

# How to assess and accredit joint programmes in Europe



**e | c | a**

european consortium for accreditation



**ISBN 978-94-90815-03-5**

Copyright © 2010 by the **European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education**

*Kaja Braathen , Mark Frederiks & Nick Harris*

*All rights reserved. This information may be freely used and copied for non-commercial purposes, provided that the source is acknowledged (©European Consortium for Accreditation).*



Education and Culture DG

**Lifelong Learning Programme**

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



# How to assess and accredit joint programmes in Europe

Methodologies tested and  
proposed by the TEAM<sup>2</sup> project



# Table of content

<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>9</b>
1.1. Project description .....	9
1.2. Why the need for single accreditation procedures of joint programmes? .....	10
1.3. Parties involved in TEAM <sup>2</sup> .....	11
<b>2. Methodologies tested in the pilot procedures</b> .....	<b>13</b>
2.1. Introduction to the pilot procedures .....	13
2.2. An overview of the 5 pilot procedures .....	15
2.3. Research Master Geosciences of Basins and Lithosphere (BASINS) .....	16
2.4. Joint European Master in Comparative Local Development (CoDe) .....	19
2.5. Erasmus Mundus Master Journalism and Media within Globalisation (EMMA) .....	22
2.6. European Teacher Education for Primary Schools (ETEPS) .....	24
2.7. Joint European Master in International Humanitarian Action (NOHA) .....	27
<b>3. Analysis of the pilot procedures</b> .....	<b>31</b>
3.1. Overview .....	31
3.2. Feedback from agencies, experts and programmes .....	31
3.3. Main ‘messages’ from the pilots and their participants .....	36
<b>4. Summary from the feedback</b> .....	<b>39</b>
4.1. Summary from the pilots .....	39
4.2. Time for a paradigm shift? A possible ‘core +’ model for accreditation of joint programmes .....	40

<b>5. Conclusions</b> .....	<b>43</b>
5.1. Conclusions from the current ‘state of play’.....	43
5.2. Towards a single methodology-‘evolution’ or a ‘paradigm shift’? .....	43
<b>6. The way forward</b> .....	<b>47</b>
6.1. Concluding summary .....	47
6.2. A way forward.....	47
<b>Annex 1: Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>51</b>
<b>Annex 2: Feedback questionnaires</b> .....	<b>53</b>
<b>Annex 3: Terminology</b> .....	<b>57</b>

# Foreword

In 2006 the ENQA<sup>1</sup> project Transnational European Evaluation Project II (TEEP II) was successfully completed. During the timeframe of this project the project group was looking into cross-border external quality assurance methods. The result was, among other things, that a methodology for evaluating transnational programmes was profitably developed and tested. Nonetheless, in the final report of the TEEP II project it was concluded that even if more insight into cross-border external quality assurance methods was gained it is important to continue refining the work within this area. Thus, the need for further focus on quality assurance of joint programmes was stressed. The European Consortium for Accreditation of higher education (ECA) decided to follow up on the call from ENQA shortly after this. With the support of the European Commission the project Transparent European Accreditation decisions & Mutual recognition agreements part 2 (TEAM<sup>2</sup>) started in 2008.



**Rolf Heusser**  
ECA chairperson

The main aims of the TEAM<sup>2</sup> project were thus to develop a European methodology for single accreditation procedures of joint programmes, explore the cross-border recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes and to extend Qrossroads, an information tool on quality assured higher education programmes and institutions.

The present report is portraying the results of the work towards a European methodology for single accreditation procedures of joint programmes. During autumn 2009 and spring 2010 five pilot accreditation procedures of joint programmes were carried out. The results of the pilots have consequently been analysed and were presented and discussed at the TEAM<sup>2</sup> dissemination conference in Graz on 10 and 11 June 2010. The outcomes of these efforts are reflected in this report.

Pioneering within any area requires substantial efforts. So this is also true for the five pilot single accreditation procedures. On behalf of ECA I would like to take the opportunity here to thank everyone who has contributed to the pilot procedures, this report and the conference in Graz.

Firstly we would like to thank all the coordinators of the joint programmes participating in the pilot procedures. Their cooperation has been very much appreciated. We could not have done this without the abilities of the joint programmes to adapt to emerging situations and their willingness to find ad hoc solutions. Secondly we would like to thank the experts in the expert panels. They did a great job in adjusting to the various guidelines.

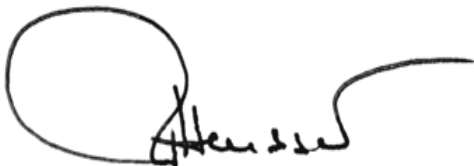
---

<sup>1</sup> A list of abbreviations can be found in annex 1.

We also need to thank the coordinators from all the quality assurance agencies involved in the procedures; Christina Rozsnyai (HAC), Maria Becerro (ANECA), Florian Fischer (ZEvA) and Fred Mulder (NVAO). This exercise has been time consuming, and we are most grateful for all the work they have done. We are also grateful for all the contributions from the other agencies involved in the procedures. A thank you also goes to Kaja Braathen and Mark Frederiks (TEAM<sup>2</sup> project coordinator) at NVAO who have monitored the procedures and finalised the report. Last, but not least, a special expression of gratitude goes to Stephanie Zwiessler, Elisabeth Fiorioli and their colleagues at ÖAR who have organised the conference in Graz, and to Nick Harris who has contributed greatly to the analyses and conclusions shown in this report.

A remark must also be made on the terminology used in this report. We are aware of the fact that various definitions are used when referring to joint programmes and joint degrees. Please see *Annex 3: Terminology* at the end of this report to see the definitions we have used as a background.

Finally, the work towards advancing external quality assurance methods of joint programmes is to be continued. We are glad that this ECA project with the financial support of the European Commission has enabled us to reveal another piece of the puzzle. It is with pleasure that I can hereby present the report “How to assess and accredit joint programmes in Europe.”

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rolf Heusser', with a large circular flourish at the beginning and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Rolf Heusser  
ECA Chairperson

# Executive summary

In order to explore the European methodology for single accreditation procedures of joint programmes ECA member agencies coordinated five experimental single accreditation procedures of joint programmes during autumn 2009 and spring 2010. In total 24 higher education institutions<sup>2</sup> (HEIs) from 12 different European countries and 9 quality assurance agencies were involved in the procedures. The procedures have functioned as empirical input material for discussions on how to carry out single accreditation procedures of joint programmes. After the completion of each of the procedures feedback from the experts, the coordinators of the joint programmes and the representatives from the quality assurance agencies was gathered and analysed. This resulted in a proposal for a way forward regarding accreditation of joint programmes. The results were then presented and discussed at the TEAM II dissemination conference on 10 and 11 June 2010 in Graz. This report is the output of the analysis and of the discussions that took place in Graz.

One of the main conclusions derived from the pilot procedures is that in principle single accreditation procedures can work, but that there still are hurdles to overcome in order for them to be truly functional. Even if all the quality assurance (QA) agencies involved in the procedures comply with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), the national legislations regulating the work of the QA agencies do not always allow for the procedures to focus on all the same aspects. This difference became especially apparent regarding the focus on input measures versus outcome measures. Joint programmes and joint degrees are indeed quite “new inventions” in the national higher education systems and are rather nationally regulated. Hence, for a single accreditation procedure to work adequately would it be more useful to focus on building up sufficient trust between the agencies in order for them to be able to acknowledge each other’s procedures, than creating a strict framework for accreditation of these programmes? And if that is the case - how could this practically be done? These and similar questions will be raised and discussed in chapters 5 and 6 of this report.

Intrinsically all the pilots would follow the same outline (see chapter 2), but as the participating joint programmes were selected it soon became clear that the exact outline of the procedures would vary according to which institutions were offering the joint programmes. There is reason to believe that this situation gives an insight into the diversity QA agencies normally are faced with when looking into accreditation of joint programmes.

---

<sup>2</sup> This only refers to the full partners of the participating joint programmes.

Each of the pilots therefore took one of the following approaches:

- the procedure, criteria and experts were mainly from one country (BASINS)
- the procedure and criteria were from one country but applied by experts from elsewhere (ETEPS)
- a new procedure was developed with ('traditional') criteria based on a minimum set plus the extras required for another country (CODE, EMMA)
- the procedure was based on one country's practice, but with experts nominated by all and with a new set of criteria specifically developed for joint programmes (NOHA)

This multiplicity in approaches allowed for the common elements of accreditation procedures such as self evaluation reports (SER), expert panels, site visits, final reports and decisions to be illuminated and evaluated from a variety of angles. From the feedback on the procedures (chapter 3) it became clear what worked well and what did not work so well, which proved to be valuable when aiming at proposing a model for single accreditation procedures of joint programmes. The details of these results will be thoroughly presented and discussed in chapters 3, 4 and 5, but a general conclusion is that the pilots demonstrated that diversity of requirements may be met in different ways. The challenge is to identify which requirements are essential – for the specific partners involved in a particular joint programme, and are not duplicating or replicating evidence collection unnecessarily.

The feedback showed that the participants were generally content with the work of the joint expert panels, how the site visits were carried out and the outline of the final reports. Especially jointly composed expert panels were viewed as a valuable asset when assessing a joint programme. Nonetheless, the feedback also showed that there are some areas which require special attention when carrying out single accreditation procedures of joint programmes. Firstly, when more than one set of criteria was used it was reported to be challenging to agree on the level of details and information required in the assessment. Variations in national regulations result in a situation where QA agencies to some extent have to focus on different aspects of a study programme. This influences the interpretations of criteria and the focus of the assessment. Secondly, in almost all the pilots comments were made regarding the self evaluation reports. In most cases these reports were too descriptive, and with a misbalance regarding the information presented about each of the participating institutions and on the various criteria. This shows how important it is to give clear instructions on how to write a self assessment report. Another potentially challenging area is the composition of the expert panel. The QA agencies have different practices regarding the composition of the expert panels. One example is that in some countries it is required to include an expert from the professional field in the panel, while in others it is not. When carrying out single accreditation procedures it is thus very important to monitor the composition of the expert panel closely. Finally, there were no unified ways in which the accreditation decisions could be taken. The decision making is affected by national regulations and needs to be taken into account when planning single accreditation procedures. The importance of making sure that the final report fulfills the

requirements of all agencies involved in the procedure was emphasised as this will facilitate the decision making process.

