEA representatives	(BE)

2.2 Structure of the PLA

When identifying joint programme experiences with adopting the European Approach, the PLA organisers noticed that the number of joint programmes that had started to use the European Approach after its adoption in 2015 was fewer than expected. Only two joint programmes (ITEPS and EuroPS) had concrete experience with the implementation of the European Approach (meaning that those programmes had actually been submitted to accreditation using the European Approach), and their coordinators were invited to share their experiences in the PLA.

For both programmes, experiences with the European Approach were shared from the viewpoint of the consortium, the quality assurance organisation and an education ministry involved. The PLA participants used these cases to identify and discuss obstacles, and formulated possible recommendations for these three stakeholders.

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[4] See the list of abbreviations in Annex 6.

In addition to these two cases, Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, which offers a joint programme involving several European countries, shared its experience during a pilot with an early version of the European Approach in 2015.

The PLA also included a session on how to deal with European funding criteria. The rules for joint programmes in the Erasmus+ joint programmes funding scheme were examined from the viewpoint of whether these rules support or hinder the implementation of the European Approach.

During the conference, PLA participants were given the opportunity to share their lessons learned and recommendations during a 'Gallery Walk'[5]. Their suggestions were directed at higher education institutions, quality assurance organisations, ministries of education and the European Commission/EACEA.

The meeting concluded with a closing panel reflecting on the outcomes of the PLA and providing reflections on the ways forward.

To help develop the PLA programme and reach the intended conference outcomes, the PLA coordinators set out two online surveys:

1. Survey 1: Identifying the needs of experts in the field.
    The specific topics to be addressed at the PLA were identified through an online survey send out 5 months prior to the PLA. The survey addressed experts of the main European higher education stakeholder organisations (ECA, ENQA, European University Association, EURASHE, Bologna Follow-up Working Group 2 implementation, Erasmus+ National Agencies, Erasmus Mundus coordinators) and the Dutch Ministry of Education. This ensured that the content of the PLA was rooted in the needs and wishes of experts on the field. Speakers were invited based on the identified topics. The survey outcomes are presented in Annex 2.

2. Survey 2: Action points needed.
    A month prior to the PLA, a survey was circulated to all participants to collect preliminary feedback on recommendations for all four identified stakeholders: higher education institutions, ministries of education, quality assurance agencies and the European Commission/EACEA. The motivation to do this inventory before the event was to lift the starting point of discussion to a higher level and to frame the discussions during the PLA. The survey outcomes are published in Annex 3.

3. Outcomes

3.1 Main conclusion

The main conclusion of the PLA is that many countries have not yet adapted their national legislation to implement the European Approach, and that it is urgent to do so. In line with the Ministerial agreement in Yerevan, any additional national stipulations that hinder implementation of the European Approach must be abolished.

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[5] In this 'Gallery Walk', small working groups formulated action points for the stakeholders, moving from one stakeholder to another, building on points made by the other working groups.

3.2 The ITEPS experience

The joint bachelor programme International Teacher Education for Primary Schools (ITEPS) is offered by Stenden University of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands), University College South-East Norway (Norway) and associate partner University College Zealand (Denmark). ITEPS has gone through the single accreditation following the European Approach.

In the session, presentations were held by the ITEPS joint programme coordinator, Ministry of Education (of The Netherlands) and the accreditation organisation (NVAO). These presentations were followed by a discussion sharing expertise and identifying good practices, obstacles and opportunities for improvement.

Challenges

These discussions generated the following challenges:

ITEPS consortium point of view:

- The Danish partner institution withdrew as a full consortium partner one month before the submission deadline for accreditation, after the Danish government forbid offering full English-taught programmes. This led to a shortage of time and implications for the joint programme agreement, implications for all accreditation documents and the site visits;
- To convince one of the partners to be part of the implementation process (self-accrediting status) for quality improvement and partnership purposes.

Quality assurance agency point of view:

- Quality assurance organisations conducting the European Approach need to be flexible (not thinking from their own national viewpoint only), and instead try to find the best fit for all countries involved;
- Remember that good quality comes before national rules.

Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science point of view:

The Dutch ministry is encouraging and supporting international joint programme development and the adoption of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes through enacting legislative changes that allow adoption of the European Approach and recognition of accreditation decisions following the European Approach.

Recommendations

The session led to the following recommendations:

- Include an addendum to the framework, explaining the case of an initial accreditation;
- Adopt a limited framework in case the consortium consists of all accredited institutions (by EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies);
- Change the definition of a 'joint programme': instead of "leading to", use "can lead to".

3.3 The EuroPS experience

The EuroPS Consortium offers a joint master programme in Political Science, Integration and Governance (PoSIG). The programme is coordinated by the University of Salzburg (Austria) and offered in collaboration with partner universities in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (two institutions), Italy, Kosovo (two institutions), Macedonia, and Slovenia. The EuroPS Consortium opted to use the European Approach because it fit best to its multilateral consortium management approach, the EACEA approved to use European Approach procedures,

and because the consortium received expert support and encouragement from the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) and the Austrian Ministry of Science.

In the session, presentations were held by the EuroPS joint programme coordinator, who also gave a perspective from the ministries of education involved, and by the accreditation organisation (AQ Austria). These presentations were followed by a discussion sharing expertise and identifying good practices, obstacles and opportunities for improvement.

Challenges

These discussions generated the following challenges:

EuroPS consortium point of view:

- The education ministries in almost all consortium countries were unaware of the European Approach (with the exception of Austria);
- The legal frameworks for the European Approach in all seven countries involved in the joint programme had to be identified and compared, which cost time and money;
- Some education ministries were unable to act to implement the European Approach due to government changes or ongoing legal reforms, and acting persons at administrative level did not want to be responsible for any taking any actions to support the implementation of the European Approach;
- National legal situations either allow smooth implementation of the European Approach or lead to repetition of the full accreditation process (including timeline);
- Different deadlines for national implementation of the European Approach accreditation decision caused a problem in that they led to different timelines and speed for accepting the accreditation decision within the consortium;
- One national accreditation agency was unaware of the European Approach and Yerevan agreement;
- The accreditation agencies in the countries involved in the joint programme were either cooperative or acting as a 'veto player';
- National accreditation procedures followed given tracks and documentation requirements;
- Within several participating universities, responsibilities in relation to the European Approach were unclear.

Quality assurance agency point of view:

- Some national legislations have not yet been adapted to allow for the European Approach. One example is Slovenia, where the European Approach can only be adopted if all joint programme consortium partners have been accredited by an EQAR-registered agency; if the consortium does not adhere to this national requirement, the Slovenian higher education institution involved in the joint programme has to undergo a separate national accreditation. This is bureaucratic and not in line with the ministerial agreement made in Yerevan;
- Quality assurance agencies need more precise details on which data a joint programme consortium should deliver for the European Approach accreditation process.

