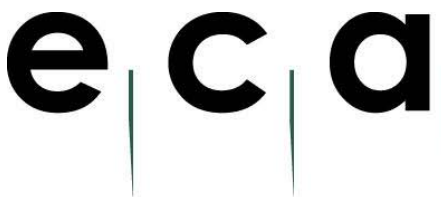


Feasibility study: a coordination point for joint programmes



Axel Aerden & Kaja Braathen



european consortium for accreditation

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1. Introduction

European higher education is increasingly characterised by developments in its internationalisation. It has become quite clear that internationalisation has many different forms. One of the means to facilitate internationalisation of higher education is through increased and focussed cooperation between higher education institutions in different countries. Another means is increased student mobility. Both these trends are captured by the steadily rising number of joint programmes offered in Europe. According to European statistics there are currently around 2,500 joint programmes offered in Europe¹. While new developments foster creativity, they also pose new challenges. Previous projects (e.g. the TEEP and TEAM projects) have shown that quality assurance of joint programmes and recognition of the degrees awarded by them is troublesome for the higher education institutions (HEIs), the national authorities responsible for quality assurance (QA) of higher education and for recognition authorities. Based on experiences from these projects the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA) is seeking solutions to these challenges through the JOQAR project- “Joint programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of degrees awarded”. The project is

According to European statistics there are currently around 2,500 joint programmes offered in Europe.

The European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) is seeking solutions for the challenges these joint programmes are confronted with.

funded by the Erasmus Mundus Action 3 programme of the European Commission.

The overall aim of the project is to facilitate single accreditation procedures of joint

programmes and the recognition of degrees awarded by these programmes. To this end a **European coordination point for external quality assurance and accreditation of joint**

¹ http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/Stocktaking_report_2009_FINAL.pdf

programmes will be set up. The coordination point will be able to assist HEIs and QA agencies when seeking to undergo external QA procedures of joint programmes. Additionally the coordination point can provide important information on QA of joint programmes and recognition of degrees. In order to customise the Coordination point as much as possible to the needs of the joint programmes and the quality assurance agencies surveys on current experiences with external QA of joint programmes, recognition of degrees and the outline of the coordination point was sent out both to coordinators of joint programmes and to European QA agencies in the beginning of 2011. The main focus of the surveys were to establish *what kind of information/ assistance on quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of degrees the respondents would find useful to be provided by the coordination point.*

The results of these surveys are presented in this report; part 1 of the development of the Coordination Point. Based on this information the JOQAR Steering Group with input from the JOQAR Stakeholders Group and the JOQAR Accreditation Group will decide on an outline of the coordination point and develop detailed work-flow charts.

2. Methodology

This report is the result of two separate surveys: the first among coordinators of joint programmes and the second among quality assurance agencies (QAAs).

The survey was drawn up by a small group of representatives of quality assurance agencies. This group first identified key issues related to the quality assurance of joint programmes and the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes.

Respondents were presented with closed questions (tick boxes) and where appropriate they were given the possibility to clarify their answers. The intention of this approach was not only to augment the comparability of the results but also to increase the response rate.

The first survey, the joint programmes survey, was sent out in February 2011 and addressed to all the coordinators of Erasmus Mundus master's programmes and to a handful of coordinators of other joint programmes. Over a period of six weeks, the coordinators of fifty joint programmes responded to the questionnaire. The respondents of the joint programmes survey cover a wide range of European countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK. Additionally one of the respondents is situated in South Africa. The joint programmes involved have consortium partners in, at least, the following countries; Australia, China, Czech Republic, India, Iran, Ireland, Japan, Lithuania, Morocco, Mexico, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, South- Korea, Sudan, Thailand, Tunisia, Uganda and the USA in addition to the countries above.

The results of this survey are presented in chapter 3 "The perspective of the joint programmes".

The second survey, the quality assurance agencies survey, was sent out in March 2011 and was addressed to all the full members of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education involved in the assessment of programmes and the project partners of the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education. Over a period of four weeks, nineteen quality assurance agencies send back a filled-in survey. The respondents

of this survey are from the following countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

The results of this survey are presented in chapter 4. "The perspective of the quality assurance agencies".

The material gathered by these two surveys and the discussions in the JOQAR Accreditation Group and the JOQAR Steering Group generated the results and conclusions detailed in this feasibility report. Although the respondents cover a large group of the joint programmes and quality assurance agencies, the report doesn't claim to be comprehensive. This report can however be regarded as a thorough and substantiated study into the feasibility of a European coordination point for external quality assurance and accreditation of joint programmes.

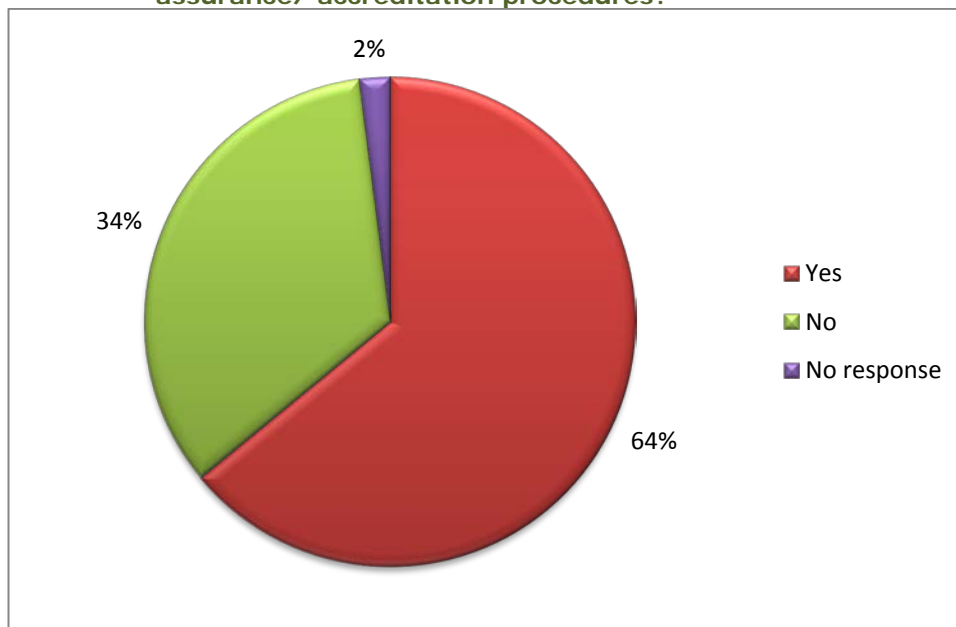
3. The perspective of the joint programmes

This chapter presents the results of the questionnaire sent to the joint programme coordinators. These results are presented in three sections. The first section presents the experiences the respondents have with external QA, the second the requirements they encounter and the third their appraisal of the proposed Coordination Point.

3.1. Experience with external quality assurance or accreditation

The coordinators of joint programmes were asked if they had already undergone an external quality assurance and/or accreditation procedure. The majority of the respondents (64%) reported that they did.

Figure 1. Has your joint programme already undergone external quality assurance/ accreditation procedures?



Those who have already undergone such procedures were asked what kind of procedures these were. Sixty one per cent reported that they have undergone several national

procedures, while twelve per cent have undergone one single (joint) procedure. The rest of these respondents have experienced a mix of national procedures and joint procedures.

Figure 2. If yes, what kind of procedure?



Following this the coordinators were given the opportunity to clarify their responses. The clarifications showed that the procedures undergone can be divided into four categories: national accreditation procedures; procedures carried out by professional network organisations; procedures carried out by the European Commission's Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA); and, other procedures initiated by the HEIs themselves. Examples of each of the categories can be found below:

1) National accreditation/ recognition procedures such as:

- Accreditation/ evaluation by national assessment agencies (single or joint)
- Validation by the University panel (England)
- Evaluation of the Quality of the Courses in Materials-Chemical Engineering of Belgian Flemish Universities.

2) Procedures carried out by Professional networks/ organisations such as:

- ECTNA (European Chemistry Thematic Network Association)
- EAALS (European Accreditation Agency for the Life Sciences)
- AIPEA (International association for the study of clay minerals).

