

# European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

Version 7 29 November 2013

## Executive Summary

Due to the different legislation and heterogeneity of external quality assurance systems within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) the complexities involved in the external quality assurance of joint programmes have been one major obstacle for their development, in particular in the case of joint degrees.

Over the past years, quality assurance agencies in the EHEA have been working together to develop and test different approaches to simplify the external quality assurance of joint programmes. In particular in those situations where there is obligatory review or accreditation at the level of programmes, a number of specific – and sometimes contradictory – national requirements often inhibit the possibility of conducting single quality assurance processes for joint programmes offered in several countries.

Moreover, despite the commitments of the Bucharest Communiqué, the full recognition of a formal outcome let alone of an accreditation decision resulting from a single quality assurance procedure in the different countries involved often remains a cumbersome and bureaucratic process, which frequently makes the conduct of several fragmented processes – neglecting the joint character of the programme – the more practical solution.

In order to dismantle an important obstacle to the development of joint programmes, the expert group proposes to establish an agreed European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, based on the ESG<sup>1</sup> and QF-EHEA. The group recommends that ministers make appropriate commitments to recognise quality assurance processes/outcomes(?) and in particular accreditation decisions on the basis of the agreed European Approach. In doing so, ministers promote single quality assurance processes that genuinely reflect and mirror the joint character of programmes in their quality assurance arrangements.

The expert group proposes that the BFUG recommend that ministers:

- adopt the European Quality Assurance Approach for Joint Programmes (described in part 4 of this document); and
- commit to fully recognise the outcomes of quality assurance processes that were made by an EQAR-registered agency as a result of a procedure in line with the European Approach and, in those cases where programme accreditation is required, the accreditation decisions.

---

<sup>1</sup> Before adoption the *European Approach for Accreditation of Joint Degrees* will need to be revised in order to take account of the revised ESG. This is likely to be only a question of wording.

## 1. Mandate

In the Bucharest Communiqué (April 2012), ministers agreed on the following:

„We will allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements. In particular, we will aim to recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes. (...)

We encourage higher education institutions to further develop joint programmes and degrees as part of a wider EHEA approach. We will examine national rules and practices relating to joint programmes and degrees as a way to dismantle obstacles to cooperation and mobility embedded in national contexts.”

The Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) consequently included in its work programme 2013-2017 the task to:

“Develop a policy proposal for a specific European accreditation approach for Joint programmes, which should be applied to all those Joint programmes that are subject to compulsory programme accreditation at national level.”

The BFUG commissioned a small expert group to draft such a policy proposal, and to report back to the BFUG Working Groups on “Structural Reforms” and “Mobility and Internationalisation”.

The expert group was composed of:

- Mark Frederiks (Structural Reforms WG, The Netherlands)
- Achim Hopbach (Structural Reforms WG, ENQA)
- Andrejs Rauhvargers (Reporting WG, Latvia)
- Colin Tück (Structural Reforms WG, EQAR)

The present recommendation was prepared by the expert group and revised after discussion by the BFUG Working Groups on “Structural Reforms” (at its meeting of \*\*\*) and “Mobility and Internationalisation” (at its meeting of \*\*\*)).

## 2) Introduction

Joint programmes are set up to enhance the mobility of students and staff, to facilitate mutual learning and cooperation opportunities and to create programmes of excellence. Joint degrees express the jointness also in the awarding of the degree.

While in the EHEA the political will to increase the number of joint programmes and joint degrees is evident through various Ministerial Communiqués, the implementation of these initiatives is still hampered by serious problems.

A significant amount of these problems concentrate around issues of recognition and quality assurance (QA). These problems are mainly rooted in the different national legislations in the EHEA and the existing heterogeneity of QA systems in the countries concerned.<sup>2</sup>

A number of projects have been initiated to investigate and tackle problems with setting up, quality assuring and recognising joint programmes. An overview of current projects can be found in Annex 6 of the BRIDGE Handbook<sup>3</sup>. Important steps forward regarding the recognition of joint degrees have been made through the development of the European Area of Recognition (EAR) Manual<sup>4</sup>, and a report by ENIC-NARICs on fair recognition of joint degrees as an outcome of the ECA project "Joint programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of degrees awarded" (JOQAR)<sup>5</sup>.