Recommendations

This session led to the following recommendations from the consortium perspective:

- Adapt national legislations to allow for the European Approach, without setting any additional national criteria;
- Implement the standards for European Approach accreditation;

- Invest in capacity building for using the European Approach (capacity building for education ministries on legal reforms and procedures, for higher education institutions on standards in joint programme quality management with set of tools or procedures, and on joint degree master programmes for a virtual university);
- Develop a checklist for member states on legal implementation of the European Approach standards. Connect this checklist to procedural national standards as they are used by the quality assurance agencies. Ensure that this is documented by the member states;
- Develop standards for the quality of the management of joint programmes as a basis for evaluators;
- Develop a European Register of European Approach accreditation results;
- Legally ensure implicit confirmation of European Approach accreditation results by the national agencies in a defined time frame after the European Approach accreditation board decision. They can veto the listing of single members (from the respective country) of the consortium of joint programmes in the European Approach accreditation register.

This session led to the following recommendations from the quality assurance agency perspective:

- In 'standard 1 – eligibility' of the European Approach:
  i. Include an overview of legal frameworks and national requirements and ensure to update these continuously;
  ii. Spell out responsibilities and particular national requirements regarding cooperation agreements;
- Examine national requirements / legislation regarding acceptance of the accreditation result:
  i. Dismantle all legal obstacles from the beginning,
  ii. Identify ways to implement automatic acceptance of the European Approach accreditation decision taken by a foreign (EQAR-registered) accreditation agency;
- Analyse the impact of funding schemes and deadlines with accreditation schemes.

3.4 The Frontex experience

Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency of the European Union, offers the 'European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management' (EJMSBM), to support training and professional education of national border guards based on common European standards. In 2015, EJMSBM participated in a pilot using the ECA-developed JOQAR framework which was a forerunner of the European Approach, using a single accreditation procedure with similar standards and the principle of acceptance of the results of the single procedure.

In their presentation Frontex indicated the following **obstacles**:

- Accreditation in a pilot project for the European Approach was accepted in participating countries, but not recognised. In each country involved in the joint programme, the programme had to be submitted to the national agency for accreditation;
- The terms of accreditation and re-accreditation (i.e. the number of years the accreditation would be valid for) differed between participating countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Spain);
- Latvian law did not allow Frontex as a consortium to select an EQAR-registered quality assurance agency. This should be permitted for international joint programme consortia;
- The requirement in some countries to translate all agreements into the national languages involved a lot of additional bureaucracy and was inefficient;

- Separate national accreditation payments in all the different countries involved were seen as problematic.

Frontex identified the following **good practices**:

- The single accreditation following the European Approach must replace separate national accreditations;
- National governments that have not done so yet, must change their legislation to allow for the European Approach without setting any additional national criteria;
- At least include exceptions in national legislations to allow implementation of the European Approach;
- Harmonise all accreditation terms and deadlines between the countries involved in the joint programme consortium;
- Frontex defends one single payment (by a joint programme consortium) for a single accreditation of a joint programme (since a single accreditation reduces the work load of separate national accreditations). Frontex argues that this point should be addressed at Bologna level and implemented by national governments;
- National quality assurance agencies must treat international joint programmes not only as national degree programmes, but also as European degree programmes.

Based on these experiences, Frontex organised a conference called 'Single accreditation of joint programmes – turning a Bologna guideline into reality' (Vilnius, May 2017). This conference had an impact on encouraging implementation of the European Approach, the main outcomes being:

1. Drafted legislation amendments in Lithuania on single accreditation of a joint programme by adopting the European Approach (to be approved, at the time of writing);
2. The conference induced the beginning of discussions in Spain on the legal possibility to choose a foreign quality assurance agency for the accreditation of joint programmes, and induced legal amendments in the Spanish Royal Acts by adopting the European Approach;
3. The conference triggered discussions in Latvia on opening doors for EQAR-registered agencies from January 2018 as solution for joint programme accreditation; and
4. The conference led to discussions in Estonia to make the legal regulation of joint programmes more flexible and compatible with the European Approach.

3.5 European funding criteria

The aim of this session was to discuss obstacles to the adoption of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in European funding programme criteria, and to identify action points to remove these obstacles.

First, the EACEA explained the European funding programme criteria in relation to joint programme quality assurance and which possibilities Erasmus Mundus offers for adopting the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. Next, a joint programme coordinator from a higher education institution listed the dilemma's encountered in the Erasmus Mundus regulation. Lastly, the European Commission provided feedback. After this, the floor was open for discussion.

The discussions yielded the following findings:

- Implementation of reform decisions, like the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes are slow-moving;

- The European Commission is investing in dialogues with key stakeholders and awareness raining of the European Approach;
- For the next Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree funding programme, the European Commission is updating its Erasmus Mundus section in the programme guide, including instructions to applicants on proof of validation documents, giving two options, namely:
  i. joint accreditation, whenever legally or financially possible; with the European Approach as the preferred option, and
  ii. a combination of national accreditations or evaluations of the programme.

This is a welcome action to implement the European Approach since current Erasmus Mundus funding criteria require a joint programme to undergo separate national accreditations, an obstacle that will be removed in the next funding round.

3.6 Concrete action points to implement the European Approach

The PLA included a Gallery Walk, aimed at formulating concrete action points for higher education institutions, quality assurance organisations, ministries of education and the European Commission/EACEA, on how these actors can stimulate the implementation of the European Approach.

The Gallery Walk method enabled all PLA participants to provide their input. All PLA participants were divided into four working groups of approximately 10 persons each. These groups simultaneously provided recommendations to the four abovementioned stakeholders in the European Approach, rotating three times so that every participant provided input to all stakeholders.

Four session leaders each focussed on one stakeholder group and gathered comments from the visiting group. These session leaders remained in the same room throughout the Gallery Walk to gather action points and encourage the participants to provide concrete recommendations, and structure the recommendations for plenary reporting afterwards. The outcomes of Survey 2 (recommended action points for stakeholders) were used as a starting point during the Gallery Walk.

The action points formulated by, and for, the four stakeholder groups are listed below.

3.6.1 Ministries of education

The action points for ministries of education are the following:

1. Act on the Yerevan agreement: integrate the European Approach in national legislation and make sure that the results are accepted by national quality assurance organisations.

2. Raise awareness of the European Approach, highlighting its benefits to higher education institutions, and establish a joint promotion centre (for instance through the European Quality Assurance Register – EQAR).

3. Include the European Approach in national strategies to internationalise higher education.

4. Compile data and statistics, and monitor developments on joint programmes and joint programme accreditation following the European Approach.

3.6.2 Quality assurance organisations

The action points for quality assurance organisations are the following:

1. Accept the results of the European Approach carried out by EQAR-listed agencies and facilitate the recognition of national decisions on the European Approach.

2. Create internal capacity building / training on the European Approach to strengthen its implementation.

3. Coordinate implementation strategies, building on experiences and sharing good practices. To this end, organise international meetings and networking between QA agencies, creating concrete results and placing the European Approach and the role of quality assurance agencies on the agenda at the highest levels.

4. Promote the European Approach towards ministries of education and higher education institutions, and create a handbook with step-by-step guidelines for higher education institutions.

3.6.3 Higher education institutions

The action points for higher education institutions are the following:

1. Ensure support from your institutional leadership in adopting the European Approach. Two aspects are fundamental: (i) institutional strategy must indicate which profile the institution must have, and (ii) how joint programmes and other international programmes help to strengthen this profile.

2. Offer appropriate incentives to implement the European Approach:
   - Ensure that your institution has adopted a coherent internal approach to quality assurance of joint programmes,
   - Make joint programmes and the European Approach part of staff development. Ensure that QA officers are involved in joint programme developments, and that there is at least one contact point within the institution.