So, what could be a way forward regarding single accreditation procedures of joint programmes? The pilots have shown that QA agencies can work together on such procedures. They have also shown that the agencies in general agree on the core of what should be focussed on when assessing joint programmes. A possible future solution regarding single accreditation procedures of joint programmes could thus be to identify the essential core modules which are agreed upon by all the agencies involved, and add to this the criteria which are regarded as necessary to assess in order to accredit the programme in all the countries concerned. This can be described as a modular approach where the strength lies in the flexibility of the procedures. By limiting the standardisation of the procedure there will be enough freedom to encourage diversity and to appreciate the peculiarities of the HEIs and the QA agencies. At the same time such an approach will make it easier for the parties involved to show how national requirements are met, and to be able to appreciate cultural differences instead of seeing them as hinders. The final question thus becomes; has the time come for a shift in paradigm regarding accreditation of joint programmes?





# Introduction

## 1.1. Project description

The first objective of the TEAM<sup>2</sup> project was to develop a European methodology for quality assurance and accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes. Joint programmes should be able to apply for one single accreditation procedure that satisfies or replaces the different national procedures in the countries concerned. Each procedure should take into account the totality of the joint programme. The assessment should specifically include the learning outcomes aimed for by the joint programme irrespective of the individual study pathways. By running pilot procedures and by publishing this methodological report, the project aimed to provide the aforementioned European methodology.

The second objective of the project was to explore the cross-border recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes. Recognition procedures regarding qualifications awarded by joint programmes are facilitated with the provision of transparent information on the quality and learning outcomes of these programmes. QA agencies should provide this information (e.g. through Qrossroads) and institutions should include transparent information regarding joint programmes on their diplomas and diploma supplements. By holding a survey and sharing good practices among ENIC-NARICs concerning the awarding of qualifications from joint programmes, and by organising a dissemination conference with accreditation organisations, joint programmes and ENIC-NARICs, the project sought to facilitate the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes.

The third objective was the extension of Qrossroads, a shared publication tool of ECA members and some other QA agencies. Qrossroads presents information regarding quality assured and accredited higher education in Europe. The information on Qrossroads is provided by quality assurance agencies and specifically concerns qualifications from quality assured and accredited programmes and institutions. 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 has been developed to include all relevant institutional and programme details from at least 13 countries.

## 1.2. Why the need for single accreditation procedures of joint programmes?

Since the late 1990's there has been a substantial increase in the number of higher education programmes which are being offered jointly by consortia of HEIs in different European countries. This is a result of initiatives based on both extended cooperation between HEIs in Europe, and the implementation of the Bologna process. Thus, for the last 5-10 years there has been a political aim, on a European level, to facilitate the establishment of such programmes through e.g. the Erasmus Mundus programme. Joint programmes are thought to enhance mobility of students and staff, to facilitate mutual learning opportunities and to create programmes of excellence, which can demonstrate the high quality of European higher education.

However, even if there is a political will to support the development of such programmes there are still significant hurdles to overcome before these programmes can easily be set up, especially in the domains of recognition and quality assurance. It is evident that there still are a number of legal issues at national levels that need to be addressed and solved in order for all institutions to be able to offer joint programmes which lead to "true" joint degrees<sup>3</sup>, which in turn can be recognised easily by national recognition authorities. At the moment the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes in general, and from "true" joint degrees in particular, is regarded as troublesome for the national recognition authorities.

One of the conclusions in the ENQA project TEEP II concerned possible accreditation procedures of joint programmes. It was stated that it is important to develop methods for evaluation/accreditation of joint programmes that do not involve unnecessary duplication, but rather focus on building mutual understanding and trust. Hence, it was suggested that two QA agencies could cooperate on a single accreditation procedure for a joint programme, and for the accreditation decision to be recognised as valid after a mutual recognition agreement<sup>4</sup>. In turn this might facilitate the recognition of the qualifications awarded by joint programmes as it is likely that these agreements would encourage the building of the trust needed for the national recognition authorities to recognise the awarded degrees.

A smooth recognition of degrees awarded from joint programmes is important in order to meet the intentions put forward in the UNESCO/Council of Europe Recommendation on the recognition of joint degrees (2004:9), namely that:

*"(...) joint degrees should be recognized at least as favourably as other qualifications from the education system from which they originate. (...) in current practice, it often seems more difficult to obtain recognition of a joint degree than of a "pure" foreign national*

---

<sup>3</sup> See Annex: Terminology

<sup>4</sup> ENQA, Methodological Report of the Transnational European Evaluation Project II (2006)

*degree. This is unjustified in view of the overall policy goal of stimulating international and inter-institutional cooperation and academic mobility.”*

In March 2010 ECA organised a workshop for ENIC-NARICs on recognition of qualifications (degrees) awarded by joint programmes. One of the main conclusions of the workshop was that the HEIs are not aware of current recognition developments and/or get lost in the jungle of joint programmes and their degrees. Following from this a call was put forward to develop national and European platforms of admission officers and credential evaluators and to bring them up to date by routinely organising dissemination meetings. The ENIC-NARICs also concluded that there is a need for further elaboration of guidelines for institutions regarding the award of degrees and Diploma Supplements. ECA and the ENIC-NARICs will further cooperate on this issue in order to facilitate recognition of degrees awarded by joint programmes. During the workshop it also became clear that QA and accreditation of the joint programmes are of importance when recognising the awarded degrees. Thus, encouraging single accreditation procedures of joint programmes which focus on the totality of the programme is likely to aid the recognition of degrees awarded by the programmes, and in turn this will contribute to facilitation of some of the overarching aims of the Bologna process related to transparency and enhanced mobility within Europe.

Finally, single accreditation procedures of joint programmes are not only interesting from a generic point of view. Single accreditation procedures should be cost efficient and lessen the work load related to accreditation procedures for the joint programmes and the QA agencies. Such procedures will, when implemented, result in efficient accreditation procedures as duplication would be limited.

### **1.3. Parties involved in TEAM<sup>2</sup>**

TEAM<sup>2</sup> was carried out by the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA). The partners in the project were:

#### **Coordinating organisation**

- Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie (NVAO), the Netherlands and Flanders

#### **Participating applicant organisations**

- Magyar Felsőoktatási Akkreditációs Bizottság (HAC), Hungary
- Österreichischer Akkreditierungsrat (ÖAR), Austria
- Commission des Titres d'Ingenieur (CTI), France
- Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación (ANECA), Spain
- Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge im Bereich Gesundheit und Soziales (AHPGS), Germany
- Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut (EVA), Denmark

- Fachhochschulrat (FHR), Austria
- Państwowa Komisja Akredytacyjna (PKA), Poland
- Zentrale Evaluations- und Akkreditierungsagentur Hannover (ZEVA), Germany
- Polish ENIC/NARIC, Poland

#### **Associated applicant organisation**

- Organ für Akkreditierung und Qualitätssicherung der Schweizerischen Hochschulen (OAQ), Switzerland

#### **Participating organisations**

- German Accreditation Council (GAC), Germany
- Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA), Germany
- Agentur für Qualitätssicherung durch Akkreditierung von Studiengängen (AQAS), Germany
- Nasjonalt organ for kvalitet i utdanningen (NOKUT), Norway
- Council for Higher Education of the Republic Of Slovenia, Slovenia

#### **Stakeholders Group**

Representatives from the following organisations/networks

- European University Association (EUA)
- European Students' Union (ESU)
- Association of Higher Education Institutions (EURASHE)
- ENIC-NARIC Network (Recognition authorities)

#### **Focus Group**

Representatives from national recognition authorities/bodies (ENIC-NARICs).

# 2

## Methodologies tested in the pilot procedures

### 2.1. Introduction to the pilot procedures

Normally an accreditation procedure includes the following steps:

- self-evaluation or documentation is submitted by the unit(s) undergoing accreditation;
- an external assessment is carried out by independent experts;
- an accreditation decision is taken

These steps were the basis for the pilot procedures. In the outline of the TEAM<sup>2</sup> project it was also suggested that the five pilot procedures should be carried out according to the following principles;

- one quality assurance/accreditation organisation would be responsible for the procedure,
- the totality of the joint programme would be assessed in accordance with ECA's principles for accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes,
- the frameworks of the respective accreditation organisations would be compared, and the differences would be taken into account,
- there would be a focus on learning outcomes, and
- observers from QA agencies of the other countries involved in the joint programme would be included in the procedure.

Another underlying premise ensuring that it would be possible to agree on one single accreditation procedure, is that all of the QA agencies involved in the five pilot procedures are full members of ENQA and/or members of ECA. This means that their activities comply with the ESG and thus that their procedures are executed in a comparable manner. It also means that the agencies who are ECA members have already been building up trust in each other's procedures through comparisons, mutual observation missions and sharing of information.

In practice all the procedures followed the normal steps of an accreditation procedure. However, on a more detailed level the procedures varied according to which institutions and agencies that were involved in the procedures.

As a rule of thumb QA agencies from all the respective countries were invited to participate in the pilot procedures. However, for various reasons not all of these agencies were able to participate. In some of the procedures the QA agencies functioned as observers, while in others they were actively involved. The variation in participation of the QA agencies depended on the possibilities and/or need for the programme to undergo an accreditation procedure in the respective countries. For example; in some cases the programmes had already been successfully accredited, while in other cases there were no possibilities for the programme to be formally accredited in all countries. In turn this also resulted in different approaches regarding the standards and criteria used in the procedure. In some of the procedures several sets of existing standards were compared, while in others only one set of standards was used to assess the whole programme. Additionally, one of the pilot procedures was carried out as a “true” pilot with no formal decision in the end. This allowed for a new set of standards regarding accreditation of joint programmes to be developed and tested.

Other areas where the pilot procedures varied in outline were for example the scope of the self evaluation report (SER), composition of the expert panels, the number of site visits and the formal outcomes of the procedures. In all the pilot procedures the scope of the submitted SER was the totality of the joint programme. However, in some pilots the SER was written according to only one set of criteria whilst in others the criteria of all the involved agencies were addressed. The size and composition of the expert panels varied according to the composition of the programmes. In some of the procedures the choice was made to have experts from all the countries involved, while in others the focus was more on the roles of the experts than on the countries of origin. The expert panels were mostly composed jointly by the involved QA agencies, although it varied how this was organised in practice. In all the assessments discipline-specific expertise, quality-assurance and international expertise and a student were included. Additionally, an expert from the professional field was included in most of the procedures. The external assessment consisted in most cases of only one site visit, but in one of the procedures there were two site visits. This depended on the coordinating QA agencies. Finally, the pilots also varied concerning the actual accreditation decisions. In most of the cases separate (coordinated) accreditation decisions were taken based on the same assessment. In one case a decision taken by one agency was recognised by another agency, and in another case the procedure was a “true” pilot procedure where no formal decisions were taken. These aspects will be further elaborated in the subchapters 2.2.-2.6 presenting more detailed descriptions on each of the procedures.

