

# The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

Thematic Peer Group on QA – Peer-Learning Activity  
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# Outline



- **Why** did we develop a European Approach?
- **What** does it consist of and **how** it works?
- **Where** do we stand with its availability and use?

# Background



- Approaches and pilots for single reviews of joint programmes
  - Developed and tested by QA agencies and stakeholders (e.g. JOQAR)
  - Working, but complex
- Need to accommodate different national criteria
  - Not always quality-related, but often structural
  - Sometimes contradictory (e.g. # of ECTS Master thesis)
  - Make sense nationally, but difficult to understand for foreign peers
- Consequence: “fragmented” external QA a common solution
  - Different agencies looking at bits and pieces
  - “Jointness” not reflected

## Background (II)



- Policy: Bucharest Ministerial Communiqué (2012)
  - “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.”
  - “In particular, we will aim to **recognise quality assurance decisions** of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes.”

# European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes



- Developed 2012 – 2015, aiming to:
  - Ease accreditation of joint programmes
  - Enable single reviews, reflect the joint character also in QA
- **Concept:** one agreed, consistent European framework
  - Standards for quality assurance of joint programmes
  - Procedure for quality assurance of joint programmes
  - Based on ESG & QF-EHEA – applied to a specific case
  - No additional national criteria
- Adopted by EHEA ministers in Yerevan (May 2015)
- For details see: <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/>

# In a nutshell



Before	After
Multiple, fragmented reviews	Single review
Combining various national rules and criteria	Agreed Standards, based on ESG & QF-EHEA
Complex procedures, ad hoc design	Agreed Procedure

# Standards



## 1. Eligibility

Status, Joint design and delivery, Cooperation agreement

## 2. Learning outcomes

(i) Level [QF-EHEA, ESG 1.2]

(ii) Disciplinary field

(iii) Achievement [ESG 1.2]

(iv) Regulated professions [EU Directive 2005/36/EC]

## 3. Study programme [ESG 1.2]

Curriculum, Credits [ECTS], Workload

# Standards (cont'd)



4. Admission and Recognition [ESG 1.4]
5. Learning, Teaching and Assessment [ESG 1.3]
6. Student Support [ESG 1.6]
7. Resources [ESG 1.5 & 1.6]
  - (i) Staff
  - (ii) Facilities
8. Transparency and Documentation [ESG 1.8]
9. Quality Assurance [ESG 1.1 & part 1]

# Procedure – milestones



- 1) Agree within the partnership
- 2) Choose a suitable EQAR-registered agency
- 3) Plan process with that agency
- 4) Self-evaluation report
- 5) Site visit by review panel
- 6) Review report and decision by the agency
- 7) Recognition in all participating countries

## 5) Site visit by review panel



- Panel members
  - At least four members from at least two countries involved
  - Expertise in the relevant subject(s) or discipline(s)
  - Labour market/world of work
  - Expertise in quality assurance
  - Student
  - Knowledge of the HE systems and language(s) of instruction
- Site visit
  - Interviews with management, staff, students and relevant stakeholders
  - Normally restricted to one location

## 6) Public report and decision



- Consortium may comment on draft report
- Accreditation decision, if required
  - Positive (valid 6 years)
  - With conditions
  - Negative
- Right of appeal
- Publication by the agency
  - At least summary and decision in English

# 7) Application in different systems



European Approach, based on ESG & QF-EHEA, and Bucharest Communiqué  
("recognise QA decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes")

Cooperating HEIs need programme accreditation/eval.

Cooperating HEIs are "self-accrediting" for programmes, i.e. accredited/evaluated/audited at institutional level

Single accreditation/eval. of JP, based on agreed Standards & Procedure, by any EQAR-reg. agency

Joint internal QA review of the JP (in line with ESG), may use agreed Standards, external review takes account of HEIs' internal

Recognised to fulfil QA requirements in all countries involved

## 7) Recognition of decision



- **Ideal:** automatically recognised/in force  
(see Bucharest and Yerevan Communiqués)
  - Possible in some EHEA countries, but not all
  - Pay attention to notification requirements
- **But:** many legal frameworks in EHEA still require changes → pragmatic approach
  - Make arrangements for recognition before
  - Contact national ministries or QA agencies
  - Formal ratification decision might be an option
  - Existing agreements between agencies could be used

- **Scenarios:**

- 1) External QA at the **level of study programmes** for all programmes/institutions

- legal changes required (usually)

- **30 EHEA countries** (AD, AL, AM, AZ, BG, BY, CY, CZ, EE, ES, FR, GE, GR, HU, IS, IT, KZ, LI, LT, LV, MD, ME, MK, NL, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SK, TR, VA)

- 2) External QA **only at institutional level**

- in the autonomy of HE institutions (usually)

- **5 EHEA countries** (BA, CH, FI, UA, UK)

- 3) **Mixed**, requirements depend on institution/programme

- **13 EHEA countries** (AT, BE, CY, DE, DK, GE, HR, IE, LU, MT, NO, RU, SI)