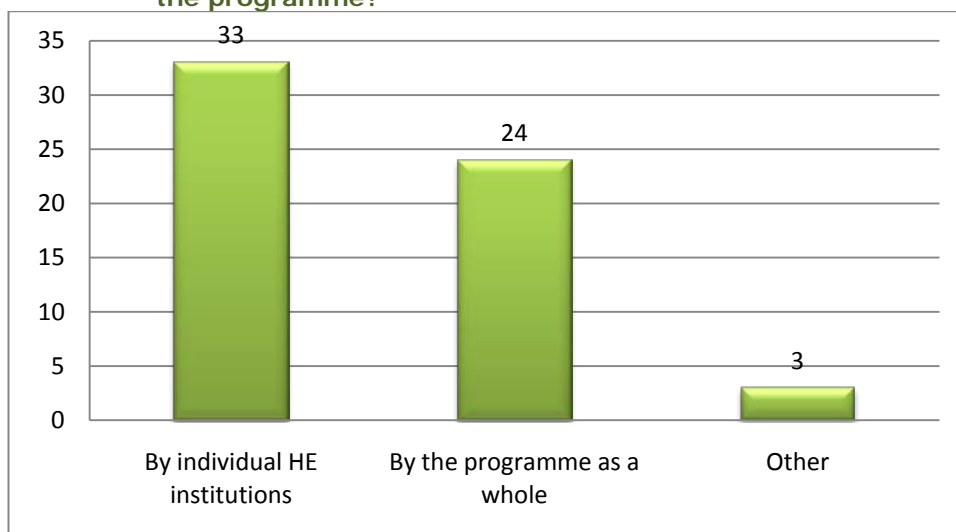
3) Procedures carried out by the EACEA, such as:

- Identification of EMMC good practices (organized and implemented by EACEA and ECOTEC, 2009)
- ECOTEC, the Commission’s framework contractor for the ex-post evaluation of the first phase of the Erasmus Mundus Programme
- Monitoring visit EACEA
- EMQA (Erasmus Mundus Quality Assessment – ECORYS)
- Interim Evaluation of EU-US and EU-Canada Cooperation Agreements (ECORYS).

4) Procedures initiated by the HEIs themselves, such as:

- “A scholar was commissioned to review all academic aspects of the programme”
- “In its development the programme was underwritten by external validation and international benchmarking. It is subject to the regulations governing each EU consortium partner-university’s system of external quality assurance and accreditation. This ensures that standards of internationally respected peers are sought and acted upon. In this regard the consortium board has established contact with one respected peer of international reputation to undertake the external quality assurance for each edition of the programme (once every two years)”.

Figure 3. How were the requirements of external quality assurance and/or accreditation considered during the development of the programme?

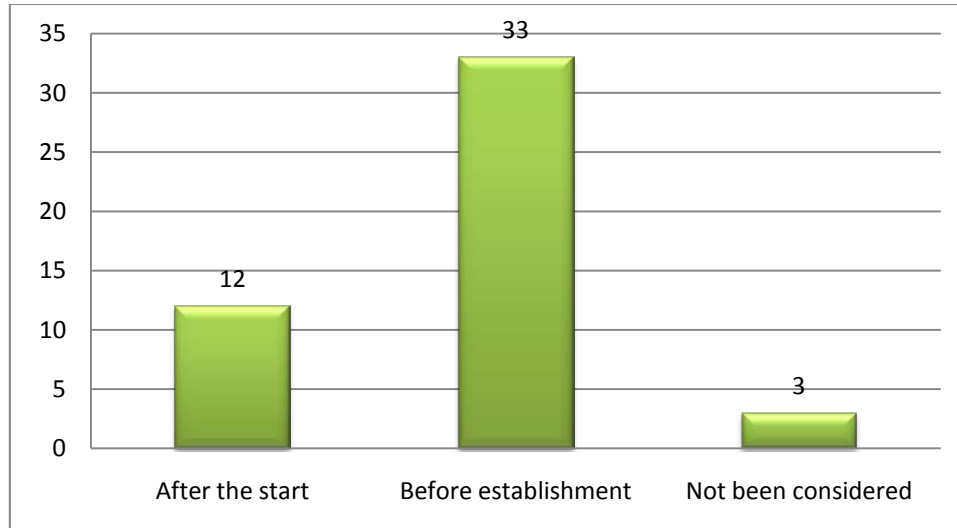


The programme coordinators were asked to describe whether they took the programme as a whole into account when considering the external QA/accreditation requirements or if they limited their approach to each individual HEI. The answers showed that both approaches are rather common. More than half (55%) reported that they only look at the individual HEIs when considering external QA, while 40% cent reported that they take the whole programme into account.

The latter group consists both of programmes that only look at the programme as a whole and programmes that combine this approach with also looking at each individual HEI. This approach is explained in one of the clarification: quality assurance concerned the programme as a whole, but that accreditation was according to national structures.

Following the question on **how** EQA/ A requirements were considered the programme coordinators were asked **when** they considered these requirements.

Figure 4. At what stage of planning were the requirements of any external quality assurance/accreditation first specifically considered?



Most common is it to consider these requirements **before the start** of the programme (69%). One fourth of the respondents (25%) consider these requirements **after** the establishment. A small group clarified that they considered external quality assurance/accreditation both before the establishment and after the start of the

programme. Only three programme coordinators (6 %) reported that they had not considered these requirements at all.

3.2. Requirements and procedures

The coordinators were asked to identify the sources they consult when searching for information on external QA requirements and procedures. The answers show that the coordinators search for information on 3 different levels, i.e. the European level, national level and the level of the higher education institutions. The answers also show that when sources on a European level are consulted this is always done in conjunction with consultation of sources on a national level or the level of the HEIs.

Examples of sources consulted on each level:

1) The European level

- Official EACEA documentation/ seminars
- ENQA (e.g. “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education”, 2007)
- EUA documents (e.g. “Guidelines for Quality Enhancement in European Joint Master Programmes”, 2006)
- JOIMAN conference and website
- ECA website

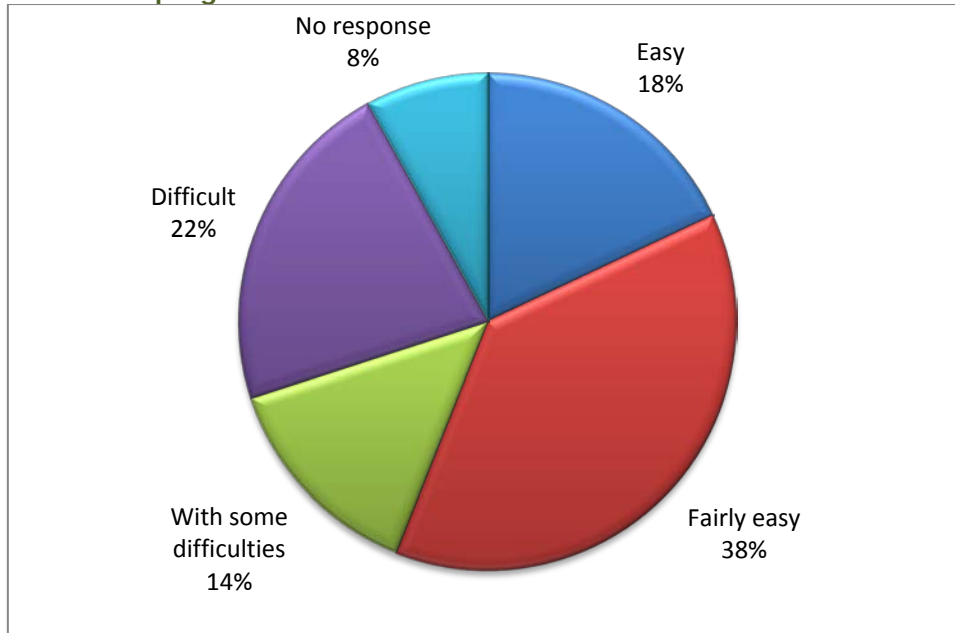
2) National sources

- National Erasmus Mundus structures
- National structures such as DAAD
- QAAs
- Ministries of HE

3) HEIs: Consortium members and others

- Units at HEIs concerned with QA
- International offices
- University education services
- Legal services
- Good practices from other EM master programmes

Figure 5. How easy was it to identify the relevant external quality assurance/accreditation requirements for the joint programme?