## 2.2. An overview of the 5 pilot procedures

The pilot procedures concern the following 5 programmes;

**Table 1: The pilot procedures undertaken in the TEAM<sup>2</sup> project**

Name of the programme	Coordinating institution	Partner institutions	Associate partners
<b>Research Master Geosciences of Basins and Lithosphere (BASINS)</b>	VU University Amsterdam (NL)	University of Bergen (NO), Université de Rennes 1 (FR)	RWTH Aachen University (DE), Université UPMC Paris 6 (FR), Eötvös Lóránd University (HU)
<b>Joint European Master in Comparative Local Development (CoDe)</b>	University of Trento (IT)	Corvinus University (HU), University of Ljubljana (SI), University of Regensburg (DE)	Tshwane University of Technology (ZA), University of Belgrade (RS), University NC, Chapel Hill (US)
<b>EM Master Journalism and Media within Globalisation (EMMA)</b>	The University of Aarhus (DK)	Danish School of Journalism (DK), University of Amsterdam (NL), University of Hamburg (DE), Swansea University (UK), City University (UK)	Berkeley (US), University of Technology Sydney (AUS), Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (CHI)
<b>Bachelor European Teacher Education for Primary Schools (ETEPS)</b>	University College Zealand (DK)	Stenden University of Applied Science (NL), Linneus University (SE), Buskerud University College (NO)	Charles University (CZ), Anadolu University (TR)
<b>Joint European Master in International Humanitarian Action (NOHA)</b>	Deusto University (ES)	Catholic University of Louvain (BE), RUB University of Bochum (DE), University of Aix-Marseille III Paul Cézanne (FR), University College Dublin (IE), University of Groningen (NL), University of Uppsala (SE)	Monash University (AU), Universidad Javeriana (CO), University of Bangalore (IN), Universitas Gadjah Mada (ID), Saint-Joseph University, Beyrouth (LB), University of Western Cape (ZA), Columbia University New York (US)

As can be seen from **Table 1**, a large number of HEIs from different countries are involved in the programmes. It is also shown in the table which institutions are full members of the consortia, and which are associate partners. A rule of thumb is that a distinction between full partners and associate partners of a joint programme consortium can be made based on who actually awards a degree. In most cases it is the full partners who award the degree, while the associate partners contribute to the programme through e.g. offering exchange possibilities for students and staff, curriculum development, cooperation on thesis' writing, benchmarking, quality monitoring etc. In the pilot procedures only the contributions of the full partners have been subject to assessment.

**Table 2**, below, shows in which countries programme accreditation of the full partners is required, and the involvement of the respective QA agencies in the procedures.

Table 2: Overview of the programmes involved and their need for accreditation

Programme	Need for accreditation *	Coordinating QA agency	Other QA agencies involved	Place of site visit(s)
BASINS	NL	NVAO	CTI, HAC	Amsterdam, NL
CoDe	DE, HU, SI	HAC	GAC, SQAA	Trento, IT
EMMA	DE, NL, DK	ZEvA	NVAO	Hamburg, DE
ETEPS	NL, SE, DK	NVAO	HSV	Leeuwarden, NL
NOHA	ES, DE, NL	ANECA	AQAS, HSV, NVAO	Deusto, ES Louvain, BE

\* This refers to the full partners in the programme

## 2.3. Research Master Geosciences of Basins and Lithosphere (BASINS)

### 2.3.1. Overview of the programme

<b>Name</b>	Research Master Geosciences of Basins and Lithosphere (BASINS)
<b>Coordinating institution</b>	VU University Amsterdam (NL)
<b>Partners</b>	University of Bergen (NO), Université de Rennes 1 (FR)
<b>Associate partners</b>	RWTH Aachen University (DE), Université UPMC Paris 6 (FR), Eötvös Lóránd University (HU)
<b>Degree awarded</b>	Joint Master's degree
<b>Credits</b>	120 ECTS

The Research Master Geosciences of Basins and Lithosphere is a joint research Master's programme. There are three partner institutions from the Netherlands, Norway and France in the consortium, and three associate partner institutions from Germany, Hungary and France.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.3.2. Legal framework of the coordinating agency

In the Netherlands there are two types of accreditation procedures; initial accreditation and accreditation. Accreditation in the Netherlands concerns programmes that already award (nationally) recognised degrees. These programmes are included in the official register of the Netherlands, CROHO. Accreditation relates to the assessment of the quality of the programme and focuses on learning outcomes.

<sup>5</sup> Although the Hungarian institution is only an associate partner in the programme an observer from the TEAM<sup>2</sup> partner organisation the Hungarian Accreditation Committee was present during the site visit.

The accreditation procedure consists of three consecutive steps: the self-evaluation, the external assessment and the accreditation decision.

At the request of the State Secretary for Education in the Netherlands, a separate protocol was developed for providing advice on research Master's programmes. This protocol describes how the accreditation framework should be implemented when assessing a research Master's programme. The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) wrote this protocol in close cooperation with the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). An additional requirement compared to regular procedures is that the research Master's programme should be specifically aimed at excellent students. Another requirement is that the curriculum should be taught and composed by prominent researchers with a proven record in the field of research and with a well-functioning research environment at their disposal.

To assess these programmes on quality NVAO draws on the expertise of KNAW. For that purpose, KNAW has set up several committees that advise on programmes within a specific discipline of the sciences.

### **2.3.3. Methodologies applied**

#### **Need for accreditation**

In 2005 the Geosciences of Basins and Lithosphere Master's programme was accredited by NVAO. This implied that the VU University Amsterdam would need to get the programme reaccredited in the Netherlands before May 2011. Neither in Norway nor France does the programme need to undergo programme accreditation. The consortium partner in Norway, University of Bergen, is able to offer the programme based on the university's self-awarding powers. The same situation applies for Université de Rennes 1.

#### **Applied criteria**

The assessment of the programme was carried out based on the Accreditation Framework of NVAO related to research master's programme: the aforementioned Protocol for Advice on Assessment of research Master's programmes<sup>6</sup>.

This meant that the institutions in the consortium had to write the SER (application document) based on the Dutch criteria, but including information on the totality of the joint programme. This was done in order for the expert panel to be able to assess the totality of the programme.

#### **Selection of experts**

The composition of the expert panel followed the procedure of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. The expert panel was additionally expanded with one

---

<sup>6</sup> NVAO Accreditatiekader bestaande **opleidingen**: Domeinspecifieke uitwerking voor Onderzoeksmasters, 12 oktober 2007

expert who was recommended by HAC. Thus, the expert panel consisted of experts from the Netherlands, Belgium and Hungary. The expertise of the panel covered subject-/discipline-specific expertise, educational/pedagogical expertise, and expertise from the professional field. Additionally the expert panel included a student expert.

#### **Site visit**

The site visit was carried out on the premises of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. This is in accordance with the normal practice of the research Master's assessments in the Netherlands. However, representatives from both partner institutions were present during the site visit. In that way the totality of the programme could be covered. Also an observer from CTI was present during the site visit.

#### **2.3.4. Outcomes of the procedure**

In this pilot procedure an accreditation decision was only needed in the Netherlands. Consequently, only one accreditation decision was taken based on the assessment. In autumn 2010 a positive accreditation decision of the programme was taken by NVAO.

## 2.4. Joint European Master in Comparative Local Development (CoDe)

### 2.4.1. Overview of the programme

<b>Name</b>	Joint European Master in Comparative Local Development (CoDe)
<b>Coordinating institution</b>	University of Trento (IT)
<b>Partners</b>	Corvinus University (HU), University of Ljubljana (SL), University of Regensburg (DE)
<b>Associate partners</b>	Tshwane University of Technology (SA) University of Belgrade (RS) University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (US)
<b>Degree awarded</b>	Joint Master's degree
<b>Credits</b>	120 ECTS

Joint European Master in Comparative Local Development (CoDe) is a joint Master's programme with partner institutions in Italy, Hungary, Slovenia and Germany. When the students successfully complete the programme they will be awarded a joint Master's degree.

### 2.4.2. Legal framework of the coordinating agency

The Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) is the national QA agency responsible for evaluating and accrediting HEIs and programmes, both in ex ante and ex post procedures. Ex ante programme applications consist of two phases. The first are education and outcome requirements, which are national-level framework requirements necessary for all study programmes before an institution can apply for launching the particular programme. The framework requirements, in addition to stating the credit values of mandatory and elective segments and entrance requirements, focus on the general educational content with a view to its learning outcomes. If such a framework requirement already exists, the institution need only apply for phase two, that is for launching the programme, but if it does not exist, both phases have to be accredited. In the case of the Master CoDe programme, both phases had to be evaluated by the HAC. For the framework requirements, the HAC issues an opinion before they are issued as decrees by the Ministry. New programmes to be launched at institutions have to be accredited.

The Education Authority under the Ministry of National Resources registers both the framework requirements and the study programme offered at a given institution following the accreditation decision by the HAC. Institutional offer has to be included in the national Guide for Admission to Higher Education published once a year (with an interim supplement) by an external unit of the Ministry, before students can apply to study the programme.

### 2.4.3. Methodologies applied

#### Need for accreditation

The Master CoDe Programme – though running as a 95 ECTS programme – has applied as a new programme of 120 ECTS. Although the HAC would normally conduct a paper-based accreditation process for a new programme, for the TEAM<sup>2</sup> project a site visit was included. The Master CoDe SER described the 120 ECTS programme but was based on the running 95 ECTS programme. The site visit inevitably included information about the running programme, which had the advantage of presenting an established programme under existing conditions rather than a future plan. In the Republic of Slovenia all HEIs as well as their study programmes should be accredited (publicly recognised) by the national body for accreditation and evaluation (SQAA). Usually also the SQAA would conduct only a paper based accreditation (first accreditation), with the exception of accreditation of a new HEI (private or public) or study programmes where the site-visit is required by the SQAA. In case of joint study programmes, the Criteria for accreditation and evaluation require that the programme must be already accredited (publicly recognised) also in other countries. Also in Germany a positive accreditation decision of the programme is required.

#### Applied criteria

The evaluation process was developed by a team of agencies from the Master CoDe partner countries, with the exception of Italy, where no functioning agency existed yet. Based on the requirements of the German Accreditation Council (GAC)<sup>7</sup>, which seemed to have the simplest seven sets of criteria, the criteria of the Slovenian<sup>8</sup> and Hungarian<sup>9</sup> agencies were included in a common framework Standards and Criteria for the Accreditation of the Master CoDe Programme. Further guidelines included those for the self-evaluation process and report for the Master CoDe coordinators, and guidelines for the evaluation team.

#### Selection of experts

The agencies involved agreed that each would recommend one expert for the evaluation team from their own countries, while NVAO approached ESU for a student member from Italy. Hence there were two experts in the discipline of the programme, one expert from the labour market and one student. HAC, as the coordinating agency, provided the team secretary, whose task was to coordinate the process and draft the report. Each evaluation team member was responsible for 2-3 of the Standards and Criteria, with some overlap depending on their expertise.

