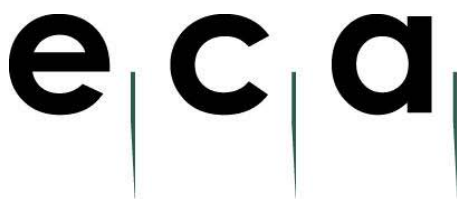




THE RECOGNITION
OF QUALIFICATIONS
FROM JOINT PROGRAMMES

THE PERSPECTIVE OF HIGHER
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS



european consortium for accreditation

The recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes

An analysis of current practices
by admission officers and
credential evaluators

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Project description and acknowledgements

The first objective of the TEAM² project is to develop a European methodology for quality assurance and accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes. Joint programmes are currently not able to apply for one single accreditation procedure that is able to satisfy or replace the different national procedures in the countries concerned. Each procedure should therefore take into account the totality of the joint programme. The inclusion of the learning outcomes aimed for by the joint programme irrespective of the individual study pathways should facilitate recognition of the outcomes of these accreditation procedures. By running pilot procedures and by publishing a methodological report, the project aims to provide the aforementioned European methodology with a view to the cross-border recognition of accreditation decisions regarding joint programmes.

The second objective of the project is to explore the cross-border recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes. Recognition procedures regarding qualifications awarded by joint programmes will be facilitated with the provision of transparent information on the quality and learning outcomes of these programmes. Quality assurance and accreditation agencies should provide this information to the ENIC-NARIC centres. By linking recognition to learning outcomes, through the sharing of good practices, by organising a workshop with ENIC-NARICs and a dissemination conference with accreditation organisations and institutions, the project should enable the facilitation of the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes.

This survey report is part of the work towards the second objective: to explore the cross-border recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes.

The third objective is the development of Qrossroads, a shared publication tool of ECA members. Qrossroads presents information regarding quality assured and accredited higher education in Europe. The information on Qrossroads is provided by quality assurance and accreditation agencies and specifically concerns qualifications from quality assured and accredited programmes and institutions. Qrossroads brings together information from the different databases of the quality assurance and accreditation agencies. Each of these agencies is responsible for the administration of their own database.

The main aim of Qrossroads is to present the qualifications awarded by programmes and institutions that were quality assured and accredited. These qualifications are presented in the perspective of the higher education system of which it is part together with information on the relevant accreditation organisation and recognition authorities.

Qrossroads will be developed to include all relevant institutional and programme information including the joint programme's learning outcomes from at least thirteen countries.

This part of the project can of course not be run without a group of enthusiastic partners. On behalf of the TEAM² Steering Group, ECA would like to thank the members of the Focus Group for their dedicated commitment and thoughtful contribution. The Focus Group consisted of the following members: Hanna Reczulska (ENIC-NARIC Poland), Carita Blomqvist (ENIC-NARIC Finland), Elizabeth Zamorano (CIEP, ENIC-NARIC France), Erwin Malfroy (ENIC-NARIC Flanders), Gunnar Vaht (ENIC-NARIC Estonia), Axel Aerden (NVAO, Qrossroads Supervisor) and, last but not least, Mark Frederiks (ECA coordinator and TEAM² project coordinator). The group would especially like to thank Herman De Leeuw, chair of the European Association for International Education's Board for Admission officers and Credential Evaluators.

This report would not be as extensive as it is without the input of such a great number of admission officers and credential evaluators – who gave their precious time to share their experience with qualifications awarded by joint programmes with us.

1

Introduction

Since the beginning of the Bologna Process, the number of joint programmes has increased notably and it seems that this trend will continue since their further development is regularly encouraged by the European ministers responsible for higher education. The Bologna Process Stocktaking report of 2009 points out that there could already be around 2500 joint programmes running in the European Higher Education Area: *“In a quarter of the countries, more than 50% of all higher education institutions are involved in [international] joint degree cooperation.”*³

But the report continues to state that the involvement of higher education institution varies greatly:

- In half of the countries, less than one quarter of the institutions would be involved in joint degrees;
- In one quarter of the countries, more than half of all institutions would be involved in joint degree cooperation;
- In one fifth of the countries, there are no joint degrees at all;
- In two countries, joint programmes do not even exist yet.

And what do we know about the current state of affairs when institutions receive applications from graduates of these types of programmes and need to ‘recognise’ qualifications awarded by joint programmes? In order to get this information a survey was carried out. This survey explored issues regarding the existing procedures and criteria used, the state of the institutional and national regulations and the role of accreditation and quality assurance when assessing these qualifications.