The programme coordinators were also asked to indicate how easy it was to identify the relevant external EQA/A requirements for the joint programme. The majority, 56 % of the respondents, stated that this had been easy or fairly easy, while 36 % found this fairly difficult or difficult. Those who described this process to be fairly difficult or difficult were asked to specify their answers. When categorising the answers, three main difficulties appear. These main difficulties are related to:

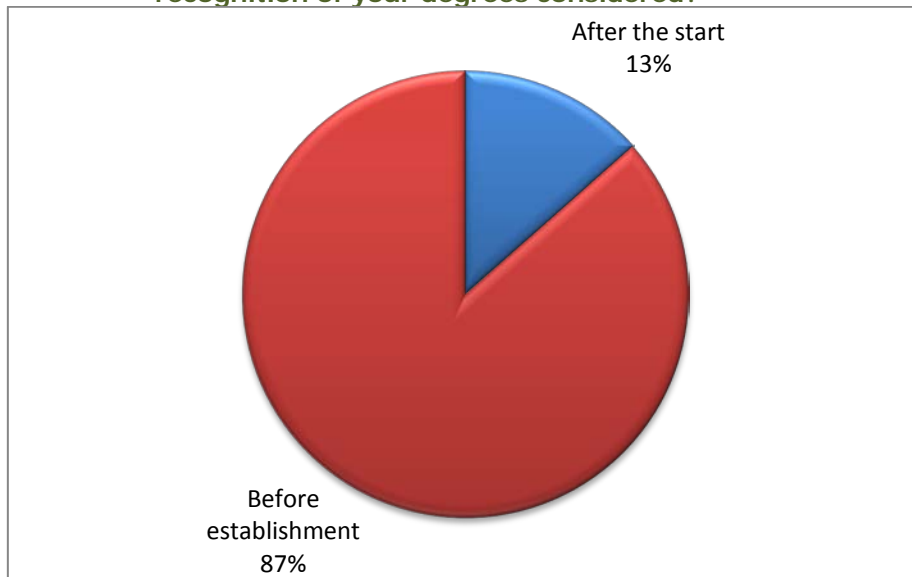
- 1) The fact that joint programmes/ joint degrees are rather new phenomena:
 - Until recently *national legislation for joint degrees* was not in place in some of the countries
 - It is not something usual yet so programmes have to look for the right external quality assurance
 - Information on requirements for joint accreditation is difficult to obtain, as some universities have *little experience* on this
 - The problem is that everything is organized per country and that there are yet no standards for joint programmes, so also the people in the university were not sure what to do and were too much focused on the national rules.
- 2) Differences between the national QA/accreditation/HE systems:
 - For joint study programmes, this is not clear: *there are national requirements which are totally different from each other*. All partner universities will need to

follow the national quality assurance processes. In some countries, this happens by audits and in some countries, there is an accreditation process.

- The most important obstacles are related to *legal and bureaucratic constraints*. It is difficult to connect the different laws of countries with the offer of joint diplomas. In addition, psychology is a protected title in different countries.
 - It is not clearly established which are the quality requirements and when it is clear they usually change from country to country.
 - For example, in Finland (the coordinating country) the system of external quality assurance was very different from that in some other countries.
 - The national accreditation system and regulations, for instance in Norway, is not adapted to the idea of joint programmes - but problems were solved.
- 3) That there is no overarching European contact point or QA/accreditation for joint programmes:
- There seems to be *no central access point* , *no central procedures regarding the accreditation procedures for joint programmes* due to the lack of a European accreditation organisation.
 - Only applicable to national accreditations. No external quality assurance on joint programmes.
 - Since EACEA did not receive the competence for accreditation of EMMC, the situation remains difficult.
 - No European Accreditation Agency.

The respondents were asked at what stage of the planning and how they considered issues related to the recognition of degrees. Here, 87 % reported that they considered the recognition of the degrees issues before the start of the programme. One in eight respondents (13%) reported they do this after the start.

Figure 6. At what stage of planning and how were issues related to the recognition of your degrees considered?



The clarifications to this question show, however, that it is not necessarily the recognition of the degree that is considered before the start of the programme: “The course started as multiple degrees and finally was a joint degree in 2006, before the first graduation.” The responses might actually indicate that consortium partners readily agree on what kind of degrees they are going to award, i.e. a joint degree or double/ multiple degrees. The question tried to address issues such as degree design, programme recognition and diploma supplement.

3.3. The Coordination Point

The programmes were asked at what stage of planning or running a joint programme they would consider it useful to get external support by a Coordination Point regarding external quality assurance/ accreditation/ recognition. The respondents were not presented with closed responses in order to leave ample opportunity to provide ECA with feedback.

One quarter of the respondents (76%) indicate that they find it most useful to receive guidance from a coordination point prior to the running of the programme. Additionally, a large number of the respondents (45%) would find it useful to receive support in the very beginning of the programme and after the programme has been running for some years:

- Depending on the role of this "coordination point", it might be useful at any stage: in the planning stage, a coordination point could help the consortium with information about the requirements for quality assurance; during the running of the programme a coordination point might help, for example, in organizing a pool of external quality assessors with experience in joint courses.
- Procedures for the recognition / accreditation are surely fundamental for a good planning and management of a course of study. For that reason it would be optimal to start them at the very outset. However, this is not always possible for economic reasons (an external evaluation is often an expensive process) and for reasons related to the need of a trial period before it is possible to highlight strengths and weaknesses of a course.
- 1) when the course is selected (suggestions on how to start)
2) during the course (suggestions on how to undergo external quality assurance)
3) support of the Ministry for joint diploma.

None of the respondents pointed out that they wouldn't consider a coordination point useful at any stage of planning or running a joint programme.

By the end of the survey the joint programme coordinators got the opportunity to state freely what kind of support they would want from the Coordination point. Common suggestions were to display best practices, provide information on QA procedures/ joint degrees and provide help in setting up a joint programme. More specifically the respondents highlighted;

- 1) **Best practices and FAQ on:** QA/ accreditation/ recognition; obstacles identified by other consortia and possible solutions; ask an expert service; practical examples.
- 2) **Information on QA procedures:** national requirements/systems in European countries/ concrete elements of QA and accreditation (validity of accreditation, time line, costs); which type of procedures are possible?; how to proceed when undergoing a joint accreditation process? (concrete steps, documents to fill in and attach); list of agencies; check lists.

“A contact point where you could get information about national accreditation requirements for university programmes within EU/ EEA as well as 3rd countries/ accreditation requirements in all European countries”

- 3) **Information on joint degrees:** clear un-doubtable information regarding legislation and recognition of joint degrees in Europe; strategies to interconnect legal systems of different countries; the difference between double, multiple and joint degrees; current status with the degree recognition between EU- non EU countries.

“A consortium will of course make sure that the awarded degrees are recognised in their own country, but it is of equal importance that the degrees are recognized within EU as a whole. This kind of information is best provided by an EU contact point, specializing at these issues.”

- 4) **Help in setting up a joint programme:** requirements and expectations for inclusion of all members in planning, implementation and evaluation processes; evaluation standards for teaching and learning experiences; guidelines for resolution of potential inequities among partner institutions in terms of capacity to present different parts of the programme; help with design/ feedback; help to adapt system/ organization difficulties (visas, bank, insurance...) and cultural difficulties; contact point for several problems and practical questions.
- 5) **Other:** not only an advisory role, but mediating role in solving the problems at stake; contact person available through phone and email; set up of a communication network between liaison offices and relevant academic authorities of European universities on these topics; identical European rules for accreditation of joint programmes.

Finally, the responding coordinators of joint programmes were asked which questions regarding quality assurance of joint programmes and recognition of degrees awarded by joint programmes were not answered sufficiently during the process of establishing the

joint programme. The comments corresponded, not surprisingly, with the answers to the previous question where the coordinators could put forward what they wanted the Coordination Point to contain. The main unresolved issues were related to the following:

1) Issuing and recognition of the degrees awarded

Some examples:

- *“The need for joint degrees is clearly established but the means and methods to achieve it are not explicit and available.”*
- *“Procedures about recognition of degrees awarded and ECTS, related to national and international systems.”*
- *“In general all the legal questions, which change significantly from country to country, and which makes very difficult to harmonize criteria and minimum requirements, and makes extremely difficult to issue joint degrees.”*

2) National vs. international (joint) accreditation procedures

Some examples:

- *“Since the national procedures are quite clear, support of international accreditation is missing.”*
- *“There are no quality assurance systems for joint programmes. Quality assurance is organised at national level separately in the participating universities.”*
- *“No European equivalent to each partner's national quality assurance procedures.”*
- *“We are establishing our own quality assurance based on experience of partner but we have not enough time to look for any international/EU standards due to the difficulty to fit with the different national quality assurances.”*
- *“How to satisfy legal requirements of different countries at the same time?”*
- *“The national accreditation systems are not prepared for dealing with Erasmus Mundus joint degrees (integrated programmes and extensive mobility of students). As far as we know, there is no communication between the different national accreditation entities regarding international joint programmes involving their countries. “*