# Availability of the European Approach

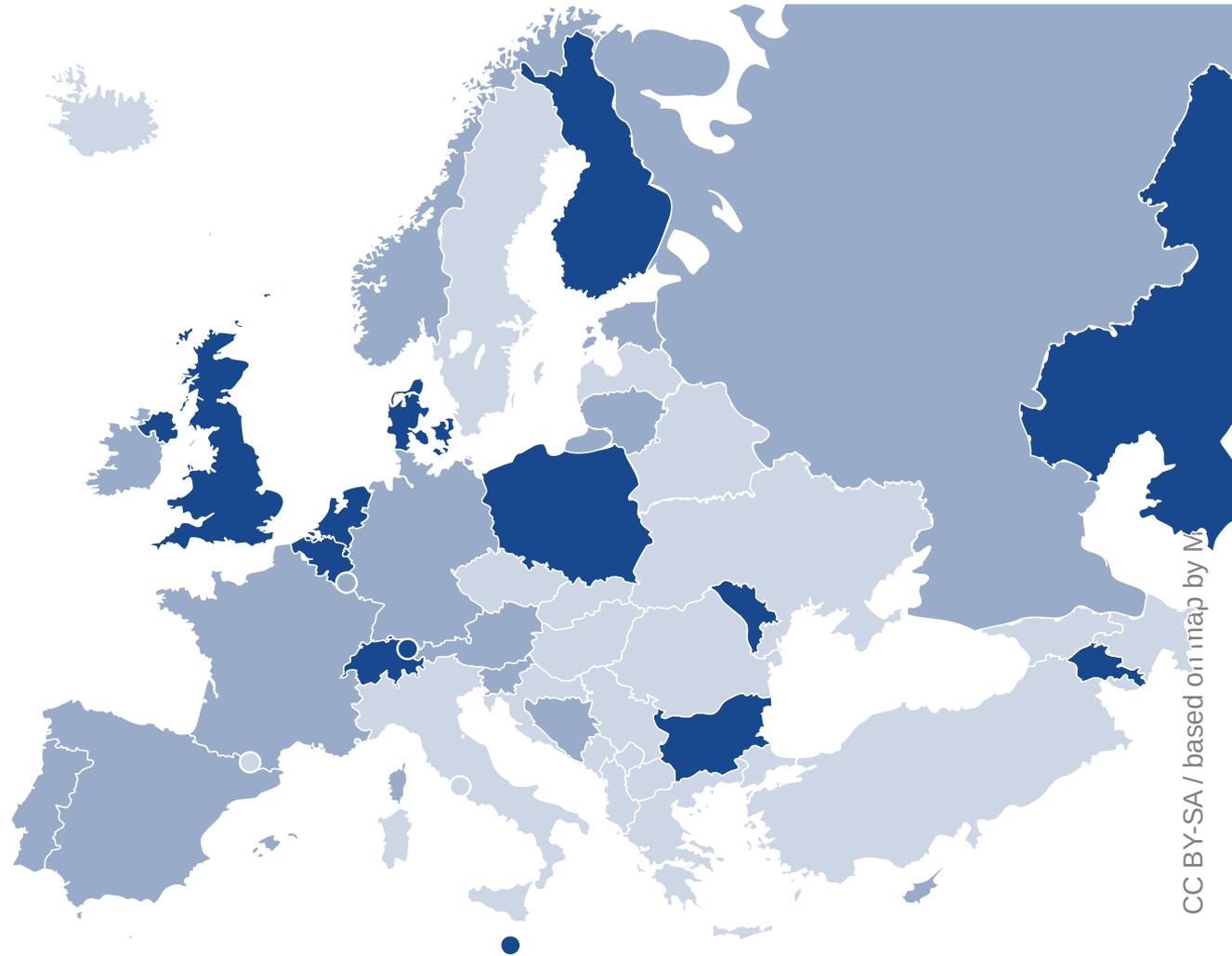


<https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/national-implementation/>

All higher education institutions are able to use the European Approach to satisfy national QA requirements

Some higher education institutions or only under specific conditions

Cannot be used to satisfy national QA requirements



# Examples



- International Teacher Education in Primary Schools (ITEps)  
Partners: **NL, DK, NO** – Agency: **NVAO** (NL/BE)
- EuroPS - Joint Master's Programme in Political Science - Integration and Governance (PoSIG)  
Partners: **AT, AL, BA, MK, SI, XK** – Agency: **AQ Austria** (AT)
- Joint Master **Maritime Operations**  
Partners: **DE, NO** – Agency: **ZEvA** (DE)
- Erasmus Mundus Master of Science in Public Sector Innovation and eGovernance (PIONEER)  
Partners: **BE, DE, EE** – Agency: **AQAS** (DE)
- European Master in Law & Economics (EMLE)  
Partners: **NL, AT, FR, PL, IT, ID ...** – Agency: **NVAO** (NL/BE)
- **Joint Master in Psychology**  
Partners: **NL, DE, ES** – Agency: **NVAO** (NL/BE)

## Key Benefits



- Jointness reflected in external QA
- Reduced workload
- Recognition
- Attractive for prospective partners

## Learn about your neighbour:



- Is European Approach available in the country?
  - Instead of programme accreditation/evaluation?
  - Or because country has only institutional external QA?
- If **yes**:
  - Has it been used, as far as you know?
  - Did you hear any feedback?
- If **no**:
  - What would need to be changed (law, secondary legislation, ...)?
  - Has there been any discussion?
  - What could be realistic plan/timeline?
  - Obstacles you expect?

Thank you for your attention!

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