### Definitions

There is often confusion in the use of terminology regarding joint programmes and degrees. To make it clear from the outset what types of programmes are addressed by this recommendation a definition of the terms is provided. These definitions are in line with Bologna policy documents and are being used, for instance, by the ENIC-NARICs<sup>6</sup>.

#### Joint programme:

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

#### Joint degree:

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

#### Multiple degree:

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

---

<sup>2</sup> ENQA (2012), Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (ENQA workshop report 19)

<sup>3</sup> Luca Lantero (ed.) (2012), BRIDGE Handbook. Joint programmes and recognition of joint degrees.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.eurorecognition.eu/>

<sup>5</sup> Axel Aerden & Jenneke Lokhoff (2013), Framework for Fair Recognition of Joint Degrees, ECA Occasional Paper, The Hague. For a description and outcomes of the JOQAR project see: <http://www.eacaconsortium.net/main/projects/joqar>

<sup>6</sup> Axel Aerden & Hanna Reczulska (2012), Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees. ECA Occasional Paper, The Hague, p. 33-40: 2013.

Hence, the common characteristic of joint programmes is that they are offered jointly whilst the degree awarding can be different (double/multiple or joint). Joint degrees are therefore a specific subset of joint programmes, as it applies only to those joint programmes that lead to the award of a joint degree. These distinctions are important because the consequences for the external quality assurance, in particular for accreditation and/or approval of the various types of joint programmes differ significantly.

## **Numbers**

In 2009 the number of joint programmes was estimated by Rauhvargers et al (2009) to be around 2,500 in the EHEA<sup>7</sup>. As a consequence the actual number may now be above 3,000. In a survey results report by Obst et al (2011)<sup>8</sup> it was found that 84% of responding higher education institutions offered joint programmes. Thirty three per cent of the responding higher education institutions were involved in awarding joint degrees.

Many more joint programmes could, however, be provided as joint degrees if national legislation, accreditation and recognition practices would become more suitable for awarding joint degrees. This recommendation aims to serve as one step in dismantling these existing obstacles.

### **3) Current practices of external quality assurance of joint programmes**

Joint programmes challenge the existing national quality assurance systems: more than one provider develop and offer a joint programme which is studied at more than one institution in more than one country with different political and legal frameworks and not least with differing quality assurance regimes.

The European higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies accepted this challenge and made a great effort in the last years to analyse the specific issues of quality assurance in joint programmes.

In those cases where all cooperating institutions are subject to obligatory external quality assurance at institutional level only (e.g. institutional audit or accreditation), and thus bear "self-accrediting" powers for their programmes, joint internal quality assurance arrangements for the joint programme can be agreed by the cooperating institutions. In doing so, institutions have been using, for instance, the Guidelines for Quality Enhancement in European Joint Master Programmes developed by the EUA.

For those cases where quality assurance or accreditation at programme level are required in one or more countries involved, several approaches for joint programmes have been established in the past years: national, joint or single processes.

#### **Several national quality assurance processes**

Several national agencies from the countries of the higher education institutions involved quality assure a joint programme in separate processes. Traditionally, each agency reviews only the part of the provision offered by the higher education institution(s) in the country that

---

<sup>7</sup>

Andrejs Rauhvargers, Cynthia Deane & Wilfried Pauwels (2009), *Bologna Process Stocktaking Report. Report from working groups appointed by the Bologna Follow-up Group to the Ministerial Conference in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve*.