3) Recognition of accreditation decisions

Some examples:

- *“The main question is how a joint program should be accredited. Now our program will be accredited based on the national rules of NVAO, and afterwards we will probably have to ask accreditation of the program in the partner countries based on equivalence. It would be better if the program is accredited as a whole and based on that accreditation also immediately recognized (accredited) in the whole EU.”*
- *“Mutual recognition of national quality assurance schemes.”*
- *“Creation of a European legal framework, assuring homogeneity in national procedures, validity of accreditation in one European country in the other European countries.”*
- *“It worked out well for our programme, but I think that it would be useful to have at the European level a coordination point that assures the mutual recognition of quality assurance procedures and accreditation of programmes. Ideally, an international body should be created that is responsible for the evaluation of the quality and the accreditation of international programmes that fulfill specific criteria.”*

4) Other

Some examples:

- *“There is a need for a "joint programme quality assurance handbook" giving precise policy to observe and some help on how to implement it.”*
- *“Involvement/responsibilities of non-teaching staff. Services available to the students not strictly related to the study-program (i.e. accommodation, transport...).”*
- *“Focus on impact on employability and cultural integration of the students.”*

“The interaction/professional relationship between the web that is the coordinating university AND the other partner-universities AND other personnel who make a significant contribution to the programme is at the nub of any quality assurance and requires perceptive inquiry”.

The second survey, the quality assurance agencies survey, was sent out in March 2011 and was addressed to all the full members of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) involved in the assessment of programmes and the project partners of the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA). Over a period of four weeks, nineteen quality assurance agencies responded to the questionnaire. The respondents of this survey are from the following countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. The results of this survey are presented in chapter 5 “The perspective of the quality assurance agencies”.

The material gathered by these two surveys and the discussions in the JOQAR Accreditation Group and the JOQAR Steering Group generated the results and conclusions detailed in this feasibility report. Although the respondents cover a large group of the joint programmes and quality assurance agencies, one cannot claim that the report is comprehensive. This report can, however, be regarded as a thorough and substantiated study into the feasibility of a European coordination point for external quality assurance and accreditation of joint programmes.

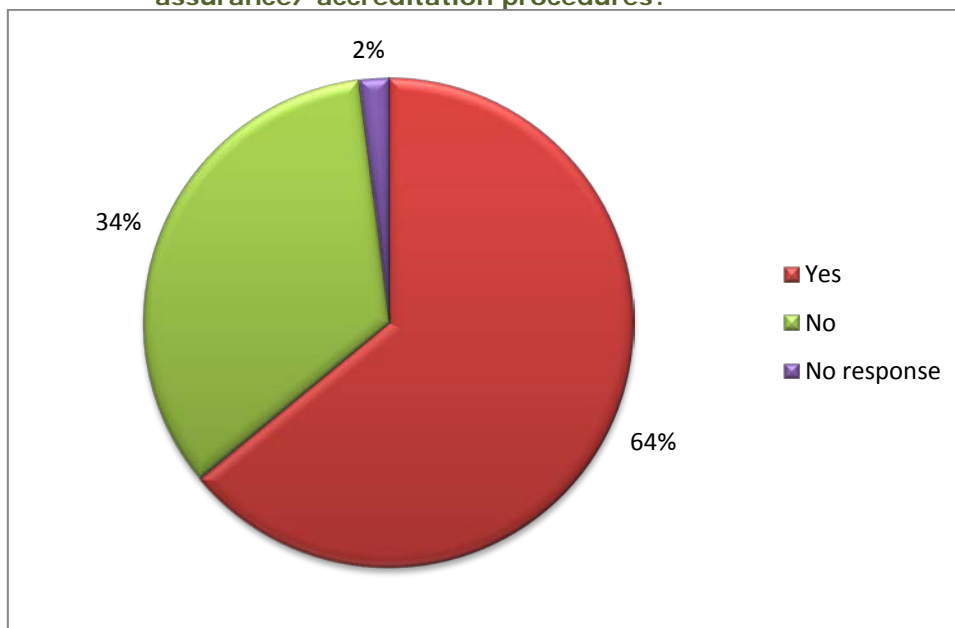
4. The perspective of the joint programmes

This chapter presents the results of the questionnaire sent to the joint programme coordinators. These results are presented in three sections. The first section presents the experiences the respondents have with external QA, the second the requirements they encounter and the third their appraisal of the proposed Coordination Point.

4.1. Experience with external quality assurance or accreditation

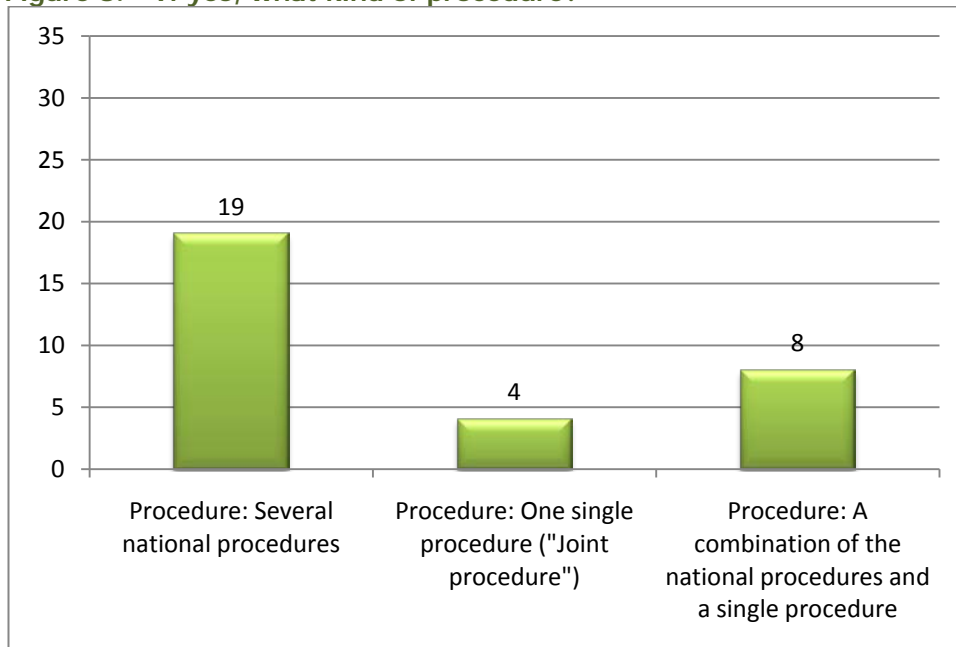
The coordinators of joint programmes were asked if they had already undergone an external quality assurance and/or accreditation procedure. The majority of the respondents (64%) reported that they did.

Figure 7. Has your joint programme already undergone external quality assurance/ accreditation procedures?



Those who have already undergone such procedures were asked what kind of procedures these were. Sixty one per cent reported that they have undergone several national procedures, while twelve per cent have undergone one single (joint) procedure. The rest of these respondents have experienced a mix of national procedures and joint procedures.

Figure 8. If yes, what kind of procedure?



Following this the coordinators were given the opportunity to clarify their responses. The clarifications showed that the procedures undergone can be divided into four categories: national accreditation procedures; procedures carried out by professional network organisations; procedures carried out by the European Commission's Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA); and, other procedures initiated by the HEIs themselves. Examples of each of the categories can be found below:

5) National accreditation/ recognition procedures such as:

- Accreditation/ evaluation by national assessment agencies (single or joint)
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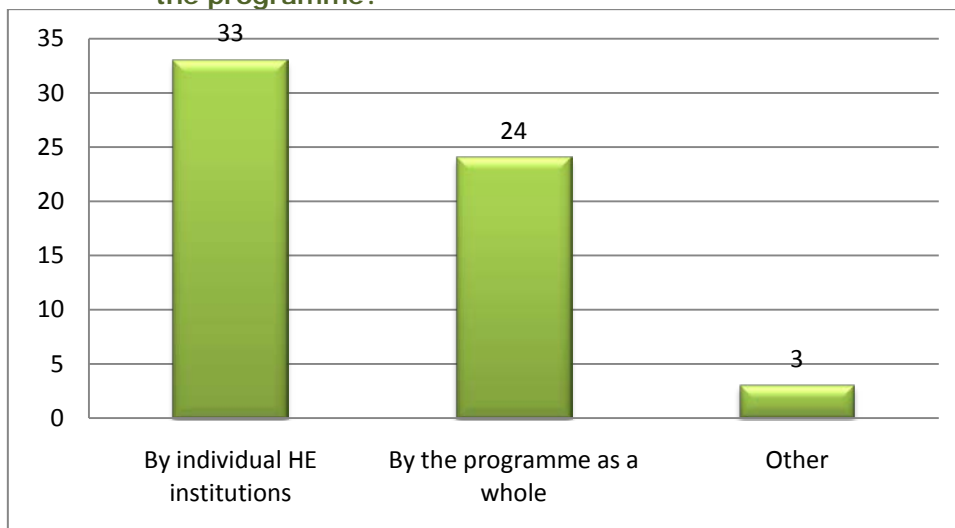
7) Procedures carried out by the EACEA, such as:

- Identification of EMMC good practices (organized and implemented by EACEA and ECOTEC, 2009)
- ECOTEC, the Commission’s framework contractor for the ex-post evaluation of the first phase of the Erasmus Mundus Programme
- Monitoring visit EACEA
- EMQA (Erasmus Mundus Quality Assessment – ECORYS)
- Interim Evaluation of EU-US and EU-Canada Cooperation Agreements (ECORYS).