3. At degree programme level:
   - Integrate the joint programme within regional programmes,
   - Involve institutional support,
   - Fully acknowledge the competences of your partner institutions, and
   - Focus on coordination for real institutional development;

4. Organise central support for joint programmes and the European Approach:
   - Provide information on procedures and workflow management,
   - Collect and share experience, good practices, and possibilities.

3.6.4 European Commission/EACEA

The action points for the European Commission and EACEA are the following:

1. Keep the European Approach on the policy agenda.

2. Do further awareness raising of the European Approach, and follow the European Approach up with the Bologna E-4 (the consultative members of Bologna: the EUA, ESU, ENQA and EURASHE) and EQAR.[6]

3. Consider the European Approach as a possible priority of the Bologna reform implementation projects.

4. Suggest a target for Bologna ministers for the minimum number of joint programmes using the European Approach.

3.6.5 EQAR

The PLA identified one additional action point, for the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), namely to:

1. Promote the European Approach, e.g. through the website, a brochure highlighting the benefits of the European Approach, and a European database of joint programmes.

4. Concluding words

The PLA conference and this report with concrete action points are aimed at supporting the further development of joint programmes and the EHEA. See the PLA website for an overview of the PLA presentations.

In November 2017, the action points will be sent to the Bologna Follow-up Group for adoption, to serve as input for the next meeting of the education ministers of the EHEA in Paris in May 2018. The ultimate aim is not merely for ministers to point at the importance of the European Approach, but for all stakeholders to commit themselves now to actively promote the implementation of the European Approach and to remove obstacles.

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[6] These abbreviations refer to the European University Association (EUA), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

Annexes

- Annex 1: The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

- Annex 2: Survey 1 – Identifying the needs of experts in the field

- Annex 3: Survey 2 – Suggestions for necessary action points

- Annex 4: List of Participants

- Annex 5: Agenda of the PLA conference

- Annex 6: List of Abbreviations

Annex 1: The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

October 2014
approved by EHEA ministers in May 2015

Joint programmes are a hallmark of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). They are set up to enhance the mobility of students and staff, to facilitate mutual learning and cooperation opportunities and to create programmes of excellence. They offer a genuine European learning experience to students. Joint degrees express the "jointness" also in the awarding of the degree.

The present European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes has been developed to ease external quality assurance of these programmes. In particular, it will:

- dismantle an important obstacle to the development of joint programmes by setting standards for these programmes that are based on the agreed tools of the EHEA, without applying additional national criteria, and

- facilitate integrated approaches to quality assurance of joint programmes that genuinely reflect and mirror their joint character.

The EHEA is characterised by a diversity of approaches to external QA, including accreditation, evaluation or audit at the level of study programmes and/or institutions. While responding to the needs and requirements of their respective context, these different approaches find their "common denominator" in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The ESG apply to quality assurance procedures of joint programmes as to all other types of programmes. Thus, the European Approach is mainly based on the ESG and on the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). In addition, the European Approach takes into account the distinctive features of a joint programme and, thus, specifies the 'standard' approach accordingly. The procedure and criteria are closely based on those developed and tested within the JOQAR project.

"Joint programmes" are understood as an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions from EHEA countries[1], and leading to double/multiple degrees[2] or a joint degree[3].

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[1] This proposal relates only to joint programmes offered jointly by higher education institutions from two or more countries, and does not address the quality assurance of programmes delivered jointly by different institutions from a single country.

[2] Separate degrees awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme attesting the successful completion of this programme. (If two degrees are awarded by two institutions, this is a 'double degree').

[3] A single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme.

1

A. Application in Different Systems of External QA

The European Approach should be applied depending on the needs of the cooperating higher education institutions and the requirements of their national frameworks:

- If some of the **cooperating higher education institutions require external quality assurance at programme level** (e.g. programme accreditation or evaluation is mandatory), then the cooperating institutions should select a suitable quality assurance agency[4] from the list of EQAR-registered agencies.

  The agency will use the Standards (part B) and the Procedure (part C) to carry out a single evaluation or accreditation of the entire joint programme. The result is to be accepted in all EHEA countries. Dependent on the national legal framework, the external quality assurance decision should come into force or be recognised in all countries where the programme is offered, as agreed in the Bucharest Communiqué.

- If **all cooperating higher education institutions** are subject to **external quality assurance at institutional level** only and have "self-accrediting" status, they may use the European Approach in setting up joint internal approval and monitoring processes for their joint programmes (according to ESG 1.2 & 1.9), if they deem it useful in their context.

  Hence, in these cases no additional external evaluation or accreditation procedures at the programme level are necessary.

- The European Approach may also be used for joint programmes that are offered by higher education institutions from both within and outside the EHEA. Involved institutions from non-EHEA countries are encouraged to inquire whether their national authorities would accept the Standards (part B) and be able to recognise the decision of an EQAR-registered agency, if applicable.

B. Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA

1. Eligibility

1.1 Status

The institutions that offer a joint programme should[5] be recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries. Their respective national legal frameworks should enable them to participate in the joint programme and, if applicable, to award a joint degree. The institutions awarding the degree(s) should ensure that the degree(s) belong to the higher education degree systems of the countries in which they are based.

1.2 Joint design and delivery

The joint programme should be offered jointly, involving all cooperating institutions in the design and delivery of the programme.

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[4] In the case of joint programmes that lead to qualifications aiming to satisfy the minimum agreed training conditions in a profession subject to the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC, the joint programme would need to be notified to the European Commission by the competent authority of one EU Member State. The cooperating institutions will need to bear this in mind when identifying and contacting an agency to conduct the review.

[5] The Standards use of the common English usage of "should" which has the connotation of prescription and compliance.

1.3 Cooperation Agreement

The terms and conditions of the joint programme should be laid down in a cooperation agreement. The agreement should in particular cover the following issues:

- Denomination of the degree(s) awarded in the programme
- Coordination and responsibilities of the partners involved regarding management and financial organisation (including funding, sharing of costs and income etc.)
- Admission and selection procedures for students
- Mobility of students and teachers
- Examination regulations, student assessment methods, recognition of credits and degree awarding procedures in the consortium.

2. Learning Outcomes

2.1 Level [ESG 1.2]

The intended learning outcomes should align with the corresponding level in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), as well as the applicable national qualifications framework(s).

2.2 Disciplinary field

The intended learning outcomes should comprise knowledge, skills, and competencies in the respective disciplinary field(s).

2.3 Achievement [ESG 1.2]

The programme should be able to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

2.4 Regulated Professions

If relevant for the specific joint programme, the minimum agreed training conditions specified in the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC, or relevant common trainings frameworks established under the Directive, should be taken into account.

3. Study Programme [ESG 1.2]

3.1 Curriculum

The structure and content of the curriculum should be fit to enable the students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

3.2 Credits

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) should be applied properly and the distribution of credits should be clear.

3.3 Workload

A joint bachelor programme will typically amount to a total student workload of 180-240 ECTS-credits; a joint master programme will typically amount to 90-120 ECTS-credits and should not be less than 60 ECTS-credits at second cycle level (credit ranges according to the FQ-EHEA); for joint doctorates there is no credit range specified.

The workload and the average time to complete the programme should be monitored.