<sup>8</sup>

Daniel Obst, Matthias Kuder & Clare Banks (2011), *Joint and Double Degree Programs in the Global Context*, Institute of International Education.

falls under the agency's remit. As a consequence, the assessment of the provision is fragmented (between different agencies and countries), which neglects the crucial characteristic of the programme, namely that it is offered jointly. Furthermore, several agencies and experts review parts of the programme, but the programme as a whole is not evaluated externally. For instance, a joint programme has its learning outcomes defined for the programme as a whole, but in several, fragmented quality assurance processes there is no comprehensive review of the entire programme's curriculum and whether it is fit to achieve these outcomes and objectives. In every process, only a small part of the programme is reviewed, without taking into account the joint programme in its entirety. From a viewpoint of quality (and of the students enrolled) the quality assurance of a joint programme should cover the totality of the programme that leads to awarding the degree(s).

## **Joint quality assurance process**

In a joint quality assurance process several agencies work together and agree on a common assessment framework, e.g. by taking one agency's framework and adding additional elements of the other agency/-ies, or by agreeing on a new framework which takes the requirements of all agencies into account.

They can jointly install a panel of experts who will commence a site visit at one location (although in practice visits at two or more locations also occur) resulting in one panel report (although sometimes reporting requirements are so different that two reports are written).

Whilst joint processes have the advantages that they look at the totality of the programme and avoid duplication in national processes, there are also some setbacks. Experience shows that, especially when agencies cooperate for the first time, comparing frameworks and agreeing on the specifics of the procedure mean quite an investment in time for agencies, experts and the institutions involved. Nearly for every programme a new process needs to be established on an ad-hoc basis, depending on the institutions and countries involved, as there is no standard process. If several locations are visited or multiple reports written, the reduction of costs and efforts is limited.

In addition, problems in the decision-making phase may loom if the agencies attach different conclusions to the results of the joint procedure. It is possible that the cooperating agencies take different quality assurance decisions which may be detrimental for both the institutions and the future cooperation between the agencies.

## **Single quality assurance procedure**

In a single quality assurance procedure there is only one agency and one assessment framework for carrying out the procedure. The framework consists of two building blocks: the European shared component (the "core") and the relevant national components (the "plus").

The European shared component covers the essential standards and criteria that need to be taken into account in all single quality assurance processes, and is based on the ESG and the QF-EHEA. The national components cover additional, particular national requirements. These national components include the elements of the assessment criteria and/or the assessment procedure that need to be included in a quality assurance procedure in a specific national higher education system. One panel is deployed for the assessment of the entire programme and this panel will usually only visit one location of the joint programme.

Nevertheless, the aim is that the results of a single procedure are accepted by all countries where the joint programme is provided. Therefore, the panel writes one report which should be the basis for the quality assurance decisions of the other agencies.

## **Lessons Learnt**

Today one can rely on ample experience with quality assurance of joint programmes. Two main lessons learnt are as follows:

In principle, part II of the ESG is applicable to quality assurance of joint programmes. Experience clearly shows that the conduct of quality assurance of joint programmes in itself does not constitute the problem many HEIs are facing in particular when it comes to the accreditation of joint programmes. ESG are applied widely in the EHEA and national specificities in the conduct of quality assurance processes are within acceptable boundaries.

What remains the major impediment for both cooperating institutions and agencies are rather the national regulations for approval of the different joint programmes and, thus, the additional national criteria that need to be applied. This is the clear outcome of the above mentioned JOQAR, the most profound project on quality assurance of joint programmes.

### **Remaining Obstacles**

Various evaluations of quality assurance of joint programmes led to a positive conclusion on the use of shared European standards and criteria (based on ESG and QF-EHEA).

With regard to the additional national criteria it was concluded that these should be removed when assessing joint programmes in single quality assurance processes. Agencies and experts agreed that these additional national criteria were not suitable for assessing joint programmes and are merely hindering the development of such programmes.<sup>9</sup>

The following examples can be given of such additional, national requirements that currently constitute obstacles in particular in common assessment processes for joint programmes. The list is based on the JOQAR project, which covered 9 countries from the EHEA: Belgium (Flanders), Czech Republic, France, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Portugal.