8) Procedures initiated by the HEIs themselves, such as:

- “A scholar was commissioned to review all academic aspects of the programme”
- “In its development the programme was underwritten by external validation and international benchmarking. It is subject to the regulations governing each EU consortium partner-university’s system of external quality assurance and accreditation. This ensures that standards of internationally respected peers are sought and acted upon. In this regard the consortium board has established contact with one respected peer of international reputation to undertake the external quality assurance for each edition of the programme (once every two years)”.

Figure 9. How were the requirements of external quality assurance and/or accreditation considered during the development of the programme?



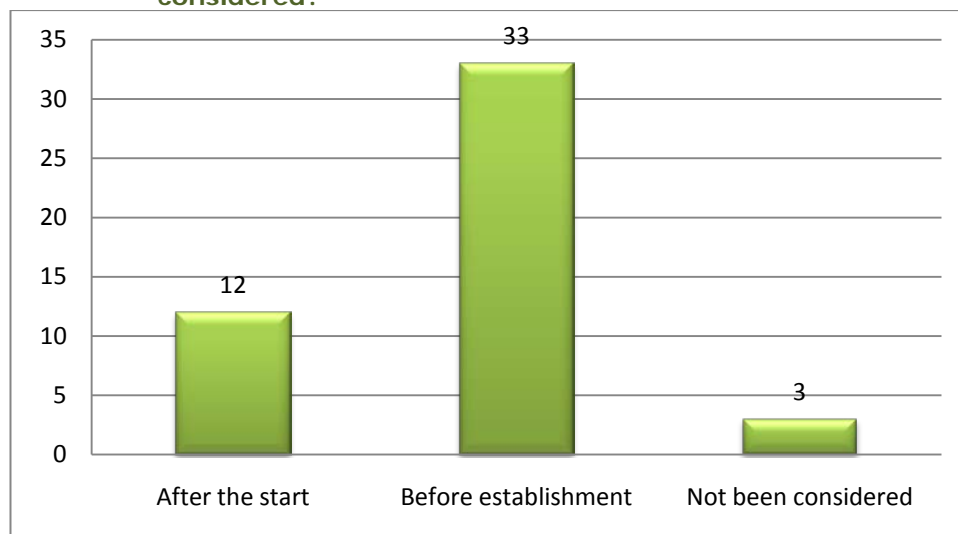
The programme coordinators were asked to describe whether they took the programme as a whole into account when considering the external QA/accreditation requirements or if

they limited their approach to each individual HEI. The answers showed that both approaches are rather common. More than half (55%) reported that they only look at the individual HEIs when considering external QA, while 40% cent reported that they take the whole programme into account.

The latter group consists both of programmes that only look at the programme as a whole and programmes that combine this approach with also looking at each individual HEI. This approach is explained in one of the clarification: quality assurance concerned the programme as a whole, but that accreditation was according to national structures.

Following the question on **how** EQA/ A requirements were considered the programme coordinators were asked **when** they considered these requirements.

Figure 10. At what stage of planning were the requirements of any external quality assurance/accreditation first specifically considered?



Most common is it to consider these requirements **before the start** of the programme (69%). One fourth of the respondents (25%) consider these requirements **after** the establishment. A small group clarified that they considered external quality assurance/accreditation both before the establishment and after the start of the programme. Only three programme coordinators (6 %) reported that they had not considered these requirements at all.

4.2. Requirements and procedures

The coordinators were asked to identify the sources they consult when searching for information on external QA requirements and procedures. The answers show that the coordinators search for information on 3 different levels, i.e. the European level, national level and the level of the higher education institutions. The answers also show that when sources on a European level are consulted this is always done in conjunction with consultation of sources on a national level or the level of the HEIs.

Examples of sources consulted on each level:

4) The European level

- Official EACEA documentation/ seminars
- ENQA (e.g. “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education”, 2007)
- EUA documents (e.g. “Guidelines for Quality Enhancement in European Joint Master Programmes”, 2006)
- JOIMAN conference and website
- ECA website

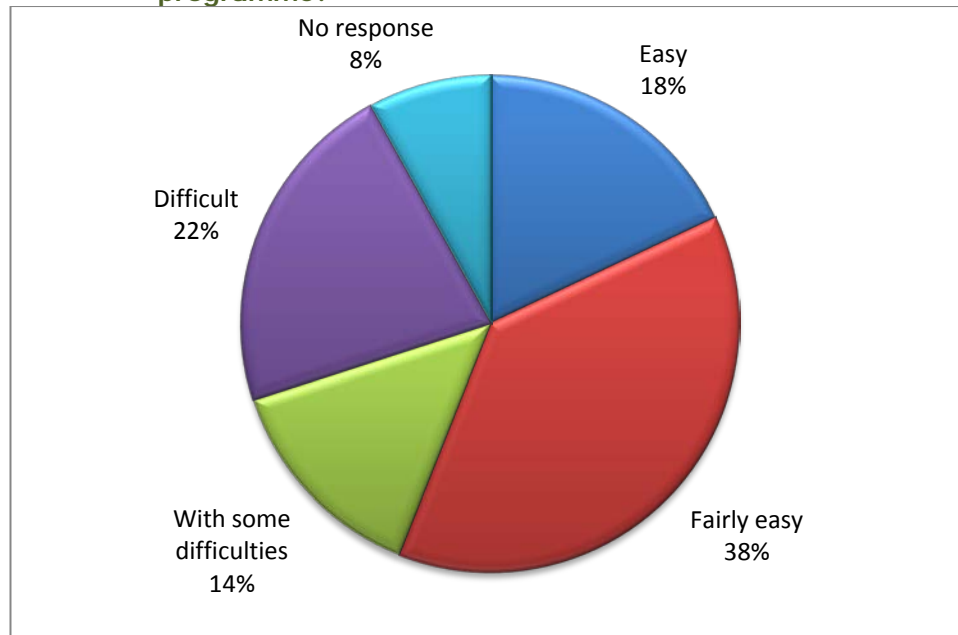
5) National sources

- National Erasmus Mundus structures
- National structures such as DAAD
- QAAs
- Ministries of HE

6) HEIs: Consortium members and others

- Units at HEIs concerned with QA
- International offices
- University education services
- Legal services
- Good practices from other EM master programmes

Figure 11. How easy was it to identify the relevant external quality assurance/accreditation requirements for the joint programme?