---

<sup>7</sup> Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programmes (resolved on 17 July 2006, amended on 29 February 2008)

<sup>8</sup> Criteria on accreditation of Higher education institutions and Study programmes (Slovenia)

<sup>9</sup> Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC): Standards and Criteria for Master Programs and Ex Post Accreditation of Institutions and Programs

In addition to the three sets of guidelines, the documentation comprised the SER and the Evaluation Report.

### **Site visit**

The site visit of the CoDe programme took place on the premises of the coordinating institution, the University of Trento, Italy. The reason for choosing Trento as the place of the site visit was mainly that being the coordinating institution, Trento could be expected to have the largest number of staff present for the programme. Moreover, a large group of students were spending the autumn semester 2009 in Trento. In addition to students who had been studying at several of the locations, teachers and managers representing all the four institutions were present during the site visit. From the QA agencies the four experts and the team secretary provided by the HAC were present during the site visit.

#### **2.4.4. Outcomes of the procedure**

In total the CoDe programme got accredited in three countries based on the pilot accreditation procedure. The Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia<sup>10</sup> was the first agency to take a positive accreditation decision regarding the programme in February 2010. Thereafter the programme was accredited by the plenary meeting of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee in June 2010. The German Accreditation Council is competent to recognise decisions of foreign accreditation organisations. They passed an accreditation decision (under consideration of, but not bound by, the positive accreditations of the partner agencies) in September 2010.

---

<sup>10</sup> SQAA is the successor agency of The Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia which ceased to exist on 28 February 2010.

## 2.5. Erasmus Mundus Master Journalism and Media within Globalisation (EMMA)

### 2.5.1. Overview of the programme

<b>Name</b>	EM Master Journalism and Media within Globalisation (EMMA)
<b>Coordinating institution</b>	Aarhus University (DK)
<b>Partners</b>	Danish School of Journalism (DK), University of Amsterdam (NL), University of Hamburg (DE) Swansea University (UK), City University (UK)
<b>Associate partners</b>	UC Berkeley (US), University of Technology Sydney (AUS), Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile (CHI)
<b>Degree awarded</b>	Double Master's degrees
<b>Credits</b>	120 ECTS

EM Master Journalism and Media within Globalisation is a joint Master's programme with partner institutions in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. When the students successfully complete the programme they will receive double degrees from the partner institutions where the students have attended the programme.

### 2.5.2. Legal framework of the coordinating agency

As the German accreditation system is organised in a decentralised manner, one of its characteristics is that the accreditation of study programmes is carried out by accreditation agencies, who in turn are accredited by the German Accreditation Council (GAC). The GAC – as the central decision-making body of the foundation – defines the basic requirements of the process and takes care that any accreditation is carried out on the basis of reliable, transparent and internationally recognised criteria. The legal basis of the accreditation system is set out in the Law for the establishment of the Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany as well as in the contracts concluded between the foundation and the agencies, where the rights and obligations of the partner institutions involved in the accreditation system are defined. As part of their contract agreements, the agencies commit themselves to the deployment of the criteria and further decisions of the GAC as well as to taking the Common Structural Guidelines of the Conference of German Cultural Ministers, in their currently valid version, into consideration.

Zentrale Evaluations- und Akkreditierungsagentur Hannover (ZEvA), who was the coordinating agency of the accreditation procedure of the EMMA programme, is one of the accreditation agencies which are accredited by the GAC.

In Germany the actual objects of the accreditation process are study programmes for Bachelor's and Master's degrees from state, or state recognised, HEIs in Germany. If a study programme has successfully undergone an accreditation process, then it is awarded accreditation for a limited period, with or without conditions, and carries the Quality Seal of the Foundation for the duration of this period.

### **2.5.3. Methodologies applied**

#### **Need for accreditation**

EMMA has been running as an Erasmus Mundus programme since 2005. Until 2010 the institutions have been able to offer the programme based on accreditation of other programmes at their institutions, but in order to be registered as a separate programme they needed to apply for accreditation of the programme in the Netherlands and Germany. In the UK the institutions undergo institutional audits and there is no need for programme accreditation of the programme, while in Denmark the programme could not apply for accreditation at the time when the procedure was carried out.

#### **Applied criteria**

The Rules of the GAC for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation<sup>11</sup>, and the initial accreditation framework of NVAO<sup>12</sup> were the criteria used in the assessment of the programme. The institutions wrote a joint SER that covered the totality of the programme and addressed both the criteria of GAC and NVAO, in order to provide the required information related to both frameworks.

#### **Selection of experts**

The expert panel was convened by ZEvA, but formally appointed by both ZEvA and NVAO. The panel consisted of three German experts and one Belgian expert. The panel covered expertise within the subject-/discipline, educational/pedagogical and audit/QA expertise, and expertise from the professional field. The panel also included a student expert.

#### **Site visit**

The site visit was carried out on the premises of the University of Hamburg, although the coordinating institution is Aarhus. This was decided since it enabled the panel to interview students who were in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the programme, and because this was the easiest solution to make sure that the procedure would be carried out in a manner which fitted the demands of ZEvA. However, representatives from all the partner countries were present during the site visit. Representatives from both ZEvA and NVAO were also present during the site visit.

---

<sup>11</sup> Rules for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation, 08.12.2009

<sup>12</sup> NVAO Initial Accreditation Framework (The Netherlands) , 14 February 2003

#### 2.5.4. Outcomes of the procedure

The pilot accreditation procedure of the EMMA programme resulted in two accreditation decisions. In July 2010 the Accreditation Commission of ZEvA accredited the programme with two conditions. In September 2010 a positive accreditation decision was taken by NVAO.

## 2.6. European Teacher Education for Primary Schools (ETEPS)

### 2.6.1. Overview of the programme

<b>Name</b>	European Teacher Education for Primary Schools (ETEPS)
<b>Coordinating institution</b>	University College Zealand (DK)
<b>Partners</b>	Stenden University of Applied Sciences (NL), Linnaeus University (SE), Buskerud University College (NO)
<b>Associate partners</b>	Charles University (CZ), Anadolu University (TR)
<b>Degree awarded</b>	Joint Bachelor's degree
<b>Credits</b>	240 ECTS

European Teacher Education for Primary Schools (ETEPS) is a joint Bachelor's programme with partner institutions in the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The aim of this programme is to educate students who will both be qualified for teaching at national schools, and teaching at international primary schools after finishing their studies.

### 2.6.2. Legal framework of the coordinating agency

The accreditation procedures in the Netherlands relate to both accreditation and initial accreditation. Initial accreditation concerns programmes that are not yet offered and/or which are not registered in the official register of recognised programmes, CROHO. The assessment of the ETEPS programme was carried out as an initial accreditation procedure.

### 2.6.3. Methodologies applied

#### Need for accreditation

The first step in this procedure was to establish in which countries the partners in the consortium could offer the programme based on their degree-awarding powers and in which countries the programme could apply for accreditation of the programme. It turned out that, at the time of the pilot procedure (spring 2010), the Netherlands was the only country where it was possible for the consortium to apply for initial accreditation of the ETEPS programme.

Since 1 January 2010 Swedish HEIs have, under certain conditions, the possibility to enter into joint degree agreements with Swedish or non-Swedish HEIs without any prior consent

from the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (HSV). One such condition is, however, that the HEI itself must have the awarding power to issue such a degree either by self-degree awarding power or by previous consent from the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education. Since the Swedish partner institution is not yet accredited for the new teacher programmes that will start in the autumn of 2011, the programmes need to undergo accreditation before the partner institution can enter into joint degree arrangements for similar programmes with other HEIs. For Swedish HEIs the last day to apply for the new teacher programmes was the 28th of June 2010.

All higher education programmes in Denmark will need to undergo programme accreditation. However, for the time being it is possible for the ETEPS programme to be offered by the University College without accreditation. As long as the students pay the full fee for the programme the University College is entitled to offer the whole programme. However, graduating from the ETEPS programme will not automatically result in competence to teach in the Danish public schools, since the programme is not fully equivalent to the ordinary Danish teacher education. Otherwise, parts of the programme – the mandatory parts – can be offered according to the national teacher education programme in Denmark and can be part of a mutual agreement between the partner universities leading to a joint degree or multiple degrees. Some of the eligible subjects can be offered too, and others can be recognised in the national programme if they are offered at a partner university, subject to a specific review by the Danish institution.

In Norway the programme can be offered based on the authorities of the University College.

As a consequence, only Stenden University of Applied Sciences applied for accreditation. They applied to NVAO for initial accreditation of the programme as a specialisation of their already accredited teacher training programme. The QA agencies in the respective countries were nonetheless invited to participate in the procedure. This resulted in an observer from the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education.

### **Applied criteria**

The Initial Accreditation criteria of NVAO<sup>13</sup> were the only criteria used in the assessment. Nonetheless, the institutions cooperated on writing the application and included information on the totality of the programme. For all the standards and criteria of NVAO the consortium included information on all the partners and emphasised that they had been developing the curriculum jointly and would cooperate on offering all the modules. When assessing the programme, the experts thus needed to look at the parts offered by all the partners in order to assess the joint programme as it was proposed to be offered.

---

<sup>13</sup> NVAO Initial Accreditation Framework (The Netherlands), 14 February 2003

### Selection of experts

The composition of the panel followed the ECA principles for accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes<sup>14</sup>. Due to the nature of the programme it was decided to appoint an international expert panel with experts from all the countries involved in the programme, even if this meant that the expert panel would be larger than usual. This was regarded as especially important as the programme aims at educating teachers who both will be qualified to teach in their respective systems, and at international schools. In the end the expert panel consisted of three experts from the Netherlands (including a student), one from Sweden, one from Denmark and one from Norway.

### Site visit

The site visit was carried out in Leeuwarden in the Netherlands. Leeuwarden was chosen as the place of the site visit as Stenden University of Applied Sciences was the institution responsible for the application to the NVAO. Since the procedure concerned a programme that was yet to be started there were no students to interview in any location. However, it was made sure that programme managers and teachers from all the partner institutions were present at the site visit. Also the observer from the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education was present during the site visit.

#### 2.6.4. Outcomes of the procedure

The ETEPS consortium decided to withdraw the application. The intention is to continue the process in the autumn of 2010.