This report presents that information from the point of view of responding institutions. It shows us how they deal with such qualifications, the problems they encounter and the solutions they put forward.

3

Methodology

This report is the result of a survey among admission officers and credential evaluators of higher education institutions. These admission officers and credential evaluators are responsible for recognising or accepting foreign qualifications for the purpose of admission to further studies. And although every European institution deals with incoming students of which degrees need to be assessed, officers and credential evaluators don't have a dedicated platform at the European level. The European Association for International Education (EAIE) has a specialised group for these people called ACE. This group comes closest to a current network but is still limited because the EAIE is a fee-paying membership organisation on an individual basis.

The survey was drawn up by a small focus group of representatives of ENIC-NARIC centres. (See '*Project description and acknowledgements*' for the composition of the group.) This group used its experience with a similar survey among ENIC-NARICs to identify key issues related to the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes. They prioritised issues and broke these down in questions. Respondents were presented with closed questions (tick boxes) and where appropriate they were given the possibility to clarify their answers. The intention of this approach was not only to augment the comparability of the results but also to increase the response rate.

EAIE's ACE membership currently comprises 180 primary affiliations. These admissions officers and credential evaluators were approached by the EAIE to fill in the questionnaire. Additionally, some ENIC-NARICs of the participating partners in the Focus Group send the invitation to their network of credential evaluators. Over a period of six weeks the survey was filled out by 72 respondents of which 66 had primary ACE affiliations. The respondents were from the following 18 countries: Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, Turkey, United Kingdom.

The material gathered by the online survey was further discussed in the focus group and this under guidance of Herman De Leeuw (EAIE, chair ACE Board). Due to the used and directed sampling, the report doesn't claim to be representative. This report should be regarded as one indicator of current recognition issues regarding qualifications awarded by joint programmes.

Here, it is also important to say something about the terminology used. When we presented the questions to the respondents we indicated which definitions we applied to terms like *joint programme* and *qualification*. You can read more about the terminology in the annex to the report of the survey among ENIC-NARICs or on ECA's online glossary on www.grossroads.eu/glossary.



Survey results

As mentioned above, twenty five ENIC-NARICs have answered the survey. Since not all of the respondents have answered all the questions we have included the total respondents per answer.

1. General information

The survey was filled in by 72 respondents of which 66 had primary ACE affiliations. The respondents were from the following 18 countries: Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, Turkey, United Kingdom.

39% of the respondents already received qualifications awarded by joint programmes for assessment. 61% of the respondents reported that they never received these types of qualifications for assessment. 55% of the institutions assess these qualifications themselves while 45% send these qualifications to another competent body.

There is a wide variety in the type of received qualifications awarded by joint programmes. 75% of the respondents that actually receive qualifications awarded by joint programmes report that none of these qualifications are joint qualifications. 14% of the respondents indicate that less than 50% are joint qualifications. 11% of the respondents even reported that all of these qualifications were joint qualifications.

The qualifications received were in the majority of the respondents (55%) at Master's level. 45% of the respondents report the reception of Bachelor's level qualifications.

The respondents were presented with three cases. They were asked how they would deal with a qualification from a joint programme in each of the following cases.

Case: When the joint programme was at least partly provided by a national higher education institution(s)

18% of the institutions don't regard qualifications awarded by a joint programme that was at least partly provided by a national higher education institution as a national qualification or as any foreign qualification. 61% of ENIC-NARICs consider these qualification a national one while 21% consider them to be a foreign qualification.

Case: When a joint programme was provided by several foreign institutions without involvement of a national higher education institution

Almost all institutions (85%) indicated that they would treat qualifications awarded by joint programmes provided by only foreign institutions as any foreign qualification. The other institutions, who treat these qualifications differently, clarified that treatment depends on the status of the awarding foreign institutions. This seems to be in line with the normal treatment of foreign qualifications.

Case: When a joint programme was provided by a consortium when one of your national institutions was a member of the consortium but did not provide any part of the qualification, i.e. the applicant had studied at other institutions.

A majority of the responding institutions (73%) consider the involvement of a national higher education institution but without offering a part of the curriculum not sufficient to consider the qualification from a joint programme as a national qualification. 11% treat these qualifications as a national qualification. 16% of the institutions don't treat the qualifications awarded by joint programmes as either a national qualification or as any foreign qualifications. These institutions indicated that their treatment depends on the status of the programme or qualification in the national system. Some pointed out that to be treated as a national qualification the programme needs to be recognised or accredited nationally. These clarifications are very similar to the clarifications received from ENIC-NARICs when they answered a comparable survey.