The programme coordinators were also asked to indicate how easy it was to identify the relevant external EQA/A requirements for the joint programme. The majority, 56 % of the respondents, stated that this had been easy or fairly easy, while 36 % found this fairly difficult or difficult. Those who described this process to be fairly difficult or difficult were asked to specify their answers. When categorising the answers, three main difficulties appear. These main difficulties are related to:

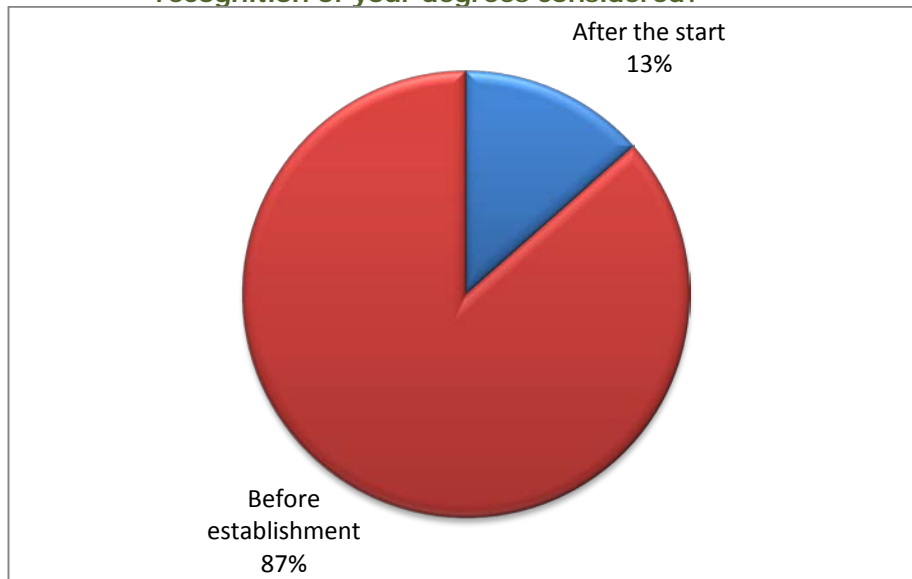
- 4) The fact that joint programmes/ joint degrees are rather new phenomena:
 - Until recently *national legislation for joint degrees* was not in place in some of the countries
 - It is not something usual yet so programmes have to look for the right external quality assurance
 - Information on requirements for joint accreditation is difficult to obtain, as some universities have *little experience* on this
 - The problem is that everything is organized per country and that there are yet no standards for joint programmes, so also the people in the university were not sure what to do and were too much focused on the national rules.
- 5) Differences between the national QA/accreditation/HE systems:
 - For joint study programmes, this is not clear: *there are national requirements which are totally different from each other*. All partner universities will need to

follow the national quality assurance processes. In some countries, this happens by audits and in some countries, there is an accreditation process.

- The most important obstacles are related to *legal and bureaucratic constraints*. It is difficult to connect the different laws of countries with the offer of joint diplomas. In addition, psychology is a protected title in different countries.
 - It is not clearly established which are the quality requirements and when it is clear they usually change from country to country.
 - For example, in Finland (the coordinating country) the system of external quality assurance was very different from that in some other countries.
 - The national accreditation system and regulations, for instance in Norway, is not adapted to the idea of joint programmes - but problems were solved.
- 6) That there is no overarching European contact point or QA/accreditation for joint programmes:
- There seems to be *no central access point*, *no central procedures regarding the accreditation procedures for joint programmes* due to the lack of a European accreditation organisation.
 - Only applicable to national accreditations. No external quality assurance on joint programmes.
 - Since EACEA did not receive the competence for accreditation of EMMC, the situation remains difficult.
 - No European Accreditation Agency.

The respondents were asked at what stage of the planning and how they considered issues related to the recognition of degrees. Here, 87 % reported that they considered the recognition of the degrees issues before the start of the programme. One in eight respondents (13%) reported they do this after the start.

Figure 12. At what stage of planning and how were issues related to the recognition of your degrees considered?



The clarifications to this question show, however, that it is not necessarily the recognition of the degree that is considered before the start of the programme: “The course started as multiple degrees and finally was a joint degree in 2006, before the first graduation.” The responses might actually indicate that consortium partners readily agree on what kind of degrees they are going to award, i.e. a joint degree or double/ multiple degrees. The question tried to address issues such as degree design, programme recognition and diploma supplement.

4.3. The Coordination Point

The programmes were asked at what stage of planning or running a joint programme they would consider it useful to get external support by a Coordination Point regarding external quality assurance/ accreditation/ recognition. The respondents were not presented with closed responses in order to leave ample opportunity to provide ECA with feedback.

One quarter of the respondents (76%) indicate that they find it most useful to receive guidance from a coordination point prior to the running of the programme. Additionally, a large number of the respondents (45%) would find it useful to receive support in the very beginning of the programme and after the programme has been running for some years:

- Depending on the role of this "coordination point", it might be useful at any stage: in the planning stage, a coordination point could help the consortium with information about the requirements for quality assurance; during the running of the programme a coordination point might help, for example, in organizing a pool of external quality assessors with experience in joint courses.
- Procedures for the recognition / accreditation are surely fundamental for a good planning and management of a course of study. For that reason it would be optimal to start them at the very outset. However, this is not always possible for economic reasons (an external evaluation is often an expensive process) and for reasons related to the need of a trial period before it is possible to highlight strengths and weaknesses of a course.
- 1) when the course is selected (suggestions on how to start)
2) during the course (suggestions on how to undergo external quality assurance)
3) support of the Ministry for joint diploma.

None of the respondents pointed out that they wouldn't consider a coordination point useful at any stage of planning or running a joint programme.

By the end of the survey the joint programme coordinators got the opportunity to state freely what kind of support they would want from the Coordination point. Common suggestions were to display best practices, provide information on QA procedures/ joint degrees and provide help in setting up a joint programme. More specifically the respondents highlighted;

- 6) **Best practices and FAQ on:** QA/ accreditation/ recognition; obstacles identified by other consortia and possible solutions; ask an expert service; practical examples.
- 7) **Information on QA procedures:** national requirements/systems in European countries/ concrete elements of QA and accreditation (validity of accreditation, time line, costs); which type of procedures are possible?; how to proceed when undergoing a joint accreditation process? (concrete steps, documents to fill in and attach); list of agencies; check lists.

“A contact point where you could get information about national accreditation requirements for university programmes within EU/ EEA as well as 3rd countries/ accreditation requirements in all European countries”

- 8) **Information on joint degrees:** clear un-doubtable information regarding legislation and recognition of joint degrees in Europe; strategies to interconnect legal systems of different countries; the difference between double, multiple and joint degrees; current status with the degree recognition between EU- non EU countries.

“A consortium will of course make sure that the awarded degrees are recognised in their own country, but it is of equal importance that the degrees are recognized within EU as a whole. This kind of information is best provided by an EU contact point, specializing at these issues.”

- 9) **Help in setting up a joint programme:** requirements and expectations for inclusion of all members in planning, implementation and evaluation processes; evaluation standards for teaching and learning experiences; guidelines for resolution of potential inequities among partner institutions in terms of capacity to present different parts of the programme; help with design/ feedback; help to adapt system/ organization difficulties (visas, bank, insurance...) and cultural difficulties; contact point for several problems and practical questions.

- 10) **Other:** not only an advisory role, but mediating role in solving the problems at stake; contact person available through phone and email; set up of a communication network between liaison offices and relevant academic authorities of European universities on these topics; identical European rules for accreditation of joint programmes.

Finally, the responding coordinators of joint programmes were asked which questions regarding quality assurance of joint programmes and recognition of degrees awarded by joint programmes were not answered sufficiently during the process of establishing the

joint programme. The comments corresponded, not surprisingly, with the answers to the previous question where the coordinators could put forward what they wanted the Coordination Point to contain. The main unresolved issues were related to the following:

5) Issuing and recognition of the degrees awarded

Some examples:

- *“The need for joint degrees is clearly established but the means and methods to achieve it are not explicit and available.”*
- *“Procedures about recognition of degrees awarded and ECTS, related to national and international systems.”*
- *“In general all the legal questions, which change significantly from country to country, and which makes very difficult to harmonize criteria and minimum requirements, and makes extremely difficult to issue joint degrees.”*

6) National vs. international (joint) accreditation procedures

Some examples:

- *“Since the national procedures are quite clear, support of international accreditation is missing.”*
- *“There are no quality assurance systems for joint programmes. Quality assurance is organised at national level separately in the participating universities.”*
- *“No European equivalent to each partner's national quality assurance procedures.”*
- *“We are establishing our own quality assurance based on experience of partner but we have not enough time to look for any international/EU standards due to the difficulty to fit with the different national quality assurances.”*
- *“How to satisfy legal requirements of different countries at the same time?”*
- *“The national accreditation systems are not prepared for dealing with Erasmus Mundus joint degrees (integrated programmes and extensive mobility of students). As far as we know, there is no communication between the different national accreditation entities regarding international joint programmes involving their countries. “*

7) Recognition of accreditation decisions

Some examples:

- *“The main question is how a joint program should be accredited. Now our program will be accredited based on the national rules of NVAO, and afterwards we will probably have to ask accreditation of the program in the partner countries based on equivalence. It would be better if the program is accredited as a whole and based on that accreditation also immediately recognized (accredited) in the whole EU.”*
- *“Mutual recognition of national quality assurance schemes.”*
- *“Creation of a European legal framework, assuring homogeneity in national procedures, validity of accreditation in one European country in the other European countries.”*
- *“It worked out well for our programme, but I think that it would be useful to have at the European level a coordination point that assures the mutual recognition of quality assurance procedures and accreditation of programmes. Ideally, an international body should be created that is responsible for the evaluation of the quality and the accreditation of international programmes that fulfill specific criteria.”*