- National QA agencies which are not allowed to coordinate an international procedure or undertake a site visit abroad (although the coordinating institution that provides the joint degree is located in another country)
- Substantial changes that have occurred since the last accreditation (curriculum, subjects, staff, etc.), must be stated and described in the reaccreditation application (Czech Republic)
- The report by the experts has to be translated in the national language (Lithuania)
- A specific assessment scale is necessary:
  - This translated document needs to follow the six areas included in the Lithuanian framework and each of these six areas shall be assessed on a four-point scale (Lithuania)
  - The assessment panel needs to come to a general conclusion regarding the joint programme. This general conclusion is either unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good or excellent and needs to be weighted and substantiated (The Netherlands)
- Specific requirements regarding handicapped students and equal opportunity (Germany)
- Formal requirements regarding ECTS:
  - A Master's qualification requires 300 ECTS credits including the preceding programmes for the first qualification for entry into a profession (Germany)
  - Second cycle studies take at least 90 ECTS (Poland)

---

<sup>9</sup>

Thomas Blanc de la Carrere and Mark Frederiks (2013), "Single Accreditation of Joint Programmes: Pilots Evaluation Report", ECA, The Hague.

- The number of ECTS credits attributed to the joint master's programme must be in the range from 90 to 120 credits (Portugal)
- The Master's dissertation should range from 15 to 30 ECTS credits (Germany), the curriculum should include an original dissertation or project, worth at least 35% of the total number of credit units (e.g. 42 credits in a programme of 120 credits) (Portugal) – as can easily be seen, these requirements are contradictory.
- A module is generally concluded with one examination and should account for at least five ECTS credits (Germany)

Specific requirements regarding the curriculum (Lithuania): a semester should consist of not more than 5 subjects (with a minimum of 3 ECTS per subject). This poses a problem if a programme wants to offer e.g. 6 subjects with 5 ECTS in a semester.

- Specific requirements regarding staff:

- The joint programme has its „guarantee“(coordinator) at the Czech partner institution. This refers to a professor or an associate professor who is a full-time employee at the institution and not more than half-time employed at some other institution and whose research and publishing activities are closely connected to the specific joint programme<sup>10</sup> (Czech Republic)
- The study programme is provided by the staff meeting legal requirements (Lithuania)
- At least 50 per cent of the academic FTEs allotted to the provision (*of the part(s) that are provided by the Norwegian institution(s)*) must be members of the institution's own academic staff. Of these, professors (full or associate) must be represented among those who teach the core elements of the provision<sup>11</sup> (Norway)
- The minimum core staff consists of at least six teachers which hold the academic title of professor or doktor habilitowany and six teachers which hold the academic degree of Ph.D (Poland)<sup>12</sup>
- The majority of the academic staff must hold a PhD degree (for a joint master's programme offered with a Portuguese university) or be a PhD holder or a specialist (for a joint master's programme offered with a Portuguese polytechnic) (Portugal)

---

<sup>10</sup>

Note: If the professor/associate professor is employed at different institutions and the total time is more than 70hrs/week, then s/he can be counted as a PhD holder, not a habilitated teacher.

<sup>11</sup>

For the different cycles specific demands apply: For first cycle provision, at least 20 per cent of the relevant discipline community/-ies must have competence as professors (full or associate); For second cycle provision, at least 10 per cent of the relevant discipline community/-ies must be full professors, and an additional 40 per cent associate professors; For third cycle provision, PhD or stipend programme for artistic development work, at least 50 per cent of the relevant discipline community/-ies must be full professors, and the rest associate professors.

<sup>12</sup>

The members of the minimum core staff have to be full-time employees of the higher education institution that offers the joint programme, and at least since the beginning of the semester. This institution has to be their primary employment. Each member of the minimum core staff has to teach at least 30 (for a professor or doktor habilitowany) or 60 hours of class during the academic year and within the programme.



- Specific requirements regarding the achievement of learning outcomes<sup>13</sup> (Flanders and the Netherlands).