4. Admission and Recognition [ESG 1.4]

4.1. Admission

The admission requirements and selection procedures should be appropriate in light of the programme's level and discipline.

4.2. Recognition

Recognition of qualifications and of periods of studies (including recognition of prior learning) should be applied in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and subsidiary documents.

5. Learning, Teaching and Assessment [ESG 1.3]

5.1 Learning and teaching

The programme should be designed to correspond with the intended learning outcomes, and the learning and teaching approaches applied should be adequate to achieve those. The diversity of students and their needs should be respected and attended to, especially in view of potential different cultural backgrounds of the students.

5.2 Assessment of students

The examination regulations and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes should correspond with the intended learning outcomes. They should be applied consistently among partner institutions.

6. Student Support [ESG 1.6]

The student support services should contribute to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. They should take into account specific challenges of mobile students.

7. Resources [ESG 1.5 & 1.6]

7.1 Staff

The staff should be sufficient and adequate (qualifications, professional and international experience) to implement the study programme.

7.2 Facilities

The facilities provided should be sufficient and adequate in view of the intended learning outcomes.

8. Transparency and Documentation [ESG 1.8]

Relevant information about the programme like admission requirements and procedures, course catalogue, examination and assessment procedures etc. should be well documented and published by taking into account specific needs of mobile students.

9. Quality Assurance [ESG 1.1 & part 1]

The cooperating institutions should apply joint internal quality assurance processes in accordance with part one of the ESG.

C. Procedure for External Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA

The cooperating institutions should jointly select a suitable EQAR-registered quality assurance agency. The agency should communicate appropriately with the competent

national authorities of the countries in which the cooperating higher education institutions are based.

1. Self-Evaluation Report [ESG 2.3]

The external quality assurance procedure should[6] be based on a self- evaluation report (SER) jointly submitted by the cooperating institutions. The SER should contain comprehensive information that demonstrates the compliance of the programme with the Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA (part B).

In addition, the report should contain the necessary information about the respective national frameworks of the cooperating institutions that foreign agencies and experts might need in order to appreciate the context, especially the positioning of the programme within the national higher education systems.

The SER should focus explicitly on the distinctive feature of the joint programme as a joint endeavour of higher education institutions from more than one national higher education system.

2. Review Panel [ESG 2.3 & 2.4]

The agency should appoint a panel of at least four members. The panel should combine expertise in the relevant subject(s) or discipline(s), including the labour market/world of work in the relevant field(s), and expertise in quality assurance in higher education.

Through their international expertise and experience the panel should be able to take into account the distinctive features of the joint programme. Collectively, the panel should possess knowledge of the HE systems of the HEIs involved and the language(s) of instruction used. The panel should include members from at least two countries involved in the consortium providing the programme. The panel should include at least one student.

The agency should ensure the impartiality of the experts and observes fairness towards the applying higher education institutions. To this end, the institutions should have the right to raise well-grounded objections against a panel member, but not a right to veto their appointment.

The agency should brief the experts on the review activity, their specific role, and the specifics of the quality assurance procedure. The briefing should focus particularly on the distinctive features of a joint programme.

3. Site Visit [ESG 2.3]

The site visit should enable the review panel to discuss the joint programme based on the self-evaluation report and assess whether the programme complies with the Standards (part B).

The site visit should therefore include discussions with representatives of all cooperating institutions and in particular the management of the institutions and the programme, the staff, the students, and other relevant stakeholders, such as alumni and the professional field.

Although the site visit should normally be restricted to one location, the provision at all locations has to be taken into account.

4. Review Report [ESG 2.3 & 2.6]

The review panel should prepare a report that contains relevant evidence, analysis and conclusions with regard to the Standards (part B). The report should also contain

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[6] The Procedure uses of the common English usage of "should" which has the connotation of prescription and compliance.

recommendations for developing the programme further. In case the review results in a formal outcome the review panel should make a recommendation for the decision.

The conclusions and recommendations should pay particular attention to the distinctive features of the joint programme.

The institutions should have the opportunity to comment on a draft version of the review report and request correction of factual errors.

5. Formal Outcomes and Decision [ESG 2.5]

If required, the agency should take a decision on the basis of the review report and the recommendation for the decision, considering the comments by the higher education institutions as appropriate. In case the review results in an accreditation decision, it grants or denies the accreditation (with or without conditions), based on the Standards (part B). The agency may supplement the formal outcome and the accreditation decision by recommendations.

The agency should give reasons for its accreditation decision. This applies in particular for accreditation decisions limited by conditions or negative decisions and for cases where the decision differs from the review panel's conclusions and recommendation for the decision.

6. Appeals [ESG 2.7]

The institutions should have the right to appeal against a formal outcome or an accreditation decision. Therefore, the agency should have a formalised appeals procedure in place.

7. Reporting [ESG 2.6]

The agency should publish the review report and, if applicable, the formal outcome or the accreditation decision on its website. In case the review was not conducted in English at least an English summary of the review report and an English version of the decision, including its reasons, should be published.

8. Follow-up [ESG 2.3]

The agency should agree with the cooperating institutions a follow-up procedure to assess the fulfilment of conditions – if applicable – and/or to evaluate the follow-up actions on recommendations – if applicable.

9. Periodicity [ESG 1.10]

The joint programme should be reviewed periodically every 6 years, which should be specified in the published decision. If there is an accreditation decision it should be granted – if the decision is positive – for a period of 6 years.[7] During the 6-year period, the agency should be informed about changes in the consortium offering the joint programme.

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[7] A period of 6 years is widely applied in EHEA countries.

Annex 2: Survey 1 – Identifying the needs of experts in the field

This Annex includes the outcomes of a survey undertaken in April 2017, aimed at identifying the needs of the experts in the field.

Survey response

- 129 respondents from 21 countries
- 106 responses from HEIs; 12 from QA agencies; 6 from ministries, 5 from Erasmus+ national agencies
- Most responses from Austria (24), Netherlands (20), France (14), Spain (11), Germany (10), Italy (9), Portugal (9), Poland (6).

Survey outcomes

1. Most needed advice regarding implementation of EA:
   a) How to deal with national regulations (67%)
   b) Information on procedures (54%)
   c) More information on assessment criteria (52%)
   d) Awarding of the degree (50%)
   e) Self-evaluation report preparation ((39%)
   f) The cooperation agreement (34%)
   g) Selection of EQAR-registered accreditation agency (32%)

Other remarks:

- Courses duration
- Joint diploma template
- Timing (SER, site visit, report, decisions, etc)
- Inter-agency cooperation and responsibilities between HEI consortium and national QA agencies
- Conversion of marks and evaluation criteria
- Institutional regulations
- Ex ante and ex post evaluations and costs constraints
- Definition of joint programmes
- Student feedback surveys
- Employability, e.g. early-stage career activities in relation to QA of employability
- Operationalisation of standards; alignment of consortium partners with national frameworks
- Finding of suitable experts

Clarifications:

- Detailed information on programme in sister HEIs is asked by panel although NVAO accepts accreditation of other countries
- How to relate joint QA to individual mechanisms in HEIs?
- More easy to use, clear explanations of implementation of EA needed
- Issuing of joint degree takes long time of negotiations; any help appreciated
- Lack of national procedures that enable implementation of EA
- EACEA still handles joint programmes as it they will be accredited nationally, in spite of EA
- A framework (model) for SER preparation would be appreciated