8) Other

Some examples:

- *“There is a need for a "joint programme quality assurance handbook" giving precise policy to observe and some help on how to implement it.”*
- *“Involvement/responsibilities of non-teaching staff. Services available to the students not strictly related to the study-program (i.e. accommodation, transport...).”*
- *“Focus on impact on employability and cultural integration of the students.”*
- *“The interaction/professional relationship between the web that is the coordinating university AND the other partner-universities AND other personnel who make a significant contribution to the programme is at the nub of any quality assurance and requires perceptive inquiry.”*

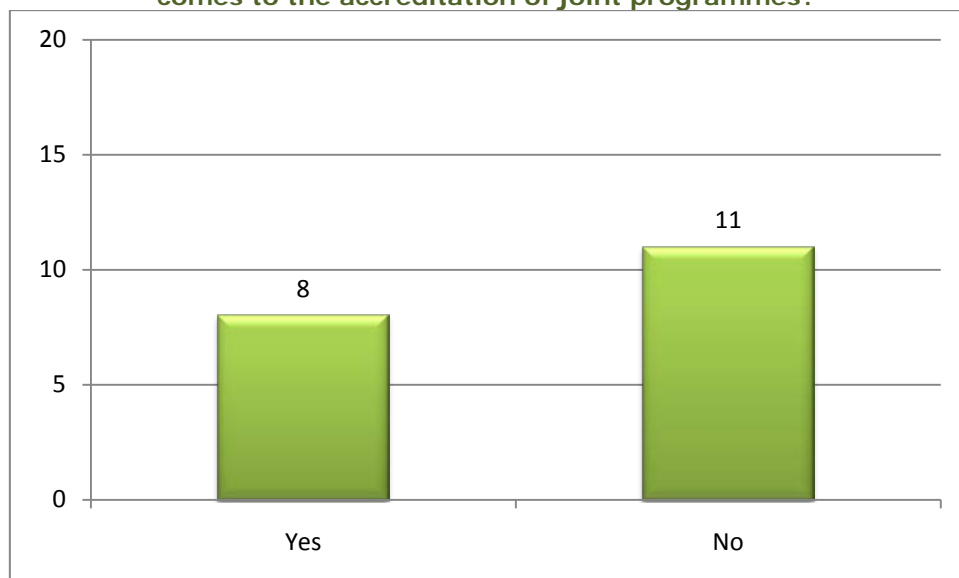
5. The perspective of the quality assurance agencies

This chapter presents the results of the survey sent to the quality assurance agencies. These results are presented in two separate parts. The first part portrays the experiences the respondents have with external QA and recognition of degrees awarded, while the second part outlines the wishes of the agencies regarding the coordination point.

5.1. Experience and practice

Of the responding agencies, 58% currently assess and accredit joint programmes by using the same procedures they apply regarding single, national programmes. The other 42% of the respondents indicate that they do have specific procedures for joint programmes.

Figure 13. Does your agency have specific procedures in place when it comes to the accreditation of joint programmes?



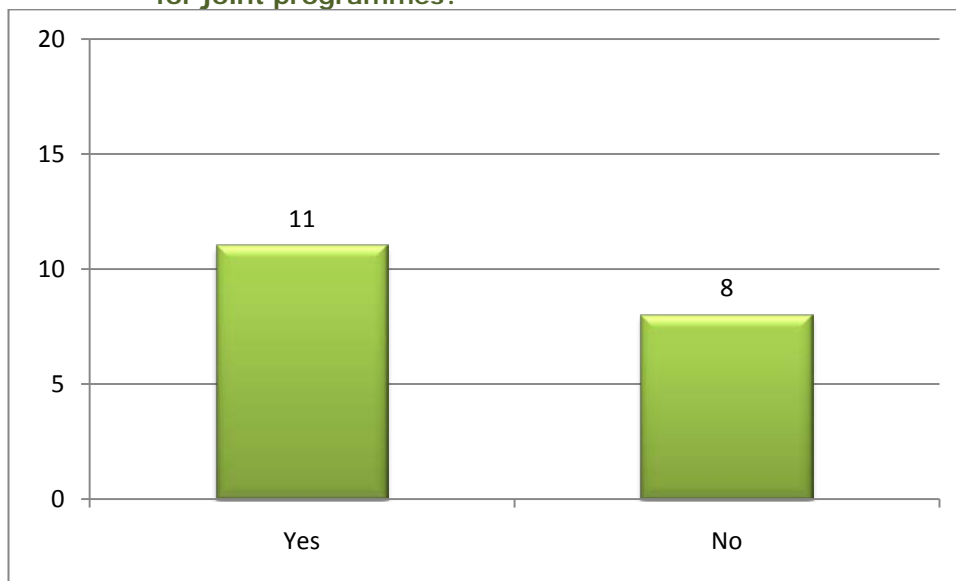
Most respondents indicate that they have implemented or are using the *ECA Principles for Accreditation Procedures regarding Joint Programmes*.

All respondents with specific procedures have clarified the elements which they additionally consider when assessing and accrediting joint programmes. The following elements are highlighted:

- The non-national partners in the joint programme have to be adequately accredited or recognised according to their national legislation;
- The joint programme has to provide a jointly elaborated self-evaluation report;
- The information provided should include the consortium agreement that outlines the responsibilities of the partners;
- The number of experts and the required expertise is modified to fit the assessment of a joint programme.

The first question tried to get information regarding the theoretical approach towards joint programmes but the proof of the pudding is of course in eating it. The second question asked which agencies had already assessed and accredited joint programmes. Here, almost two thirds of the agencies (58%) replied that they had indeed carried out procedures regarding joint programmes.

Figure 14. Has your agency already carried out accreditation procedures for joint programmes?

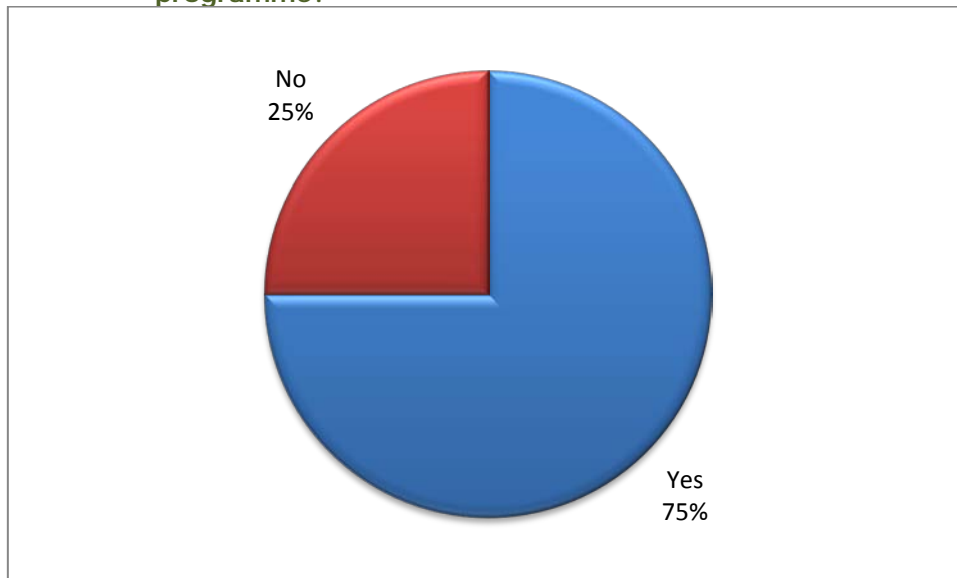


Of the group that did not carry out any accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes, only one agency already has established specific procedures in case it would undertake such an accreditation procedure.

The agencies that responded that they had already carried out accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes were asked if they had included in the procedure any kind of

cooperation with other competent quality assurance agencies. Only one in four of the respondents answered that they had not established such cooperation.

Figure 15. Was there any kind of cooperation with other quality assurance agencies of other countries involved in the joint programme?



The agencies that had established such a cooperation (75%) were asked to specify the involvement of quality assurance agencies of other countries in a procedure regarding joint programmes. Most respondents here list the agencies they cooperated with and the formal cooperation arrangement. The list of agencies is quite extensive and broad: sixteen distinct European and two African agencies are mentioned. The cooperations referred to vary in scope from actual joint procedures over project-based cooperations to information exchange arrangements.