Undoubtedly many more examples from other countries can be given. The list is not exhaustive and presents only examples which can easily be complemented by examples from other countries in the EHEA.

Specific national criteria are sometimes in contradiction with other national criteria, as can be clearly seen in the case of different national ECTS requirements. Moreover, such very detailed criteria – which sometimes only make sense within the national context – are very difficult to evaluate for international experts. Although a few countries allow that these specific criteria do not have to be applied if these are conflicting with criteria in other countries, this often requires a separate administrative procedure and causes uncertainty for the institutions and agencies involved. Some of the requirements significantly limit the flexibility that is deliberately granted by what has been agreed in the Bologna Process (e.g. QF-EHEA), and are thus difficult to justify, especially for joint programmes.

The problems are even more significant for those HEIs that have to obtain compulsory accreditation for joint programmes. Since accreditation decisions are in most of the cases statutory acts and, thus bound to national legal requirements, these decisions need to be taken in all countries where the institutions that provide the joint programme are based. Although a single accreditation procedure means that these decisions can be taken on the basis of one and the same experts' report, it still requires multiple national administrative procedures to apply for accreditation by the institutions involved. There is hence a risk that multiple accreditation decisions do not point in the same direction.

In some countries accreditation decisions are of a binary nature (positive or negative) whilst in other countries there are also other possibilities (e.g. conditional accreditation). This means that in one country the decision could be conditional, whilst in another country it could be either positive or negative, depending on how serious the shortcomings are perceived by that national agency.

In addition, different accreditation periods apply, e.g. in some countries the accreditation is valid for 6 years, in other countries accreditation periods may vary from 4 to 10 years. Variety in the duration of accreditation makes it more difficult to plan single accreditation processes.

---

<sup>13</sup> The assessment panel should select, randomly and differentiated by marks achieved, fifteen students from a list of graduates for the last two completed academic years. For each student selected, the panel examines the meaningful students' work, including the completed and signed assessment forms.

#### **4) Common principles for quality assurance of joint programmes**

In order to facilitate the external quality assurance of joint programmes and, thus, to dismantle one major obstacle as requested in the Bucharest Communiqué, the expert group proposes in the following sections a joint European approach for quality assurance of joint programmes. The approach is envisaged to enable joint programmes offered in the EHEA to be quality-assured in one single and integrated (internal or external, as required by relevant legislation) procedure, based on the common principles.

In general the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) apply to the quality assurance procedure of joint programmes as to all other types of programmes. Thus, the common principles are mainly based on the ESG and also on the QF-EHEA. In addition they take into account the distinctive feature of a joint programme and specify the 'standard' approach accordingly. The procedure and criteria are closely based on those developed and tested within the JOQAR project.

The common principles are applicable in the context of different kinds of external quality assurance processes of joint programmes, be it accreditation or any other approach depending on the national framework:

- If all cooperating higher education institutions are subject to external quality assurance at institutional level and have "self-accrediting" status, they may use the principles in setting up joint internal approval and monitoring processes for programmes (according to ESG 1.2)..
- If the cooperating higher education institutions are subject to external quality assurance at programme level (e.g. programme accreditation is mandatory), the principles might be used directly by quality assurance agencies for the design of the procedure.
- For joint programmes that are offered by higher education institutions from both within and outside the EHEA, the approach might either be used as a basis for agreeing a joint ad-hoc quality assurance arrangement together with institutions, agencies and other relevant authorities from the non-EHEA countries involved.

The European approach should be able to be applied by a quality assurance agency identified by the cooperating institutions jointly. In case the external quality assurance procedure results in a formal outcome, it should - dependent on the national legal framework - come in force or be recognised in all countries where the programme is offered. In line with the Bucharest Communiqué, EHEA governments should therefore commit to recognise formal outcomes of external quality assurance processes made by EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies as a result of a procedure in line with the following proposal and on the basis of the criteria proposed below.

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 XXX, 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.