- Differences in national regulations and assessment criteria
- First hurdles are national/institutional regulations, QA less of an issue. Probably the only way out is to create a "free zone" for EHEA joint programmes.
- More information on awarding the degree, especially in case of double degrees.
- Problem of combining different national regulations, even more so with partner HEIs outside of EHEA.
- Little information/awareness about EA and how to use it in special situations.
- Regulations on number of credits that has to be taken at a HEI is not in line with demands of a joint programme
- Not advice but information is needed, e.g. case studies, good practices, but also failed projects.
- A3ES (Portugal) has no clear procedures on joint accreditation.
- Never heard about EQAR although I work already 10 years on joint master programmes
- Main issue in France is issuing a joint diploma instead of a double one
- Most difficult is to provide quality experience to students, as if they were in same HEI instead of going to different HEIs
- Lot of time spent on national evaluations of programmes, so European system should not double the work
- Selection of partner HEIs
- Accurate and current information on national regulations for awarding the joint degree
- Complicated and competitive cooperation of QA agencies and detailed national regulations make accreditation procedures for joint programmes complex and expensive
- Since the EA does not provide any guidance on meanings of standards there is the risk that various agencies will differently interpret these. Sufficient understanding of legal framework in different countries is needed.
- Difficult to find suitable international experts.
- National law and EA are sometimes not aligned
- Has to be clear what the implication is of accreditation of a HEI

2. Which topics should be addressed in a conference on implementation of EA?
   a) How to deal with national regulations (76%)
   b) More information on assessment criteria (65%)
   c) Information on procedures (61%)
   d) Awarding of the degree (53%)
   e) Self-evaluation report preparation ((48%)
   f) The cooperation agreement (42%)
   g) Selection of EQAR-registered accreditation agency (37%)

Other remarks:

- Gap between policy and practice and how to deal with it.
- Parallel workshops so that participants can choose 3 different topics that interest them most
- Courses duration
- Create networks of support by ex-EM scholars/experts
- Timing
- Single vs national accreditations
- Collection of good practices
- Cooperation between national QA agencies to smoothen national constraints
- Clarifying concepts

- Institutional regulations
- How to coordinate with partner agencies
- Definition of jointness
- Information on meaning of standards
- Follow-up of EA in national frameworks/regulations
- Cooperation agreement-how is financing organised- payment by the students-exchange of teachers-how to perform student questionnaires-single or double degree

Clarifications (most are already mentioned in first question, here are additions):

- Challenges met while evaluating mobility programme
- Which accreditation agencies should be involved when having double degrees with HEIs in 6 different countries?
- Hear from qualified persons about different procedures and interpretations
- Urgent need for information and cooperation mechanisms between us (cooperation between HEIs, between agencies, and between HEIs and agencies).
- Consequences of type of degree (joint/double) and type of QA procedure should be outlined
- Important to guide partners on bureaucracy
- Most difficult is to combine national regulations
- I do not see great benefit from EA at present, just a lot of additional paper and logistic work.
- When you educate for a regulated profession you need more clear information, incl. the regulations in a certain country.

3. Which obstacles do you see in relation to the European Approach?
   a) How to deal with national regulations (78%)
   b) Awarding of the degree (34%)
   c) Selection of EQAR-registered accreditation agency (19%)
   d) More information on assessment criteria (18%)
   e) The cooperation agreement (14%)
   f) Self-evaluation report preparation ((10%)

Other remarks:

- National authorities should accept and trust the quality check performed by their colleagues in other countries
- Local politics within university
- Lack of support/disinterest form higher authorities
- Many things on the operational level remain unclear. I have seen a EA procedure fail as the agencies had different understandings on how things could work.
- Low awareness of EA among national authorities; national laws not adopted to EA; flexibility to implement EA within existing regulations depends on will of single persons acting for ministries or QA agencies; universities do not have the competences and expertise to manage this beyond the regular accreditation business.
- A lot of administrative hassle; we have our national accreditation every 5 years; we do not need or want an additional burden!
- If national governments agree on using it, I do not foresee any other issues
- Coordination between agencies, differences in terms of evaluation schedules and procedures (ex ante/ex post, 5-6-7 years evaluation)

- Definition of joint programmes
- Sometimes difficult to deal with different accreditation agencies, each demanding different things for the same programmes
- Acceptance of the EA in all EHERA countries

Clarifications (why do you foresee these obstacles?):

- Potential conflicts with national rules/institutional rules & procedures
- Regulations often contradictory
- Even if legislation is adopted the implementation, setting procedures in place, takes long time. Likely that some stakeholders will not be cooperative, e.g. changes in institutional bye-laws take long time.
- Achieving joint degree is a real challenge because of complexity of national regulations.
- Financial and administrative regulations are much harder obstacles than QA, no major obstacle for EA.
- My QA agency was contacted 3 times to implement EA; it failed 3 times! One procedure was difficult to coordinate and find best way to proceed. 2 other procedures; in France there is no ex ante accreditation for new programmes, so we cannot validate ex ante accreditation by another agency. Also difficult for all agencies to define the right timeline. Sharing costs is also a tricky question. Main obstacle is that it is very difficult to define 1 single procedure for the EA. For each demand we have to exchange information and try to elaborate a tailor made solution; this is time consuming, requests lots of efforts for results that are not very significant.
- A3ES (Portugal) should be more involved. Even when accredited according to EA in another country, national legislation still requires it to be accredited at national level. This prevents universities from searching for accreditation abroad, and it may preclude joint accreditation.
- Graduation conditions are very different from one country to the other, and some institutions are reluctant to accept the results acquired by a student at another institution, even if it is in the framework of a joint programme and under a relevant consortium agreement.
- A master requires 300 ECTS in Germany. Masters with less ECTS have problems to be accepted.
- The most significant problems are related with practical issues related with the awarding degree, for which the different countries have different rules difficult to harmonize.
- Some national regulations do not allow already the implementation of joint degree in joint programmes.
- Assessment criteria may vary according to country, field of study, higher education level and quality feedback coming from partner universities
- JP start at the level of enthusiastic staff (research/teaching cooperations) - hence for a good implementation it is necessary to elevate issues to a higher level - commitment of leadership of HE, commitment of supporting / administrative level - clarity on legal frameworks / understanding of programme development in a legal (requirement) sense - the understanding of prerequisites when it comes to external quality assurance. The understanding of how is responsible for what. The EA does not solve - open issues at the home country level - with regard to JP.
- In Germany, only joint degree programmes can be accredited based on the European Approach - this is a real flaw in our national legislation!
- For small countries is always a problem with the use of national language which is usually protected by constitution. Choosing other agency is usually connected with translation of all papers in English.