---

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.eaconsortium.net/admin/files/assets/subsites/1/documenten/1264159237\\_eca-principles-for-accreditation-procedures-regarding-joint-programmes.pdf](http://www.eaconsortium.net/admin/files/assets/subsites/1/documenten/1264159237_eca-principles-for-accreditation-procedures-regarding-joint-programmes.pdf)

## 2.7. Joint European Master in International Humanitarian Action (NOHA)

### 2.7.1. Overview of the programme

<b>Name</b>	Joint European Master in International Humanitarian Action (NOHA)
<b>Coordinating institution</b>	Deusto University (ES)
<b>Partners</b>	Catholic University of Louvain (BE), RUB University of Bochum (DE), University of Aix-Marseille III Paul Cezanne (FR), University College Dublin (IE) University of Groningen (NL), University of Uppsala (SE)
<b>Associate partners</b>	Monash University (AU), Universidad Javeriana (CO) University of Bangalore, India Universitas Gadjah Mada (ID) Saint-Joseph University, Beyrouth (LB) University of Western Cape (ZA) Columbia University New York (US)
<b>Degree awarded</b>	Joint Master's degree <sup>15</sup>
<b>Credits</b>	90 ECTS

The NOHA programme encompasses three semesters (sixteen months) accounting for 90 ECTS<sup>16</sup>. It has four main components:

- Intensive Programme (5 ECTS).
- Core Course (25 ECTS), the same at all seven institutions.
- Second semester Orientation Period (30 ECTS) offers specialisations, one for each institution. Students choose which one to attend.
- Third semester is devoted to either internship in an organisation or a research project at the home university (15 ECTS). During this semester students also write their Master's thesis (15 ECTS).

### 2.7.2. Legal framework of the coordinating agency

Currently in Spain accreditation is legally required for all programmes by means of The Royal Order that regulates official degrees (*Article 24 of the RO 1393/2007 of 29<sup>th</sup> October*). Accreditation is applicable to Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate degrees. Legislation

---

<sup>15</sup> With the exception of Uppsala and Groningen Universities that currently award double degrees. In Sweden it is estimated that national legislation will allow the award of a joint Master's degree in 2011-2012). In the Netherlands it became possible for Dutch HEIs to award joint degrees from July 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Except in Sweden where national legislation requires 120 ECTS.

establishes three different stages in the accreditation process: An ex-ante accreditation, a monitoring stage and an ex-post accreditation after 6 years.

As far as joint programmes are concerned, Order 2514/2007 of 13 August regarding the award of Master's and Doctor official degrees establishes the legislation regarding its issuance. Additionally, the ex-ante accreditation of joint programmes includes specific requirements that involve taking into account the totality of the programme and not only the part subjected to the Spanish legislation.

### **2.7.3. Methodologies applied**

#### **Need for accreditation**

In the Netherlands, Spain and Germany accreditation is compulsory for the institutions to be able to offer the programme.

The first step of the procedure was to involve all the QA agencies of the seven countries in the process, regardless if accreditation was a requirement or not.

NVAO, HSV, Agentur für Qualitätssicherung durch Akkreditierung von Studiengängen (AQAS)<sup>17</sup> and Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación (ANECA) met in Madrid twice to discuss on the procedure and the results of the pilot accreditation.

The review was coordinated by ANECA. The external review was conducted in line with the process described in the ANECA document Procedure for the pilot project on the accreditation of joint programmes and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference.

#### **Applied Criteria**

The standards used for the pilot accreditation of NOHA programme focused on the fact that joint programmes must demonstrate that they offer:

1. Added value that is internationally proven
2. Guaranteed academic recognition
3. Guaranteed services to the student
4. Efficient management of resources
5. Learning activities that are coordinated in an integrated and jointly designed study plan
6. Common and equivalent learning outcomes
7. Demonstrated continuous review
8. Key information on the programme that is easily accessible

---

<sup>17</sup> Accreditation of NOHA programme in Germany took place at the same time of NOHA pilot accreditation in Spain. For this reason and due to the coordination between AQAS and ANECA, the secretary of the pilot accreditation procedure was invited to the University of Bochum to take part in the site visit of the German accreditation process coordinated by AQAS at the University of Bochum on 18 December 2009.

These criteria were developed by ANECA taking into account the current criteria of the Spanish accreditation framework, and focussing on the special characteristics of joint programmes.

### **Selection of experts**

The panel consisted of seven members: five external reviewers (two international QA experts, two academic experts and a student member), an observer and a secretary. The panel was jointly nominated by all the QA agencies involved in the procedure: Four of the members were nominated by ANECA and three by the other QA organisations related to the NOHA programme (HSV, AQAS and NVAO). The composition of the panel followed the stipulations of the ECA document Principles for accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes as well as ANECA's principles for the selection of experts.

### **Site visits**

The first site visit took place at Deusto University on 14 and 15 December 2009. Programme managers from all the partner institutions were interviewed at the site visit through a Skype conference.

ANECA, along with the other QA agencies involved in the NOHA procedure, decided to carry out a 2<sup>nd</sup> site visit at the Catholic University of Louvain on 10 February 2010. All the panel members attended the first site visit and three of them were present at the second, since the purpose of this visit was mainly to confirm and assemble information already gathered.

### **Documentation**

The following documents were produced during the pilot accreditation of the NOHA programme:

- Terms of Reference of the procedure for the pilot project on the accreditation of joint programmes
- Procedure for the pilot project on the accreditation of joint programmes
- Guide to drawing up the SER of the pilot project on the accreditation of joint programmes
- SER of NOHA programme
- Guide for the Expert Panel
- Agenda of both site visits (Bilbao and Louvain la Neuve)
- External Report on the European Master in International Humanitarian Action (NOHA) according to the Standards of the Pilot project on the accreditation of joint programmes
- Conclusions of the QA organisations related to NOHA regarding the pilot accreditation (annex of the External report).

#### **2.7.4. Outcomes of the procedure**

The result of this procedure was very positive because, despite its pilot nature, the QA agencies involved in the project agreed that a single accreditation decision could be accepted by the others, if this would have been a formal procedure.

# 3

## Analysis of the pilot procedures

### 3.1. Overview

Table 3: A comparative introductory review of the procedures

	BASINS	CODE	EMMA	ETEPS	NOHA
# core HEIs	3	4	6	4	7
# Associate partners	3	3	3	2	7
# countries <sup>18</sup>	3 (+2)	4 (+3)	4 (+3)	4 (+2)	7 (+7)
# QA agencies involved	3	3	2	2	4
# countries where accreditation is needed <sup>19</sup>	1	3	3	3	3
Criteria	Existing for 1 QAA	Joint from existing for 3 QAAs	Joint from existing for 2 QAAs	Existing (professional orientation)	New
# participants at the site visit	9	5	5	9	7
Roles of the experts <sup>20</sup>	D/P/Q/S/C/O	D/P/Q/S/C	D/P/Q/S/C/O	D/P/Q/S/C/O	D/Q/S/C/O
Site visits	1	1	1	1	2
Total site visit days	1	1	1	1	3

### 3.2. Feedback from agencies, experts and programmes

After the completion of each of the procedures the coordinators of the joint programmes, the experts and the representatives from the QA agencies were asked to fill in qualitative questionnaires<sup>21</sup> showing their impressions of the procedures. They were asked to share their experiences with the various steps of the procedures, and to specify strengths and weaknesses. Summaries and analyses of the feedback can be found in the subchapters following below.

<sup>18</sup> The number of countries of associate partners are included between brackets

<sup>19</sup> This refers to full partners

<sup>20</sup> Roles in the site visit: D – discipline specific expertise ; P – professional practice expertise; Q – QA expertise; S – student; C- Process coordinator; O- observer.

<sup>21</sup> See Annex 2

### 3.2.1. On determining the criteria and procedure

There was some divergence of views on the ease with which procedures and their criteria could be agreed, reflecting the specific partnerships and the 'degrees of freedom' within which the QA arrangements could be implemented. For some the procedures and criteria are set out in detailed requirements often with legal backing, for others there is a wider choice both in the specific criteria involved and in their interpretation within the evaluation procedure allowed. The largest divergences were often a result of different emphases on and balance between 'input measures' (hours of study, curriculum contents, faculty assessed by CVs, etc) and 'outputs' (students achieved learning outcomes), and also the extents to which diversity could be introduced within the design of programmes. Limitations are set for some through detailed and often legal requirements whereas for others programme evaluation requires demonstrable consideration of the appropriate and authoritative 'reference points'.

#### **Key points:**

- there is still quite a lot of work to be done to try to find a simple single model for the accreditation of joint programmes, but key elements to monitor are identified.
- there are shared core requirements but also different (often nationally required) specific items.

### 3.2.2. On the SER

All of the pilots experienced some (or more) difficulties with the SERs. Most areas where the panels found difficulty centred around:

- an inappropriate balance of information to match the criteria, often with a large amount of superfluous information but also with some of the most basic absent (e.g. a clear diagram of the study plan, and responsibilities of the different partners).
- insufficient 'self evaluation'; most of the SERs were predominantly descriptive documents, seldom including any critique of why certain decisions or changes were made, nor recording changes that had been considered and why they were rejected.
- insufficient attention to the 'jointness' of the programme, and what added value it offers.

#### **Key point:**

- more detailed guidance should be provided on what is expected in an SER – and what is not!

### **3.2.3 On composing a panel and its working**

Each of the pilots included within their panels members with subject/discipline expertise, QA/accreditation expertise, and a student. Some included professional practice experts as well, but each strand of the pilots differed in their detailed approaches to assembling panels. The detail of agencies' nomination and/or provision of panel members varied, but all reported that their panels worked well as teams.

#### **Key points:**

- should joint programme accreditation involve a 'joint panel' or could mutual recognition be based on the judgement of a panel from just one (i.e. the lead) agency?
- how are 'special needs' met? (e.g. some QA agencies are required by law to have a labour market representative on the panel, whilst for others this may be unnecessary – and expensive)
- induction MUST reduce attitudes and prejudices held by individual members of an evaluation panel where these are based on specific national/subject practices that are not directly relevant to procedure and criteria the panel is engaged with.

### **3.2.4 On the site visit(s)**

In all cases the site visits were regarded as one of the most successful parts of the pilot. Feedback consistently noted the care and attention to detail of planning and the important part this played in the overall success of the pilot.

#### **Key points:**

- should ALL panel members be involved in a 2<sup>nd</sup> site visit if required, or only those required to cover those remaining specific questions?
- Erasmus HEIs are 'well known' and as such one site visit was satisfactory for most of the pilots here; would just one site visit still be sufficient if the consortium consisted of 'less well known' HEIs?

### **3.2.5. Diversity of accreditation requirements (the procedure criteria and report)**

Whilst all accreditation procedures follow the general requirements and guidelines of the ESG, and look at many of the same parameters, it was clearly the case that at present it is the detail of specific (national) accreditation that causes difficulties. To some extent these involve the procedure (panel makeup; period between evaluations; etc), but it is also the detail of criteria, and typically the numerically-based criteria where there may be limited room for 'negotiation', that cause problems. All too often (the legally required) criteria relate to what are essentially 'input measures', whilst at the same time QA is being encouraged to focus on 'learning outcomes'. It became clear that all steps of the procedures need to be compared. An example of this is that some agencies publish all

documents included in an accreditation procedure, while others only publish the final reports. Such elements need to be monitored and agreed upon in advance.