2. Legislation

The institutions were asked if their higher education system had legal provisions facilitating the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes, such as joint qualifications.

67% of responding institutions indicate that there are no legal provisions facilitating the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes, such as joint qualifications. 33% of the institutions did report such legislation.

Some of the institutions clarified their response and pointed out that they had their own institution framework (admission policy). Although that can't be considered a legal framework it would give them the opportunity to "recognise" qualifications awarded by joint programmes. Recognition, it was pointed out by several respondents, is the responsibility of some other (national) authority. Respondents said that they interpreted "recognition" as the acceptance of other qualifications for admission to their institutions' programmes.

The institutions that reported the absence of legislation facilitating the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes were asked what kind of recognition is then possible regarding these qualifications.

Of the institutions that indicated the absence of facilitating legislation, 50% of the institutions indicated that full acceptance for access or full recognition of qualifications

awarded by joint programmes would be possible. 17% of the institutions reported however that this meant that they could not recognise these type of qualifications at all and thus graduate with these qualifications would not be able to study at their institutions.

The responding institutions were then asked if there were institution-specific guidelines/ruling or codes of practice for the recognition of qualifications awarded by a joint programme.

73% of the institutions answered that they didn't have this, while 27% indicated that they had. Some of these institutions clarified that they had guidelines for setting up and running joint programmes and that these guidelines were also applied when reviewing a qualification awarded by a joint programme.

3. Assessment criteria and procedures

In order to analyse the assessment criteria and the procedures applied by the ENIC NARICs, they were asked if they had a special procedure for the evaluation of qualifications awarded by joint programmes, such as joint qualifications. Only 13% of the institutions reported having special procedures, while 87% of the institutions apply their regular procedure to evaluate qualifications awarded by joint programmes.

One of the institutions that applies a special procedure clarified that they needed to map out the educational pathways, do a thorough analysis of the course contents and attributed ECTS, learning outcomes and the memorandum of understanding between the cooperation institutions. But, according to the respondent, all this is done within the spirit of full academic recognition.

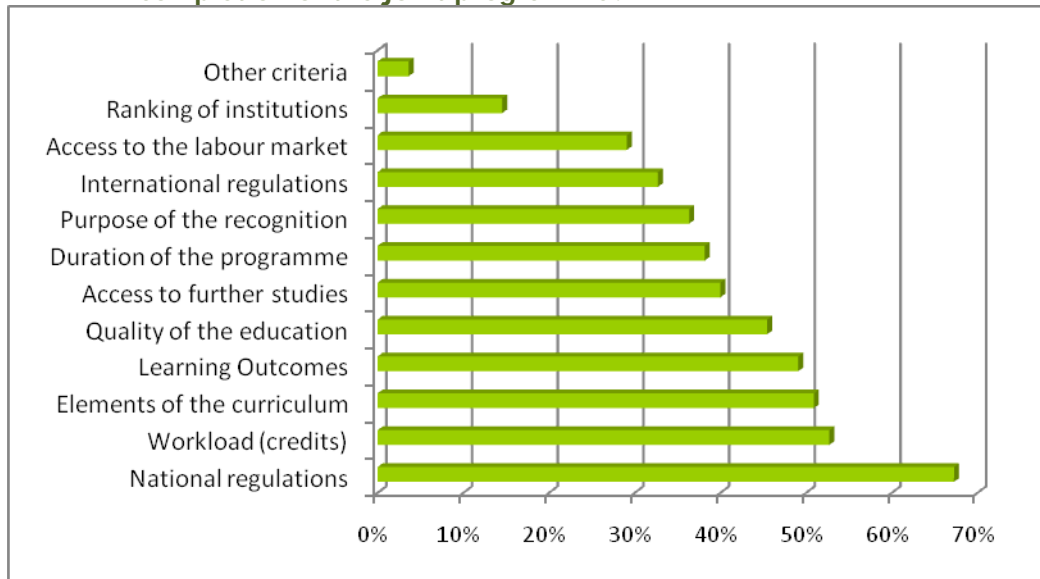
The institutions were asked which elements they checked when establishing the status of a qualification awarded after the completion of a joint programme. And here, the responses differ widely with the responses gathered from ENIC-NARICs.

