

To the
Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG)

12 August 2014

Proposal: European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

Dear BFUG members,

We thank you for entrusting us with the responsibility of drafting the proposal for a European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. After thorough discussion and consultation with the BFUG Working Groups on Structural Reforms as well as Mobility and Internationalisation, the BFUG itself and the BFUG Board we hereby submit our final proposal, along with a short Background Report.

The political will to increase the number of joint programmes and joint degrees in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is evident through various Ministerial Communiqués. At the same time, the implementation of these initiatives is still hampered by serious problems, amongst others around issues of recognition and quality assurance (QA). In those countries where programmes have to be approved by accreditation bodies or ministries, different national legislation and formal criteria represent one major obstacle for the QA of joint programmes and, in particular, joint degrees. Such specific and sometimes contradictory national requirements thus inhibit cooperation in the development of joint programmes.

Over the past years, QA agencies and stakeholders have been working together to develop and test various approaches (see Background Report) that ease at least the external QA of joint programmes and, moreover, reflect their joint character. These have demonstrated that the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) together form a sound basis for QA of joint programmes.

Despite the commitment of the Bucharest Communiqué “to recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes”, the full recognition of formal outcomes resulting from a single external quality assurance procedures often remains a cumbersome and bureaucratic process. This often makes the conduct of several, fragmented processes the more practical solution and leads to a situation where different agencies all look only at the bits and pieces in “their” country.

We believe that this neglects the joint character of joint programmes and, therefore, propose a set of shared European standards and criteria, to be adopted by ministers. These should be based exclusively on the ESG and the QF-EHEA, representing the agreed European framework, and be used without additional national criteria.

We propose that the BFUG recommends that ministers include the following text in their Yerevan Communiqué:

Joint programmes are a hallmark of the European Higher Education Area and offer a genuine European learning experience to students. We will facilitate the development of joint programmes as a unique model of “European study” in the EHEA and therefore adopt the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

We renew our commitment to recognise the outcomes and quality assurance decisions by EQAR-registered agencies on joint programmes.

We also commit ourselves to dismantle further remaining obstacles to international cooperation between higher education institutions with regard to the development of joint programmes. We invite the BFUG to report back to us until 2018 on remaining obstacles and to propose additional measures to address those.

We are pleased to present the final proposal to the BFUG for its endorsement.

Kind regards,

Expert group for drafting a proposal for a “European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes”

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