4. Do you foresee that a quality assurance procedure according to the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes will be carried out in your country in the near future?
    a) Yes (62%)
    b) No (38%)

Please specify:

- The policies with regard to the quality assurance procedures in the Netherlands are quite similar to the EAQA's procedures and regulations, so the current Dutch QA system - with the accreditation structure that we have for the NVAO - covers these.
- I assume that we as the coordinating partner university in our consortium (EMLE) will apply for the single accreditation procedure according to the 'European Approach' at the NVAO - so in NL - in 2018 or ultimately early 2019. According to me, given our positive experience in the JOQAR pilot project, this is the best procedure for Joint International Programmes to have a proper and smooth external Quality Assurance procedure done, to have the accreditation done in the end. Hopefully, accepted in all relevant partner countries automatically by then.
- There are hardly any joint degrees in the Netherlands and it will be very likely that an additional acknowledgement/light accreditation will be needed in the different countries involved, so it will only be an extra burden.
- Yes. To the best of my knowledge the Polish Accreditation Committee is interested to apply the European approach. However it is difficult to predict if the supporter of the idea will manage to convince decision makers to introduce it into the legal framework.
- In Germany quality assurance procedures according to the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes are already carried out.
- Yes, our agency is already doing that. (one ongoing procedure)
- We can find many reports and support information on this matter. We feel the European Commission's progress, improvements and many efforts to design an official European Quality Assurance System in the future. The quality assessment reports that we received from the CQAB (assessment of our EMJMD programme) prove the European Commission's high consideration for this matter as well as its high level of expertise. It inspires us in our own Quality Assurance System.
- In Croatia we plan to use the Approach as soon as the opportunity arises (as soon as someone applies for a joint program accreditation), in practice if not formally if that will not be legally possible by then.
- It is somehow defined by the Law on HE. But, there always be a problem taking a HEI from the state which is not covered by EQAR agency.
- I would like to say yes, because Norway has been very open to changes and to accept decisions in the Bologna process, but I doubt that this could be done by one or a few countries only.
- UK universities already have reasonably rigorous quality assurance mechanisms and our university also has its own, additional procedures for the regulation of joint degrees. In my case the joint degree that I help to run also has to meet requirements for professional accreditation (the Royal Town Planning Institute). As a result the EAQA procedure would add a fourth level of quality assurance. In many universities people will ask about the added value of EAQA in relation to the costs.

- No, all our tentative projects have failed so far.
- Incompatibility between different national rules.
- This is a topic A3ES (Portugal) has avoided, so I don't believe it will be solved in the near future - even though it must be, eventually.
- Each study programme to be carried out in the Czech Republic has to comply with the national regulations and undergo standard national accreditation procedures. These cannot be substituted by procedures undergone in another country or quality assurance system.
- Though national agency is a member from EQAR since 2008, there's still no possibility for reaching to another approach either than the national agency, so I don't believe it will possible in a near future too...
- Doubtful if it means that we must do both national and European quality assurance
- We are still waiting for general guidelines to be implemented

Conclusions and points for discussion

1. The answers show that not everyone (even among this group of many HEIs with joint programmes) is aware of the EA, what a EQAR-registered agency means, etc. There are also some misunderstandings, e.g.

that the EA would come on top of national accreditation, so that there would be additional work. The intention of the EA is of course to have just 1 single accreditation instead of multiple national ones, so it would be more efficient. As the EA is not implemented yet in many countries this may explain this misunderstanding.

Another misunderstanding is that the EA requires different agencies to cooperate with all complexities involved. However, the intention of the EA is to have just 1 EQAR-registered agency to carry out the procedures with the result accepted in all EHEA countries. So there is no need for coordination among agencies, the only requirement is that the other agencies are informed of the EA procedure by the agency that is doing it. Again, as in most countries there have not been the necessary legislative changes yet the reality is that the results of the EA procedure are not accepted widely.

2. The Netherlands, Germany, Poland, and Croatia foresee EA procedures in near future. Norway is less sure. In UK it is not necessary and is likely to be seen as an additional burden. In France 3 attempts have failed because ex ante accreditation is not accepted in France, and because of timing, sharing costs/resources and coordination problems. In Portugal and Czech Republic and some other responding countries the necessary (legal or agency) requirements/interests are not in place and as a consequence a EA procedure is not foreseen in the near future.

3. There are 3 major obstacles in relation to the EA, with national regulations seen by far as the biggest obstacle:

   a) How to deal with national regulations (78%): lack of national procedures that enable implementation of EA; lack of support/disinterest from higher authorities; alignment of consortium partners with national frameworks; regulations often contradictory; national regulations differ from assessment criteria; problem of combining different national regulations greater with HEIs outside of EHEA; regulations on number of credits not in line with demands of a joint programme; detailed national regulations make accreditation procedures for joint programmes complex and expensive; Master requires 300 ECTS in Germany, master with less ECTS will have difficulty to be accepted.

   b) Awarding of the degree (34%): issuing joint degrees takes long time of negotiations; some national regulations do not allow the implementation of a joint degree in a joint programme; in Germany only joint degrees can be accredited with EA: practical issues related with awarding the degree for which the different countries have different rules that are difficult to harmonize; graduation conditions are very different from one country to the other, and some HEIs are reluctant to accept the results acquired by a student at another HEI, even if it is in the framework of a joint programme and under a relevant consortium agreement.

   c) The EA standards or procedure:

      i. Selection of EQAR-registered accreditation agency (19%); EQAR not known; some/many EQAR-registered agencies have no procedure/knowledge/experience or interest in EA; choosing foreign agency means translations in English which in some smaller countries a problem because use of national language is protected by the Constitution; inter-agency cooperation and responsibilities between HEI consortium and national QA agencies; complicated and competitive cooperation of QA agencies; ex ante vs ex post evaluations and costs constraints; finding of suitable international experts; too much detailed information asked by panel; differences in terms of evaluation schedules and procedures (ex ante/ex post, 5-6-7 evaluation)

      ii. More information on assessment criteria (18%): definition of joint programmes (eligibility); implication of accreditation of a HEI not clear; operationalisation of standards; courses duration; conversion of marks and evaluation criteria; student feedback surveys; employability; how to relate joint QA to individual mechanisms in HEIs; since the EA does not provide any guidance on meanings of standards there is the risk

that various agencies will differently interpret these; sufficient understanding of legal framework in different countries is needed.

      iii. The cooperation agreement (14%): selection of partner HEIs

      iv. Self-evaluation report preparation ((10%); timing (SER, site visit, report, decisions, etc.)

4. Institutional regulations that are not flexible are also several times mentioned as an obstacle to applying the EA. Moreover, changes in institutional bye-laws take time.

5. EACEA funding rules are not aligned with EA (EACEA still assumes multiple national accreditations)

6. The following statement sums up major obstacles: "Low awareness of EA among national authorities; national laws not adopted to EA; flexibility to implement EA within existing regulations depends on will of single persons acting for ministries or QA agencies; universities do not have the competences and expertise to manage this beyond the regular accreditation business."

7. Some comments hint at possible solutions for the obstacles encountered:

    a) National regulations:

        i. Creating a "free zone" for EHEA joint programmes

        ii. Follow-up (inclusion) of EA in national framework/regulations

        iii. National authorities should accept and trust the quality check performed by their colleagues in other countries

        iv. Cooperation between national QA agencies to smoothen national constraints

    b) Awarding of the degree:

        i. joint diploma template

        ii. accurate and current information on national regulations needed for awarding the joint degree

        iii. more information needed on awarding double degrees

    c) EA standards/procedure:

        i. Easy to use, clear explanations of implementation of EA

        ii. Cooperation agreement: good practices/examples on how is financing organised- payment by the students-exchange of teachers-how to perform student questionnaires- single or double degree

        iii. A model for SER preparation/SER format

    d) Possible assistance applicable to all obstacles:

        i. Information on case studies, good practices, but also failed projects

        ii. Creating network of support by ex-EM scholars/experts

        iii. JP start at the level of enthusiastic staff (research/teaching cooperations) - hence for a good implementation it is necessary to elevate issues to a higher level - commitment of leadership of HE, commitment of supporting / administrative level - clarity on legal frameworks / understanding of programme development in a legal (requirement) sense - the understanding of prerequisites when it comes to external quality assurance. The understanding of who is responsible for what.