60% of the institutions check the status of all the awarding higher education institutions while all ENIC-NARICs do this. 79% of the institutions check the status of the joint programme in the higher education systems where it is offered. Something 92% of the ENIC-NARICs do. 34% of the institutions check whether the arrangements through which the joint programme was established complies with the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good practice in transnational education. One of the institutions included in their clarification that it was informative to be told that UNESCO/Council of Europe has a Code of Good Practice in transnational education.

Criteria taken into account when assessing individual qualifications concerned

The responding institutions were presented with a list of criteria that could be assessed. They were asked to point out which of these they take into account when assessing the individual qualification awarded by a joint programme.

Figure 1. Which of the below listed criteria do you take into account when assessing the individual qualification awarded after the completion of the joint programme?



While all ENIC-NARICs take into account national regulations, a mere 67% of the institutions report that they do this when assessing the individual qualification awarded after the completion of the joint programme. More institutions take into account workload (credits) and elements of the curriculum than learning outcomes. Interestingly, the duration of the programme only figures seventh on the list of criteria taken into account when assessing a qualification awarded by a joint programme. While none of the ENIC-NARICs take into account the ranking of institutions, 15% of the institutions report that they themselves include this as a criterion.

A small number of institutions clarified that there are of course also other criteria to take into account. The criteria included were the status of the institutions providing the programme and legal provisions (e.g. professional title).

4. Quality assurance and institutional recognition

In order to analyse trends on quality assurance and accreditation followed by institutions, they were asked if quality assurance or accreditation of the joint programme or institutions involved influences the outcome of the assessment of the awarded qualification in question.

Here, 79% of responding institutions confirm that quality assurance or accreditation influences the outcome of their assessment of the awarded qualifications. Still 21% of institutions report that this does not influence their assessment. There were many clarifications and many of these indicated that institutions are not fully aware of the current developments in the frame of quality assurance and accreditation. One of the institutions added that quality assurance facilitates the process of recognition and influences their decisions regarding scholarships.

Institutions have clear ideas of what quality assurance and accreditation actually should mean for them. As one of the institutions clarified: *“The process of assesment will be quicker and the evaluation will more likely to be positive, since the quality of the programme is already clearly established. This will certainly be the case when we are evolving towards a European Higher Education Area with solid Qualification Frameworks, comprising formal & automatic mutual recognition of qualifications.”*

But quality assurance and accreditation of the joint programme or the institutions involved doesn't just *influence* the assessments of the awarded qualifications. Surprisingly, more institutions (89%) state that joint programmes and/or the institutions involved should actually be quality assured or accredited.

The question that comes out of this is, of course, who should quality assure or accredit the joint programme or the institutions awarding the qualification(s)? It seems that 61% of the institutions currently prefer that this is taken care of by agencies in all the participating countries while 25% of respondents indicate that it would be sufficient if this is taken care of by one of the quality assurance or accreditation agencies of any of the participating countries. One institution explained: *“[The joint programme or the institutions awarding the qualification(s) should be quality assured or accredited] by the quality assurance or accreditation agencies of all the participating countries, in absence of clear regulations concerning the joint quality assurance on an international level.”*

5. Final comments and conclusion

The institutions were invited to illustrate the main problems they associate with the assessment of qualifications awarded by joint programmes in general. Thirty seven institutions responded and their answers were very diverse. The first group of problems covers the differences between higher education and qualification systems. One institution stated: *“The assessment is done only according to national regulations (as any national programme). There are not many facilities to recognize joint programmes if the student has not completed his/her studies in our system, even when it is clear for us that [the qualification] should be recognised from an academic point of view.”*

The second group of problems refer to the (lack of) information regarding recognition or accreditation of the joint programme (or the awarded qualification) in the countries concerned. One of the institutions clarified: *“European joint programmes are not a problem but we need to deal with Asian, Euro-Asian and Australian-Asian joint degrees that do not seem to be regulated or even listed anywhere.”* Another one added: *“The multiplicity of qualifications (joint, multiple...) and their official recognition by national bodies or governments, the recognition of the accreditation, or the international homologation or certification, specifically in 'Third Countries'.”*

Finally, all institutions were asked if they had any additional comments about the survey or the issue of the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes. The following two comments were received regarding the issue of recognition:

"A fully endorsed consortium of European accreditation organisations recognising one another's accreditation decisions on programmes, would be very welcome."

"Joint degrees should be as easy to organize and judge as double degrees. There should be a good accreditation body, for the whole of Europe, so that the quality of joint degrees is once and for all clear and transparent to everyone."

"There should be particular uniform directive lines elaborated for evaluating such joint qualifications, by ministries of high education of all countries taking part in the joint programme."