**Key points:**

- the pilots demonstrated that diversity of requirements may be met in different ways; the challenge is to identify which requirements are essential - for the specific partners involved in a particular joint programme, and are not duplicating or replicating evidence collection unnecessarily.
- Differences in the procedures such as publishing policies may cause difficulties when carrying out single accreditation procedures.

### 3.2.6 On selecting and using criteria to reach a decision

The summary table 3 above shows the different approaches taken in the pilots. All agreed that their approach allowed them to reach a decision, but differences in national legislation led to different extents to which that decision could be recognised by others.

**Key points:**

- different requirements of different QA agencies (set in law and/or by ministries) pose a significant hurdle for single accreditation method for joint programmes
- procedures involving use of ALL criteria required by ALL partner QA agencies would be over prescriptive; but jointly derived or 'all new' sets of criteria may only be suitable for some
- might a 'core criteria plus' model (see Chapter 4) work?

### 3.2.7 On the utility of the ECA principles

Although not specifically used in all pilots as a primary basis for establishing the procedures and criteria, the ECA principles on the evaluation of joint programmes were subsequently discussed and found by most to be 'entirely workable'. However, opinions differed on whether having general statements, which allow for local contextual interpretations, was of advantage or disadvantage, or whether more detailed guidance was of benefit.

**Key points:**

- it was agreed that ECA principles cover the 'right areas'
- there was a divergence of views on whether or not more detail and/or guidance is required associated with the ECA principles
- a set of guidelines to assist the application of the ECA principles in different contexts should be considered

### 3.2.8 On 'political' national / international aspects (excluding criteria)

The major challenges identified by almost all involved parties were the difficulties associated with national legislation. It was clear for many that, with experience, they could work within the 'spirit' of the evaluation requirements and reach a shared judgement on whether the major expectations had been met by a programme. It was, however, a continuing and repeated story that 'in practice' particular aspects of national legislation could intervene to 'make life difficult' and hinder reaching a shared evaluation decision. These difficulties were then compounded between reaching an evaluation decision and the making of an accreditation decision. Another potential stumbling stone that was identified are the so called regulated professions<sup>22</sup> (e.g. teacher, physiotherapist, architect, nurse, civil engineer etc.). If a joint programme does not comply with the national requirements for a given profession in a given participating country (countries), graduates of this programme will not have access to the regulated profession (or an obligatory further professional training) in the participating country (countries).

#### **Key point:**

- there is increasing and persuasive evidence that QA agencies can collaborate to effect a rigorous and efficient evaluation of joint programmes, but national legal requirements limit the possibilities for wide(r) recognition of the evaluation outcomes.

### 3.2.9 Financing

Thorough quality assurance is not cheap. It is important that efforts are made to maximise the effectiveness of what is done. Even so many involved in the pilots noted that their strands of the overall project had been more expensive than initially anticipated, both financially and also (and importantly) in terms of time involved. Site visits are expensive and the ideal would be to evaluate a joint programme with a single site visit, but two issues were raised in this regard: i) the validity (or not) of reduced panels for second visits if required, and ii) issues to do with the acceptability of just one site visit for consortia of less well known HEIs (and other providers).

#### **Key point:**

- the pilots proved more expensive than initially budgeted – but had the decisions been recognised by all represented then there would have been a significant cost saving over multiple accreditations.

---

<sup>22</sup> A *regulated profession* is a profession subject to regulations laid down in separate provisions, setting out qualification requirements and conditions for the pursuit of this profession. This is often connected with the requirement of a particular, specified education and training. A profession not regulated in one country may be regulated in other countries.

More information regarding regulated professions in European Union is available on the EC website: [http://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/qualifications/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/index_en.htm)

### 3.3. Main 'messages' from the pilots and their participants

#### 3.3.1 Challenges foreseen and encountered

The main challenges foreseen and experienced by participants included:

- the divergence of national regulations in general. A general view of the greatest contextual challenge was "*the political will of the countries involved – accreditation is a reflection of national educational policy*" and concurrent views that 'political will' was lagging behind the willingness and abilities of QA agencies and institutions to find ways to increase the effectiveness of the QA of (transnational) joint programmes.
- specific concerns about legal aspects, particularly on curriculum, and the different emphases placed on a variety of 'input measures', ECTS and the CVs of HEI staff involved in teaching were prominent amongst concerns
- different emphases on *learning outcomes* in general and whether 'intended' or 'achieved' (i.e. demonstrated through assessment of student performance)
- panel members using procedures and interpreting criteria based on their own 'usual context' rather than the context of the programme being evaluated
- differences in the form and style of reports; with comments/content often reflecting the 'cultural context' of the panel members/report author even when the main ethos of the programme and its required accreditation may be anticipated as something different.
- recommendations are common features of most procedures/reports but their bases, and expectations about any follow up, vary considerably; some see 'recommendations' as (required) 'instructions' whilst others see them as (just) 'recommendations'.

#### **Key point:**

- despite the challenges, ALL of the pilots 'worked' in principle and in practice and each could reach an agreed conclusion on the evaluation of its joint programme. Problems arose when considering the extent to which that conclusion could then be utilised.

#### 3.3.2 Strengths and weaknesses

All participants were asked to identify up to 3 strengths and also up to 3 weaknesses of the pilot from their perspective. There were, perhaps inevitably, 'cultural' differences in the items identified and even whether they were strengths or weaknesses! The number of site visits, for example, led to different views with many subject experts wishing for more visits but QA 'professionals' generally content with the information gathered at one. In part the 'division' reflected whether the emphasis was on the curriculum content and coherence or on the parameters by which the programme was (or was not) internally quality assured. One strength on which all agreed was having diversity within an (authoritative) panel. Another strength that was mentioned by several was the commitment of the involved parties. The procedures allowed for transparency, spread of information and a closer cooperation among QA agencies. Additionally, both HEIs and experts were committed to

the procedure. On the other hand, one weakness commented on by many was the amount of work involved in developing and applying (a new set of) shared criteria. This also makes clarifications of terminology important. Additionally, the information included in the procedures was extensive and in some cases time felt scarce. A focus also needs to be put on how to write joint SERs.

**Key points:**

- having diversity (of roles) in the panel membership is a strength
- developing shared criteria and/or applying 'someone else's' criteria are often problematic – though not impossible.



# 4

## Summary from the feedback

### 4.1. Summary from the pilots

The five pilots carried out under TEAM<sup>2</sup> reflect a range of different approaches to the development of a methodology for the single accreditation of a transnational joint programme.

In summary the pilots each took one of the following approaches:

- the *procedure, criteria* and selection of *experts* were as used by one agency
- the *procedure* and *criteria* used were from one agency but applied by *experts* from elsewhere
- a *new procedure* was developed with ('traditional') *criteria* based on the shared requirements of all agencies + the 'extras' required for each; joint choice of *experts*
- the *procedure* was based on that of one country but with experts nominated by all agencies involved, and with a *new set of criteria* specifically developed for joint programmes; joint choice of *experts* nominated by each of the agencies involved

In practice all of the pilot projects, however constructed, reached conclusions that all of the partners involved in that pilot could agree with. In most procedures several decisions were taken based on one report, while in one case a formal recognition of the decision of one agency could be made by another agency.

Several questions arise around the extent to which the evaluation of joint programmes can be:

1. an exercise undertaken by one agency with a shared recognition of the outcome
2. a shared exercise with a single outcome which is shared by others
  - a. to what extent is the 'sharing' constrained by the need for a single outcome?
3. a shared exercise with separate outcomes (that are hopefully the same!)
  - a. with separate outcomes that may (or may not) be formally recognised more widely either later or through a different (national) procedure.

In terms of 'trust' and 'mutual recognition' these represent:

1. 'trust' between agencies to accept work done solely by one and an acceptance of its outcome/decision
2. 'trust' in a shared exercise and its conclusion, ideally with a shared outcome/decision
3. 'trust' in a shared exercise but with (the potential for) separate conclusions and separate outcomes/decisions

These are discussed in more detail below but in summary they might be regarded as:

1. the ideal in mutual recognition from an administrative point of view, but any single

outcome could perhaps be open to an applicant's criticism that 'they didn't understand our way of doing things', if the outcome was negative.

2. a context dependent approach that might be likely to get more 'buy in' from the applicants and cover, in a pragmatic way, some of the practical problems that can arise during the planning and implementation of such an exercise.
3. perhaps the most likely for many in the present 'climate', this approach has the potential to build trust towards one 1. or 2.; it does however have the potential problem of 'split decisions' covering a single programme depending on the detail of 'non-core' criteria e.g. *all is fine except that you can accredit on 90ECTS but we must have 120.*

#### 4.2. Time for a paradigm shift? A possible 'core + 'model for accreditation of joint programmes

The diversity of approaches within the pilots, to the development and application of procedures and criteria, clearly suggests that the QA agencies can work together to reach mutually acceptable recommendations and decisions. There remain, however, substantial problems in the extent to which these recommendations/decisions can be 'recognised' more widely.

Since national legislation on recognition issues may continue to be a stumbling block for some time perhaps it is time for the QA agencies to develop a new approach to streamlining the accreditation of joint programmes so that assessments can more easily lead to accreditation decisions that can be recognised across boundaries.

A paradigm shift might involve identifying the essential core (necessary and sufficient) evidence required by ALL agencies (and their stakeholders) and then adding to this, in a modular approach, those additional criteria required by clusters or individual agencies. A programme would then be subject only to the core plus those modules for those it wished to gain accreditation from.

Such an approach might have the added benefit of also offering the opportunity of involving quality assurance procedures that are not predicated on a requirement for 'accreditation', but are never the less concerned with assuring that the same core aspects of a programme are secure. The required 'purposes' of all QA approaches may be summarised under the following:

- that a programme is well planned;
- that it *can be* delivered properly (*ex ante*); (and /or) that it *has been* delivered properly (*ex post*)
- that a student's achievements match what is said on the diploma.

An additional requirement should be that there is support for students to ensure that they have a fair chance of completing the programme and gaining the planned degree.

#### 4.2.1. A Core + model

Currently, different agencies each use a set of criteria in their procedures. Some criteria are used by all agencies, some are used by several or even many, but not all, whilst some may even be unique to a particular agency. How might such an arrangement be coordinated and consolidated towards the effective but more efficient QA of joint programmes?

Using a 3 agency example with criteria requirements of

agency	criteria types (see below)							specific to 1 agency
1	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	x
2	a		c		e		g	y
3	a		c	d	e	f	g	
then ...								
'core' is ..	A		C		E		G	

Application of a 'core +' model for the evaluation of joint programmes would thus involve, in this case, use of the **core** criteria [A+C+E+G] as a 'cluster' / 'modular block' and then additional ( '+' elements), depending on which specific accreditation(s) the programme was seeking.