Annex 3: Survey 2 – Suggestions for necessary action points

This Annex includes the outcomes of a survey (September 2017) aimed at identifying the action points that need to be undertaken by four stakeholder groups in order to stimulate the implementation of the European Approach. The action points listed in this Annex are not the final action points resulting from the PLA; instead, these are suggestions for consideration that have informed the discussions during the PLA.

Action points for ministries of education

1. Include European Approach into the national legislation. Quickly.
   Follow-up with what has been agreed / confirmed / ratified by the EHEA education ministers in Yerevan; map and cross-check existing legislation - identify obstacles - introduce changes.
   - First, there should be a clear intent of removing all national legislative obstacles.
   - Then, national authorities must check if all their existing criteria actually enable the European Approach to come to life.
   - Then, remove national legislation that prevents use of the European Approach, i.e. that does not allow to recognise single accreditation/evaluation in line with European Approach instead of national criteria.
   - Create national legislations that that allow the use of the EA without creating double burdens (some countries are not opposed to use EA, but still have to cover the Programme in their regular Institution wide Review. So this is a double pain for QA agency and HEI.
   - Do not add any national requirements

2. Introduce supporting aids for HEI where possible (financial support, setting common standard if required).

3. Disseminate information in the country, accept that some requirements might not be mandatory with the EA.

4. Accept the verdict of a European Quality assessment. If an institution passes a European Quality assessment the university (of applied sciences) should be allowed to handout degrees without additional (national) checks of accreditation bodies.

Action points for QA organisations

1. Adopt appropriate criteria and operational procedures to adopt the European Approach, adopting a common European framework for single accreditation of JP in EHEA.

2. Be ready to offer using the European Approach (EA), if institutions are interested.
   - Be open to experiment with the EA - be the intermediary between HEIs and the national authorities and provide the necessary background knowledge and expertise, if necessary, to understand what are the obstacles for using the EA in their system.
   - In some cases, it might be sufficient to take a decision at the level of the quality assurance organisation which allow the use of the EA and there is no need for a legislative change.

3. Explain the European Approach to HEIs. Identify differences between the EA and the national procedures and make this info transparent to HEI.

4. Be more flexible and accept differences, taking into account the fact that it is a priority to propose such programmes than not having them because they are not exactly in the frame of QAA.
   - Accept to renounce some of your own procedures to follow other agencies' procedures.
   - Strengthen their cooperation at the practical level to make the European Approach work.

5. Plan and organise time to get in contact with agencies in the countries of origin of consortium partners. Invest time in familiarisation on legal frameworks in various countries of consortium partners. Crosscheck "eligibility" information provided.

6. QAAs in the countries concerned for a joint programme using the EA might need to agree on financial issues (cost of evaluation - eventual costs lost by not doing an evaluation, sharing costs etc.)

7. Lobby for allowing for flexibility in the case of accreditation of transnational joint degrees, get together and sign multilateral agreements to implement EA and lobby it at ministerial lobby. QA organisations have much better position in a dialogue with policy makers and can contribute more to the adoption of the European Approach.

8. Work more internationally getting agreements for mutual recognition with other EQAR-registered agencies.

9. If there are no legal obstacles to the European Approach, capacity building exercises could be relevant for QA organisations.

Action points for higher education institutions

1. Co-operate more closely with other HEIs and their quality assurance agencies to define what they want.

2. Communicate with relevant authorities (inside and outside of the institution), and familiarise with the various requirements regarding set-up / implementation of a joint programme. Be ready to use the European Approach, even if you are an early adopter.

3. Create joint programmes with a joint, integrated curriculum and integrated quality assurance. Accept the European Approach as accreditation, and use the helpful set of criteria (European Approach), and ask their external QA providers to use it.

4. Unite, lobby and request Ministries, Parliaments and QA agencies to amend national legislation to allow for single accreditation of a joint programme.
   - Continue to mention the challenges faced. Prepare well-justified supporting documentation and case studies, and submit to the Ministry of Education.
   - Insist that scattered national evaluations in many cases do not look at the programme as a whole.
   - Remind their education ministries / legislators of the promise that the HEIs would be able to use the European Approach.

5. Improve information and awareness of the European Approach to staff.

6. Give more incentives and recognition of staff efforts.

Action points for European Commission / EACEA

1. Reduce bureaucracy, insert European accreditation in EC law.

2. Revision of Erasmus Mundus rules that relate to the necessity to follow national legislation when applying for funds. Promote European Approach in funding rules, make accreditation costs an eligible cost if European Approach is used.

3. Listen to obstacles of applicants wanting to use the EA and try to help them. Liaise with ENQA, EQAR, DG EAC.

4. Give bonus points for JP proposals that adopt the European Approach.

5. Raise awareness for the EA at all possible fora with stakeholders (already happening). Promote and support the EA in a similar way as the ESG have been supported.

6. Create contact points easily accessible for concrete questions

7. Review application requirements, information provided.

8. Issue recommendations of good practice.

9. Promote mutual learning and best practices. Consider the support of coordination and learning activities.

10. Provide funding to identify differences between EA and regular national procedures of QAA, develop joint single accreditation mechanism, agreements and codes of conduct single accreditation of JP.

11. EACEA should elaborate mechanism which might boost Joint Programmes in EU.

Annex 4: List of Participants

	Country	Institution / organisation	Participant
1	Belgium (Flanders)	Leuven University	Guido Groeseneken
2		Ghent University	Jean Marie Noterdaeme
3		Ministry of Education and Training	Noël Vercruysse
4	France	Université Paris I Pantheon-Sorbonne	Anne-Sophie Rieth
5		High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES)	Solange Pisarz
6		Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation	Denis Despréaux
7	Germany	Technical University of Munich	Rudolf Bauer
8		Münster University	Sonja Völker
9		German Accreditation Council	Katrin Mayer-Lantermann
10		Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia	Patrick Neuhaus
11	Netherlands	Stenden University of Applied Sciences	Peter Elting
12		Maastricht University	Ria Wolleswinkel
13		Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO)	Lineke van Bruggen
14		Ministry of Education, Culture and Science	Tessa Bijvank
15	Poland	Adam Mickiewicz University Poznan	Bohdan Skalski
16		Jagiellonian University Krakow	Anna Szetela
17		Polish Accreditation Committee	Maciej Markowski
18		Polish Accreditation Committee (representing the Ministry of Education)	Janus Uriasz
19	Spain	University of Granada	Adelina Sánchez Espinosa
20		National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA)	Rafael Llavori
21		Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, SEPIE	Luis Delgado
	Other experts		
22	Netherlands	ENIC-NARIC network	Bas Wegewijs
23	Finland	Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI)	Annika Sundbäck