## **A. Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA**

### **1. Eligibility**

#### **1.1 Recognition**

The institutions that offer a joint programme are legally should<sup>14</sup> be recognised as higher education institutions and their respective national legal frameworks should allow them to participate in this joint programme and, if applicable, award a joint degree.

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

#### **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 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**

The intended learning outcomes should align with the corresponding level in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA).

#### **2.2 Disciplinary field**

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

#### **2.3 Achievement**

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 XXX, or relevant common trainings frameworks established under the Directive, should be taken into account.

---

<sup>14</sup> The common principles use of the common English usage of “should” which has the connotation of prescription and compliance.

### **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 is clear.

#### **3.3 Workload**

A joint bachelor programme should amount to a total student workload of not less than 180 and not more than 240 ECTS-credits; a joint master programme should amount to a total of not less than 60 and not more than 120 ECTS-credits (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**

#### **4.1. Admission and selection**

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

4.2. 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 pedagogical concept should correspond with the intended learning outcomes. Learning and teaching approaches applied should take into account potential cultural differences 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 1.5]**

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 1.4]**

### **7.1 Staff**

The adequate implementation of the study programme should be ensured with regard to the staff (quantity, qualifications, professional and international experience).

### **7.2 Facilities**

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

## **8. Transparency and Documentation [ESG 1.7]**

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 part 1]**

The cooperating institutions should apply joint internal quality assurance processes in accordance with part one of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

### **B. Procedure for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA**

#### **1. Self-Evaluation Report [ESG 2.4, 3.7]**

The quality assurance procedure **should<sup>15</sup> 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 criteria for assessment of joint programmes.

In addition the report should contain relevant information about the respective national frameworks of the cooperating institutions and 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 2.4, 3.7]**

The agency should appoint a panel of at least four members that includes a mix of expertise in the relevant subject or discipline related field(s), including the labour market/world of work in the field, and in quality assurance in higher education. The panel should include members with knowledge of the HE systems from each country of the HEIs involved and the language(s) of instruction used. At least two nationalities from the consortium providing the programme should be represented in the panel. Furthermore, the panel should include at least one student.

---

<sup>15</sup> The common principles use of the common English usage of “should” which has the connotation of prescription and compliance.

The panel members combine their relevant subject or discipline related expertise with international expertise and experience in order to be able to take into account the distinctive features of a joint degree.

The agency should ensure the impartiality of the experts and observes fairness towards the applying higher education institution. To this end, the institution should have a right to object a panel member on well-grounded reasons, but not a right to veto.

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

### **3. Site Visit [ESG 2.4, 3.7]**

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 for Quality assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA.

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. Communication tools like video-conferencing etc. might be used as appropriate.

### **4. Review Report [ESG 2.5, 3.7]**

The review panel writes a report which contains relevant evidence, analysis and conclusions regarding the standards. The report should also contain 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 particular pay 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 2.3]**

If required, the Agency takes a decision on the basis of the review report and the recommendation, considering the comments by the higher education institutions as appropriate. In case the review results in an accreditation decision it declares or denies the accreditation (with or without conditions), based on the Standards for Quality assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA. The formal outcome and the accreditation decision may be supplemented 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 agency deviates from the review panel's conclusions.

## **6. Appeals [ESG 3.7]**

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

## **7. Reporting [ESG 2.5]**

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

## **8. Follow-up [ESG 2.6]**

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 2.7]**

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.<sup>16</sup> During the 6-year period, the agency should be informed about changes in the consortium offering the joint programme.

---

<sup>16</sup> A period of 6 years is widely applied in EHEA countries.

## **5) Proposal for the Yerevan Communiqué**

The expert group proposes the following text for the Yerevan Communiqué:

We renew our commitment to dismantle obstacles to international cooperation between higher education institutions and the development of joint programmes.

We adopt the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes as a means to facilitate the external quality assurance of joint programmes. We commit to recognise the outcomes and quality assurance decisions by EQAR-registered agencies on joint programmes that were made in line with the European Approach.