Thus if a joint programme involved:

- agencies 1 and 3 then the '+' elements would include a [D+F] shared module and [b] and [x]

whereas if

- agencies 1 and 2 then the '+' elements would be [x] and [y]

and if

- agencies 2 and 3 then the '+' elements would be [y] and the [d+f] module already identified but in this case used as a single requirement. Should this programme subsequently seek accreditation within agency 1 jurisdiction then presumably all it would be required to produce was evidence of meeting criteria 'b' and 'x'.

It seems VERY likely that within a short while there could be an alignment of a relatively small number of shared '+' modules as agencies move towards harmonisation of (essential) requirements, although there can be little doubt that the slower 'political' developments may require the retention of some individual national / regional/sectoral specifics (the 'x', 'y', 'z' type).

#### 4.2.2. How might criteria types be identified and clustered into a 'core'?

QA agencies involved in accreditation have through ECA developed a multiple set of bilateral agreements, with a further ambition that multilateral agreements (MULTRA) will follow in the near future. The development of such agreements has been dependent on various forms of mutual trust based on cooperation and to some extent a harmonisation of generic and specific procedures and criteria. TEAM<sup>2</sup> has clearly demonstrated agencies' capacities to work together in such a manner and to agree on mutually shared criteria and

in some cases also added specifics required by one or more, but not all, of the agencies involved.

**Only** as examples if, for example, the criteria type

- a – was concerned with the legitimacy of the institution to offer HE programmes
- b – was concerned with time duration / ECTS requirements (legally required by some, mere guidance for others)
- c – covered alignment of programme outcomes with national/international qualification descriptors
- d – established detailed teaching staff requirements
- e – set out subject specific contents requirements
- f – set out detailed requirements for particular types of teaching and learning support
- g – ensured student assessment focuses on demonstrated achievement of learning outcomes

then a typical example of criteria clustered into an agreed 'core' required by all might be :

- a – legitimacy of the institution(s) offering a programme
- c – alignment of programme outcomes with the Dublin Descriptors or equivalent
- e – (agreement on) detailed subject content
- g – student achievement should focus on their demonstration of achieved learning outcomes (as opposed to, for example, time / workload 'input' measures)

The agencies might typically have different requirements/expectations concerning:

- b – time/workload / ECTS requirements (specific legal requirements in some countries, none in others)
- d – detailed requirements for teaching staff (e.g. numbers of staff and/or qualifications)
- f – detailed requirements for particular types of teaching and learning support (e.g. physical facilities, tutorial support, etc)

and as such each agency would need to determine what it alone might expect as its '+ requirements.

It may be that such an approach could, in a relatively short time, lead to agencies focussing on those criteria that really are the 'necessary and sufficient' for quality assurance.

# 5

## Conclusions

### 5.1. Conclusions from the current 'state of play'

It is clear from the results of the pilots in TEAM<sup>2</sup> that QA agencies can work very well together and reach quality assessment results that they could share. Yet they may still have problems when they wish to convert those assessment results into recommendations for, or actual, accreditation decisions. The constraints seem to be largely in three main areas – differences in:

- the extent to which programme designers and developers are limited by national or institutional requirements that are not essential for others (Italy and Germany, for example, have different requirements concerning the modular basis of programmes; in some countries 'national standards' must be included whilst in others the use of 'reference points' is expected, etc.)
- the extent and level of the detail required for procedures – including for example: the timing (ex ante or ex post for example), the duration (of the procedure and/or how long the result is valid for), the panel composition (the balance of discipline and QA experts, the required presence or not of a labour market representative etc., but at least all seem to agree that a student should be a part of the panel)
- the extent and level of detail of criteria that could, should, or must be applied during an assessment or accreditation.

Further (potential) procedural difficulties can arise through the cultural differences that abound not just between people having different roles but between people having the same or similar roles, but within different institutions and/or regions and countries; when they come together in an united panel they come with different experiences and different expectations. There are also differences that reflect the disciplines that people work within and the extent to which they are more concerned with 'theory leading to practice' or 'practice underpinned by theory'; both are essential in higher education but the pedagogical and assessment models can differ. A shared and comprehensive induction for the entire panel involved in a single accreditation methodology is essential and critical.

### 5.2. Towards a single methodology-'evolution' or a 'paradigm shift'?

The pilots have shown that different approaches can lead to a successful 'conclusion', but the conclusions did not and could not in all cases lead to accreditation decisions, nor did the pilots involve or cover the 'local' external quality assurance requirements of all of the partner HEIs within the consortium being scrutinised (e.g. the pilots did not involve those

QA agencies that are not involved in programme accreditation yet are responsible for institutions contributing to a joint programme consortium).

‘Mutual recognition’ as a means of increasing the efficiency of external quality assurance and their outcomes is a very attractive concept. But the obvious question is: mutual recognition of what? For ECA the ideal is mutual recognition by several of an accreditation decision made by one. Sometimes however the final decisions are beyond the legal competencies of the QA agencies themselves, in terms of making the actual accreditation decision (as opposed to giving advice for it) or fully recognising an accreditation decision made by others. As we have seen above the major barriers now lie not with the ability of QA agencies to work together but with the legal structures and frameworks that they work within.

Legal frameworks change slowly in any single country and the likelihood of numerous national legal systems changing toward a shared goal – quickly – might be thought unlikely. Are there, in the meantime, other approaches that can be pursued that will both support Higher Education and provide evidence-based advice on how and why legal constraints could be removed whilst still retaining the quality assurance that all expect?

Returning to mutual recognition as a ‘mechanism’, several forms were identified in the previous chapter:

1. ‘trust’ between agencies to accept work done solely by one and an acceptance of its outcome/decision
2. ‘trust’ in a shared exercise and its conclusion, ideally with a shared outcome/decision
3. ‘trust’ in a shared exercise but with (the potential for) separate conclusions and separate outcomes/decisions

*1. ‘trust’ between agencies to accept work done solely by one and its outcome/decision*

Within ECA’s programme of work QA agencies with markedly different approaches have, in a small number of intensive pilots, demonstrated that it is both possible and reasonable to ‘trust’ another agency’s work and decisions, based on detailed knowledge of how others work. Building trust through the detailed scrutiny of each other’s work is however intensive and expensive but there is a compelling case that it should be continued and broadened out to involve a wider array of agencies. This would usefully also include some agencies that do not necessarily focus just on ‘accreditation’ as the named outcome but are none the less concerned with the QA of joint programmes.

But procedures and their criteria evolve; how long would the ‘currency’ of trust built during such an exercise be likely to last, particularly in a time of financial crisis (when there are significant pressures to reduce costs of QA?) If the principles are sound, and it seems from the pilots that the ECA principles are, then the ‘currency’ should last so long as there is mutual exchange of information *and agreement* on changes

to procedures and criteria. The ‘evolution’ of mutual benefit between QA agencies should work, but as national and regional governments become increasingly concerned about value for public expenditure, and higher education is often seen as a ‘target’ for cut backs at times of financial crisis, then it may be that sudden changes in the *purposes* of QA may lead to a divergence in the criteria that will then need to be re-addressed.

2. *‘trust’ in a shared exercise and its conclusion, ideally with a shared outcome/decision*

The pilots have demonstrated very clearly that different agencies can build trust in a shared exercise and its conclusion, even if they have different powers concerning that conclusion (e.g. some accredit directly, some only advise). The pilots also showed, however, that the development of a ‘shared exercise’ can be a complex and time-consuming business, and it would not be sensible for each new joint programme accreditation to start afresh.

The pilots have identified some of the critical areas and questions that need to be addressed in building a ‘shared exercise’. There seem to be only a limited set of options within each of the key areas, but this still leaves the potential for ‘permutations’ particularly where some agencies have additional requirements. The experiences and evidence from the pilots could provide the basis for developing guidance, perhaps in a modular form, to assist with similar ‘new’ exercises in building joint evaluations, and a set of guidelines, to go with the ECA principles and Code of Good Practice, could inform the ‘evolution’ of current procedures and their criteria towards greater mutual recognition.

3. *‘trust’ in a shared exercise but with (the potential for) separate conclusions and separate outcomes/decisions*

The pilots showed that such an approach also works and, although it was not the case here, at a worst case scenario, it does have the potential for a ‘split decision’ as the conclusion. The development and refinement of a modular approach to the evaluation of joint programmes might reduce such a risk; this would be an ‘evolutionary’ approach to greater mutual trust and hence recognition, but one that might include wider scope for inclusion of specialist requirements.

All of the above are based on ‘starting from where we are’ and seeking, to a greater or lesser extent, to negotiate a ‘harmonisation/distillation’ of the variety of current procedures and criteria. Within a European or even global higher education ‘space’ it might however be attractive to reconceptualise a procedure that could provide evidence on academic and/or professional standards *and* the quality of the management of programme design and delivery, irrespective of the ‘technical’ outcome of the decision. Not everyone uses, or will continue to use, accreditation of individual programmes for example and such a new approach might integrate evaluation at programme and institutional levels irrespective of the ‘technical outcome’ (an accreditation (decision), a review report, etc.).

In such circumstances it would be necessary to go back to the *purposes* of the evaluation and use these as a 'new' starting point. The focus of mutual recognition would then be on the *purposes of evaluation*, not just the outcomes. It would be important to identify what aspects are regarded by ALL as quality essentials, and then focus on just the evaluation of these - no longer 'evolutionary' approach of one of the types mentioned above but a 'paradigm shift'. Such a reconsideration of QA could and would most likely lead to a refocusing not on the numerous input measures that are currently regarded as 'essentials' but on an evaluation of the QA of *what* students have demonstrated they know, understand and can do, and *how* they were supported during their studies. Many of the currently assessed criteria would become redundant, but it is many of these that currently act as barriers to mutual recognition.

# 6

## The way forward

### 6.1. Concluding summary

TEAM<sup>2</sup> and its pilot projects have examined different approaches to the single methodology for accrediting transnational joint programmes and have demonstrated a variety of routes to a positive outcome. It is clear that QA agencies can work effectively together through several different approaches to the single accreditation of each joint programme, and the project has indicated some of the essential elements associated with a successful outcome. It has also identified some of the remaining problem areas. How these will be overcome will in part depend on the political context in which QA agencies have to work, but it will also be essential for the agencies to work together to refine *their* ideas of precisely what it is they really need to assess in order to come to a QA conclusion. Further, agencies must focus on not only the core ‘necessary’ information they need, but also identify what it is they have to date been gathering and whether or not it really is essential; cost effectiveness is a new imperative.