24	Netherlands	ProDeJiP network & coordinator EMLE, Erasmus University Rotterdam	Wicher Schreuders
25	France	Bologna Secretariat	Françoise Profit
26	Netherlands	Quality Assurance person to the PLA & consortium director Erasmus Mundus programme Euroculture	Robert Wagenaar
27	Austria	University of Salzburg	Franz Kok
28	Belgium	European Commission, Higher Education Unit	Klara Engels-Perenyi
29	Belgium	EACEA	Klaus Haupt
30	Belgium	European University Association	Goran Dakovic
31	Germany	Agency for Quality Assurance (AQAS e.V.)	Ronny Heintze
32	Netherlands	Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU)	Jurgen Rienks
33	Netherlands	Association of Dutch Universities of Applied Sciences (VH)	Dirk Cornelissen
34	Belgium	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)	Colin Tück
35	Austria	Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria)	Maria Weber
36	Poland	Frontex	Anemona Peres
37	Lithuania	Mykolas Romeris University	Inga Juknytė-Petreikienė
38	Netherlands	National Agency Erasmus+	Madalena Pereira
39	Netherlands	Nuffic	Rosa Becker
40	Netherlands	Nuffic	Jenneke Lokhoff
41	Netherlands	Nuffic	Roos Hogenkamp
42	Netherlands	Nuffic	Caroline Duits
43	Netherlands	National Agency Erasmus+	Cyril van Es

Annex 5: Agenda of the PLA conference

Agenda Peer Learning Activity (PLA)

on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

The Hague, The Netherlands

PLA Location:

Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
Rijnstraat 50
2515 XP The Hague, The Netherlands

The aim of the PLA is to:

- Identify obstacles
- Identify good practices on how to use the European Approach
- Formulate an concrete action list for the four stakeholders (higher education institutions, QA organisations, ministries of education, and European Commission and Agency).

Thursday 5 October 2017		
12:00 - 13:00	*Welcome lunch* at Ministry of Education, Culture and Science	
13:00 - 13.10	Welcome	**Denise Heiligers,** Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, The Netherlands
13.10 - 13.15	Aim of the programme	**Rosa Becker,** Nuffic, The Netherlands
13:15 - 13:45	**The European Approach**	**Ronny Heintze,** AQAS Accreditation Council, Germany

Time	Topic	Speakers
13:45 - 14:10	**Outcomes online survey:** **the main difficulties encountered**	**Rosa Becker,** Nuffic, The Netherlands
14.10 - 14.40	**Frontex considerations to adopt the European Approach**	Speakers: 1. **Anemona Peres**, Frontex, Poland 2. **Inga Juknytė-Petreikienė**, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania Moderator: **Madalena Pereira,** Dutch National Agency Erasmus+
14:40 - 15.40	**ITEPS experience with the European Approach** The example of the joint bachelor programme in International Teacher Education for Primary Schools (ITEPS)	Speakers: 1. **Peter Elting**, Stenden University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands 2. **Lineke van Bruggen**, NVAO, The Netherlands 3. **Tessa Bijvank**, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, The Netherlands Moderator: **Ronny Heintze**, AQAS Accreditation Council, Germany
15:40 - 15:55	*Coffee and tea*	
15:55 - 16:55	**EuroPS consortium experience with the European Approach** The example of the joint master programme in Political Science, Integration and Governance (PoSIG programme)	Speakers: 1. **Franz Kok**, University of Salzburg, Austria 2. **Maria Weber**, AQ Austria, Austria Moderator: **Annika Sundbäck**, EDUFI, Finland
16:55 - 17:00	Close of the day	**Rosa Becker**, Nuffic, The Netherlands
18:00 - 19:00	Guided Tour through The Hague Start: 18:00 at Mercure Hotel Spui End: 19:00 at Restaurant	
19:00 - 22:00	Dinner at restaurant Dekxels Denneweg 130, The Hague	

Friday 6 October 2017		
09:00 - 09:15	Welcome	**Rosa Becker,** Nuffic, The Netherlands
09:15 - 10:15	**How to deal with European funding programme criteria?**	Speakers: 1. **Klaus Haupt**, Head of Unit Erasmus+, EACEA, Brussels 2. **Wicher Schreuders**, Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands 3. **Klara Engels-Perenyi**, Higher Education Unit, European Commission, Brussels Moderator: **Annika Sundbäck**, EDUFI, Finland
10:15 - 10:30	*Coffee and tea*	
10:30 - 12:00	**Formulating concrete action lists for the four stakeholder groups**: - higher education institutions - quality assurance organisations - ministries of education - the European Commission & EACEA Format: parallel working group sessions in the form of a 'Gallery Walk'	Plenary leader: **Jenneke Lokhoff**, Nuffic, The Netherlands 4 session leaders: 1. **Solange Pisarz**, Hcéres, France (action list QA organisations) 2. **Jurgen Rienks**, VSNU, The Netherlands (action list higher education institutions) 3. **Noel Vercruysse**, Ministry of Education, Flanders (action list ministries of education) 4. **Robert Wagenaar,** University of Groningen, The Netherlands (action points European Commission/EACEA)
12:00 - 13:00	*Lunch* at the Ministry	
13:00 - 14:15	**Formulating concrete action lists for the four stakeholder groups:** plenary feedback from the groups	Presenters: 1. **Solange Pisarz**, Hcéres, France (action list QA organisations) 2. **Jurgen Rienks**, VSNU, The Netherlands (action list higher education institutions)

		3. **Noel Vercruysse**, Ministry of Education, Flanders (action list ministries of education) 4. **Robert Wagenaar,** University of Groningen, The Netherlands (action points European Commission/EACEA) Moderator: **Jenneke Lokhoff**, Nuffic, The Netherlands
14:15 - 14:55	**Closing Panel "How are we going to proceed?"**	Panel members: 1. **Klara Engels-Perenyi**, Higher Education Unit, European Commission, Brussels 2. **Françoise Profit**, Head of the Bologna Follow-up Group Secretariat, France 3. **Goran Dakovic**, European University Association, Belgium 4. **Colin Tück**, European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), Belgium Moderator: **Jenneke Lokhoff**, Nuffic, The Netherlands
14:55 - 15:00	Closing of the PLA	**Rosa Becker**, Nuffic, The Netherlands
15:00 - 15:45	*Networking drinks*	

Annex 6: List of Abbreviations

AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
DE	Germany
EA	European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes
EACEA	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, European Commission
EAQA	European Association of Quality Agencies
ECA	European Consortium for Accreditation
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EHERA	European Higher Education and Research Area
EJMSBM	European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management (joint programme)
EM	Erasmus Mundus
EMJMD	Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees
EMLE	European Master in Law and Economics (joint programme)
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register
ES	Spain
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
ESU	European Students' Union
EU	European Union
EUA	European University Association
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
FaBoTo II	Facilitating the use of Bologna Tools for Higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies II (project)
FI	Finland
FR	France
HE	Higher education
HEI(s)	Higher education institution(s)
HERE-ES	Higher Education Reforms in Spain (project)
ITEPS	International Teacher Education for Primary Schools (joint bachelor programme)

JOQAR	Joint programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of degrees awarded (project)
LT	Lithuania
NL	The Netherlands
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders
PL	Poland
PLA	Peer Learning Activity
PoSIG	Political Science, Integration and Governance (joint master programme)
QA	Quality assurance
QAA	Quality assurance agency