"Create an international agency to accredit these programmes."

Annex: Terminology

As mentioned in the chapter on methodology, we presented the respondents with a set of concepts and their definitions without further discussing the terminology used. Some of this terminology will be further explored below.

QUALIFICATION

Higher education in Europe predominantly uses “degree” when they refer to the award issued by a higher education programme. ENIC-NARICs on the other hand commonly refer to qualifications. There seems to be only a slight difference between these two terms. In the Lisbon Recognition Convention, a qualification is defined as *“any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme”*⁴. From this definition, we can see that the term qualification is a broader concept than degree. In general, diploma is not used for higher education and certificate is not used for regular higher education programmes.

The definition of qualification has been redefined in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area as: *“Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting that particular learning outcomes have been achieved, normally following the successful completion of a recognised higher education programme of study”*⁵. This definition follows the development in the European Higher Education Area and more particularly those concerning qualification frameworks and learning outcomes. More importantly, the definition explicitly refers to recognised higher education.

JOINT PROGRAMME

The term joint programme and joint degree are regularly mixed up in European higher education. Joint programme and joint degree are however not synonyms. A programme refers to the offered education while a degree refers to the award itself attesting successful completion of a programme. A joint programme can lead to a joint degree but not necessarily. As it happens, a degree from a joint programme can be either single, joint, multiple or double degrees.

The term joint programme is widely used but rarely defined. EUA’s Guidelines for quality enhancement in European joint master programmes refers to joint programmes as *“programmes which are developed and implemented jointly by several institutions in different countries”*⁶. This definition is of course correct. It however also makes offering joint programmes a closed shop since it seems to exclude the possibility that other institutions join the consortium after the development phase. As reported in ENQA’s TEEP II project⁷ and seen in the second phase of Erasmus Mundus, late joiners are a reality.

The focus therefore needs to be more on the joint offering and not on the development and implementation. The European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education proposed a definition with this focus in their Principles for accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes:

“A joint programme is a programme offered jointly by different higher education institutions irrespective of the degree (joint, multiple and double) awarded”⁸

This definition is quite straightforward and seems to suit the reality of the European Higher Education Area.

JOINT QUALIFICATION (AKA. JOINT DEGREE)

In the Analytical Quality Glossary⁹ a joint degree is defined as *“a degree awarded by more than one higher education institution”*.

From this definition we could conclude that there is no link with a specific type of programme. The programme in question then doesn't have to be offered jointly by the degree awarding institutions. Do overseas programmes validated by British universities offer joint degrees? And what makes such a degree a joint degree? Can it be issued on different documents? The fact that the definition doesn't make reference to joint programmes seems to be problematic. In fact, the term joint programme is not included in the Analytical Quality Glossary.

The Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees¹⁰ gives the following definition of the term joint degree:

“A joint degree should, for the purposes of this Recommendation, be understood as referring to a higher education qualification issued jointly by at least two or more higher education institutions or jointly by one or more higher education institutions and other awarding bodies, on the basis of a study programme developed and/or provided jointly by the higher education institutions, possibly also in cooperation with other institutions.

A joint degree may be issued as

- a) a joint diploma in addition to one or more national diplomas;*
- b) a joint diploma issued by the institutions offering the study programme in question without being accompanied by any national diploma;*
- c) one or more national diplomas issued officially as the only attestation of the joint qualification in question.*

The Methodological Report¹¹ of ENQA's TEEP II project assessed the validity of this definition and reported that the definitions do not take into account the legality of the diploma or the document(s) issued. The report concluded that *“the definitions in the Recommendation are therefore not as widely accepted as they could have been”*.

The Methodological Report of the TEEP II project therefore proposed its own definition of a joint degree: *“a joint diploma issued by the institutions offering a joint programme in*

place of all the national diplomas, attesting the successful completion of this joint programme”.

This definition brings us closer to the current realities of joint qualifications or joint degrees across Europe. We can see the following characteristics:

- A joint degree is awarded after successful completion of a joint programme;
- The joint degree is awarded jointly by the higher education institutions that offer the programme;
- The institutions involved do not award any other degree;
- The joint degree is the recognised and only attestation of the qualification.

We can therefore conclude that a joint degree is a recognised degree awarded by the higher education institutions that offer the joint programme, attesting the successful completion of this joint programme. It is a single document signed by the competent authorities (rectors, vice-chancellors, ...) of the institutions involved in the joint programme replacing the separate (institutional/national) degrees.