Much of the experience from TEAM<sup>2</sup> suggests that a ‘modular’ approach to the single accreditation of joint programmes may be an effective way forward. The essential aspects that *all* agencies need to cover would be included within a core, and then additional/extra items, required by some but not all, would be included in non-core ‘modules’. All evaluations would use the core and any new evaluation of a joint programme would add noncore modules to cover additional aspects that the relevant QA agencies needed to address, often on the basis of national regulations. Whilst the core would be unlikely to change – or if so would only do so slowly or in minor ways – the other non-core modules might be expected to change regularly as the particular needs of individual agencies/countries or groups change.

TEAM<sup>2</sup> has been a success and has given a substantial base for further work in the important but complex area of developing a single methodology for the assessment/evaluation and accreditation of (transnational) joint programmes.

### 6.2. A way forward

A ‘paradigm shift’ will not occur everywhere, simultaneously and overnight! But a successful way forward could be achieved through a focus on the shared longer term goals – identified through a rethinking of the purposes of and needs for the QA of higher education – and then a series of ‘evolutionary’ steps, supported by a series of coordinated and targeted exercises and resources, towards that end point.

What are the needs of such a combined approach? Starting at ‘the end’ (what do stakeholders really need from QA?) there is clearly a need for comparable information on study programmes and their quality assurance (including accreditation). The Qrossroads project is demonstrating that this can be provided in a very successful way. The main aim of Qrossroads is to provide information on higher education qualifications awarded by programmes and institutions across Europe that have been quality assured and accredited. The information available through Qrossroads is provided by QA agencies<sup>23</sup>. Each of these agencies is responsible for the administration of their own database. Qualifications are presented within the perspective of the higher education system of which each is a part together with information on the relevant QA agency and recognition authorities.

Further work, focussed within the QA agencies and building on the TEAM<sup>2</sup> successful pilots, might seek to refine a methodology for a single evaluation for joint programmes with growing interest from an increasing diversity of partners; such work would have a high profile. Taking account of points made above, any ‘new’ methodology would probably require (the potential for) some flexibility/optional components within a single overall methodological framework. The principles and foci of evaluation have been established, but the detailed implementation, through the different criteria requirements of various agencies/governments, may require some ‘adaptability’. Further work in this area will be carried out within the EU funded project JOQAR which also focuses on quality assurance of joint programmes and recognition of qualifications awarded by these programmes.

ECA members are committed to an extensive series of bilateral agreements concerning mutual recognition of accreditation decisions/results, but the logical target is to develop these to multilateral agreements (MULTRA). The discussion and development of multilateral agreements between QA agencies will both lead to, and be led by, a renewed discussion on the individual purposes of quality evaluations in higher education. From this a refinement of both the procedure and what the critical criteria are must inevitably follow. To do this will, of course, require the identification of what ALL QA agencies must cover, and also an identification of those aspects that only some agencies will wish to examine. The development of MULTRA provides another rationale for a modular evaluation framework, based on the ECA principles but within which all agencies share core requirements whilst different agencies, or groups of agencies, can identify their specific but additional needs.

A ‘Knowledge Base’ would be an obviously useful and probably essential resource to assist QA agencies to work within such an overall ‘framework’ towards a shared approach to the single evaluation of joint programmes. Such a Knowledge Base might include (in electronic format) a database of literature and guidance on the principles and practices of internal and external quality assurance of joint programmes, and additionally information on the recognition of degrees awarded through joint programmes. It would thus act as a primary reference point for those involved in the development, coordination, quality assurance and

---

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.qrossroads.eu>

recognition of joint programmes and their awards. ECA has started to build up such a knowledge base. Important links to documents on internal and external quality assurance of joint programmes and on recognition of degrees awarded by these programmes can be found on the website of ECA.<sup>24</sup>

Whilst each of these aspects can contribute to the better provision and quality assurance of joint programmes there is, in total, likely to be such a wealth of different types and forms of information that a co-ordinating centre would not only be valuable but probably essential. Such a co-ordination point would, for example, bring together QA agencies and help them to apply the single methodology in ways that enable it to be applicable in a variety of situations and in such a way that the outcomes would be acceptable in a maximum number of countries.

---

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.eaconsortium.net/main/projects/team-ii-/qa---recognition-of-jps>



# Annex 1: Abbreviations

ANECA – Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación  
AQAS – Agentur für Qualitätssicherung durch Akkreditierung von Studiengängen  
BASINS – Research Master Geosciences of Basins and Lithosphere  
CoDe – Joint European Master in Comparative Local Development  
CROHO – Centraal Register Opleidingen Hoger Onderwijs  
CTI – Commission des Titres d’Ingénieur  
ECA – European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education  
ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System  
EHEA – European Higher Education Area  
EMMA – Erasmus Mundus Master Journalism and Media within Globalisation  
ENICs – European Network of Information Centres  
ENQA – the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education  
ESG – Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area  
ESU – European Students’ Union  
ETEPS – Bachelor European Teacher Education for Primary Schools  
EUA – European University Association  
EURASHE – European Association of Institutions in Higher Education  
GAC – the German Accreditation Council  
HAC – the Hungarian Accreditation Committee  
HEIs – Higher Education Institutions  
HSV – the Swedish agency for quality assurance of higher education  
JPs – Joint Programmes  
JDs – Joint Degrees  
KNAW – Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences  
LRC – Lisbon Recognition Convention  
NARICs – National Academic Recognition Information Centres  
NOHA – Joint European Master in International Humanitarian Action  
NVAO – Nederlands - Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie  
QA – Quality Assurance  
SER – Self-Evaluation Report  
SQAA – Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education  
TEAM<sup>2</sup> – Transparent European Accreditation decisions & Mutual recognition agreements<sup>2</sup>  
TEEP II – Transnational European Evaluation Project II  
ZEVA – Zentrale Evaluations- und Akkreditierungsagentur Hannover



# Annex 2: Feedback questionnaires

## Feedback questionnaires for the TEAM<sup>2</sup> pilot procedures- experts

### Background

1. What do you view as the most important current challenges regarding accreditation of joint programmes?

### The procedure

2. Did the self evaluation report contain the necessary information, including enough information on the totality of the programme?

3. Was it difficult to assess the programme based on the selected criteria?

4. Did you find the composition of the expert panel good with regard to assessing the joint programme? Did it work well?

5. What is your impression of the site visit(s)? I.e. was it well planned and executed according to your expectations? And, did you find the information on the totality of the programme during the site visit sufficient?

6. What are your experiences with the writing of the joint accreditation report? Are there any elements/ criteria which you think should be particularly monitored?

### Points for improvements

7. Please mention 3 strengths and 3 weaknesses to the procedure.

8. How to improve the procedure? How do you think such a procedure should ideally be?

9. Other comments?

## **Feedback questionnaires for the TEAM<sup>2</sup> pilot procedures- quality assurance agencies**

### Background

1. What do you view as the most important current challenges regarding accreditation of joint programmes?

### The procedure

2. Did you follow the ECA principles for accreditation of joint programmes in the procedure? If so, what is your impression of their use?

3. What do you think of the self evaluation report from the institutions? (e.g. did it contain the necessary information on the totality of the programme?)

4. What are your points of view on the expert panel? (e.g. views on composition, selection, appointment, functioning)

5. Did the site visit go according to your expectations and capture the totality of the programme?

6. What is your impression of the joint accreditation report? Are there any elements/ criteria which needs to be particularly monitored when writing reports about joint programmes?

### Points for improvements

7. Please mention 3 strengths and 3 weaknesses to the procedure.

8. What do you think is needed in order for across border cooperation between QA agencies on accreditation procedures to function more efficiently?

9. Other comments?

## **Feedback questionnaire for the TEAM<sup>2</sup> pilot procedures- coordinators of the joint programmes**

### Background

1. What do you view as the most important current challenges regarding accreditation of joint programmes?

### The procedure

2. Was it feasible to write a joint self evaluation report which included information on the totality of the programme? And, where applicable, was it difficult to interpret and include the information required by the different agencies involved in the self report?

3. What are your impression of the site visit (s)?

4. Did the report from the experts meet the expectations? I.e. did it capture the jointness of the programme in a good way?

5. All in all, did you find the procedure feasible?

### Points for improvements

6. Please mention 3 strengths and 3 weaknesses to the procedure.

7. How to improve the procedure? How do you think such a procedure should ideally be?

8. Other comments?



# Annex 3: Terminology

**B**elow some of the terminology related to joint programmes is outlined, explained and defined. These definitions reflect the terminology used by ECA regarding joint programmes and joint degrees.

## Accreditation

“A formal and independent decision indicating that a programme and/or an institution meets certain predefined quality standards.”<sup>25</sup>

## 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”*<sup>26</sup>. 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”*<sup>27</sup>. 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.

---

<sup>25</sup> European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (<http://www.grossroads.eu/glossary>)

<sup>26</sup> Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European region, Lisbon 1997, Art. 1

<sup>27</sup> **Bologna Follow-Up Group**, Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, 2005, p. 30

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"*<sup>28</sup>. 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 project<sup>29</sup> 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"*<sup>30</sup>

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

### Joint qualification (also known as "joint degree")

In the Analytical Quality Glossary<sup>31</sup> 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 Degrees<sup>32</sup> 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*

<sup>28</sup> **European University Association**, *EMNEM - Guidelines for quality enhancement in European joint master programmes*, 2006

<sup>29</sup> **ENQA**, *Methodological report of the Transnational European Evaluation Project II*, 2006

<sup>30</sup> **European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education**, *Principles for accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes*, 2007, p. 1

<sup>31</sup> **Harvey, L.**, *Analytic Quality Glossary*, Quality Research International, 2004–9

<sup>32</sup> **Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications**, *Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees*, 2004

*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.*

Generally, the use of *diploma* is not encouraged since most ENIC-NARICs consider diplomas to be qualifications of lower levels of education, thus not higher education. Part a of the definition seems to indicate that there are institutions that award two degrees: a national degree and a joint degree. It is very unlikely that both these degrees would be acknowledged as the nationally recognised higher education qualification. Part c of the definition is nowadays not regarded as a joint degree but rather as the award of multiple degrees.

The Methodological Report<sup>33</sup> of ENQA's TEEP II project also assessed the validity of the Recommendation's 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 higher education institutions that offer the programme (but not necessarily by all);
- The institutions involved in the joint degree do not award any other (national) degree indicating that the awarded joint degree is nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme;
- 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 higher education institutions that offer the joint programme, attesting the successful completion of this joint programme. It is a single document nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme and signed by the competent authorities (rectors, vice-chancellors, ...) of the institutions involved in the joint degree.

---

<sup>33</sup> ENQA, Methodological report of the Transnational European Evaluation Project II, 2006, p. 10





**e | c | a**

european consortium for accreditation

[www.eacaconsortium.net](http://www.eacaconsortium.net)  
[www.grossroads.eu](http://www.grossroads.eu)