To establish the current need for information, the agencies were asked to indicate which sources they did or would consult to get information on accreditation requirements of other countries involved. This question was included as an open question. Respondents were not presented with a list of options to which they could, if necessary, add other options. This approach was used in order to get the widest possible scope of sources in use. However, all the sources included in the responses can however be limited to just five categories. These five categorised sources are:

- The competent quality assurance agencies in the other countries of the institutions involved in the joint programme;
- Websites (e.g. national agencies, Qrossroads) that provide information about the other countries or the institutions involved in the joint programme.;
- The national authorities (e.g. the Ministry of Education) of the other countries of the institutions involved in the joint programme;
- The European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education;
- The competent recognition bodies of the institutions involved in the joint programme and their ENIC-NARIC network;

Of the responding agencies, two thirds (68%) did or would consult the other competent quality assurance agencies directly. This however does not mean that the other agencies do not use the other agencies as a source of information. All the other agencies would however limit themselves to using the website of the other quality assurance agencies.

Other websites, such as Qrossroads, are additionally mentioned. In fact, 37% of all responding agencies refer to websites as a source of information.

One in five of the agencies (21%) mentions national authorities, which in almost all cases are the ministries responsible for higher education. The European Consortium for Accreditation is included as a source of information by the same percentage of agencies (21%). This is actually quite a high percentage considering not all respondents are ECA members. The last categorised source is the ENIC-NARIC network and national recognition bodies. They are brought up by 11% of the responding agencies.

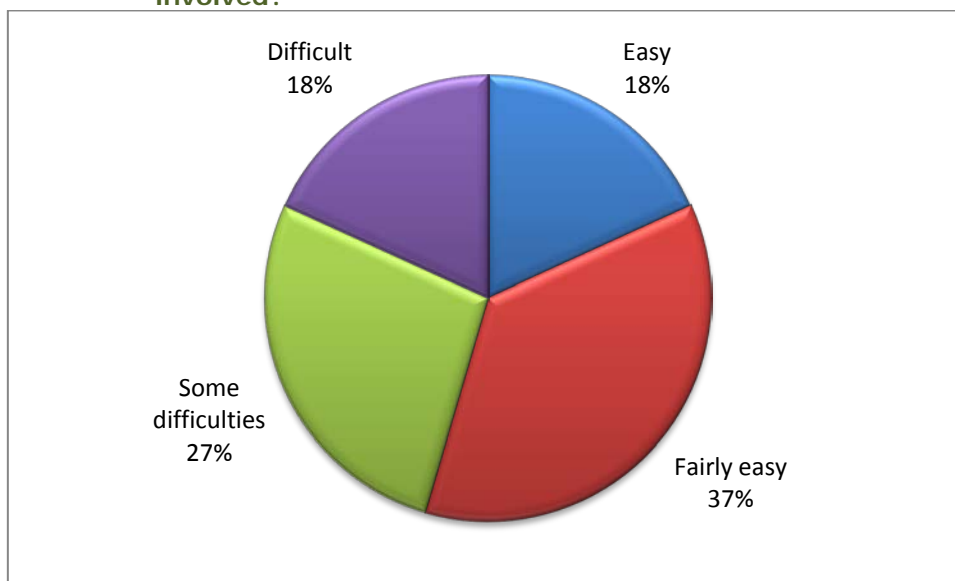
Figure 16. Which sources did/would you consult to get information on accreditation requirements of other countries involved?

Competent quality assurance agency/-ies	68%
Websites (e.g. agencies, Qrossroads)	37%
National authorities (e.g. Ministry of Education)	21%
European Consortium for Accreditation	21%
ENIC-NARIC (Recognition) Network	11%

The agencies were then asked how easy it was to identify the relevant accreditation requirements for joint programmes. Given the fact that all agencies easily listed their main information sources it is probably not a surprise that a majority of the responding agencies found this easy (18%) or fairly easy (37%). Here, we can see a correlation with the agencies

that indicate direct contact with the other accreditation agencies as their main source of information about accreditation requirements. Still, 45% of the responding agencies did not think that the identification of the relevant accreditation requirements was easy. Of all respondents, 27% had some difficulties and almost one in five (18%) thought that this was difficult.

Figure 17. How easy was it to identify the relevant accreditation requirements for the joint programme of other countries involved?



The difficulties encountered all seem to arise from the fact that information sources are outdated or contradict each other. Responding agencies indicate that websites do not indicate the validity (e.g. last update) or explicitly refer to the original source or legislation. One of the agencies explicitly states that ministries, NARICs and other agencies sometimes contradict each other.

The agencies that had already carried out at least one accreditation procedure in collaboration with (an) other agency(ies), were asked to identify the most difficult areas of cooperation. This question was included as an open question. Respondents were not presented with a list of options to which they could, if necessary, add other options. This approach was used in order to get a complete list of difficult areas. However, all the areas

included in the responses can be limited to just four categories. These four categorised sources are:

- The use and interpretation of each other's accreditation methodology, procedure, standards and system;
- The production and implementation of the final report, result and decision;
- The cooperation arrangement and the definition of responsibilities between the agencies;
- The communication towards the institution and/or programme and the procedural guideline for the joint programme (e.g. self-evaluation report).

All of the responding agencies (100%) answered that the use and the interpretation of each other's accreditation methodology, procedure, standards and/or system was the most difficult area of collaboration with another agency. In addition, two thirds (67%) of the respondents point towards the production and implementation of the final report, result and decision as another difficult area of cooperation.

Figure 18. If you carried out the accreditation procedure in collaboration with (an) other agency(ies), please identify the most difficult areas of cooperation

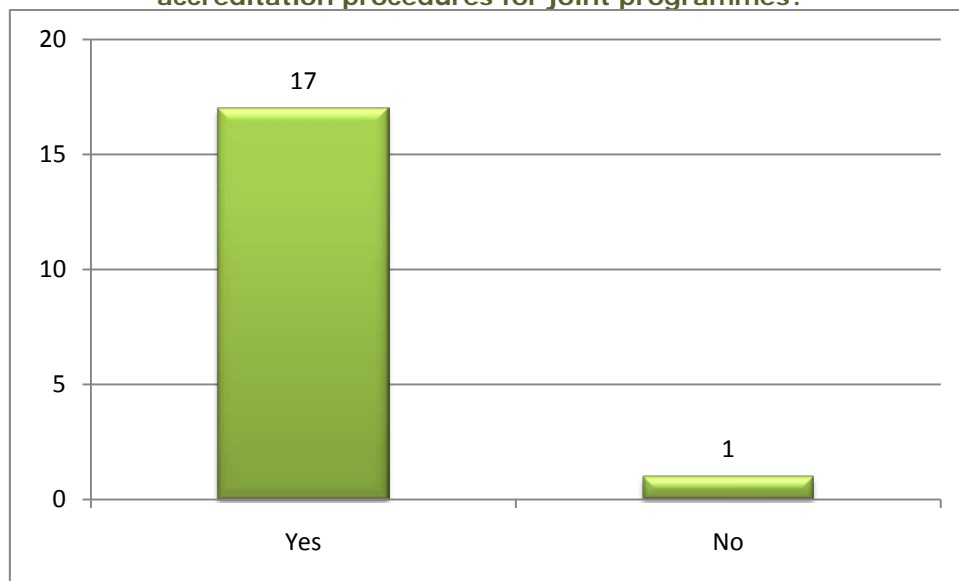
The use & interpretation of each other's standards/system	100%
The final outcome, result and decision	67%
Definition of responsibilities	33%
Guidelines for the programme (e.g. self-evaluation report)	22%

One third of the agencies (33%) indicate that the cooperation itself was difficult. The responding agencies here referred to the agreement to cooperate and the definition of responsibilities between the agencies. The last difficult area of the cooperation between agencies (22%) is the communication towards the institution and/or the joint programme. Here, the procedural guideline for the joint programme, such as the way the self-evaluation report has to be written, is explicitly mentioned.

5.2. The Coordination Point

The quality assurance agencies were asked whether they would consider it an added value to get information on a methodology for assessing joint programmes and additional assistance for the planning and/or carrying out of single accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes. All but one agency responded that they would value this type of assistance.

Figure 19. Would you consider it an added value to get information on a methodology and assistance for planning/carrying out single accreditation procedures for joint programmes?



The respondents were asked to clarify their response. The one negative respondent answered that they had “developed an Assessment Guide, which includes some 80 quality criteria in the form of questions and definitions on the benchmarks. This serves as a basis for the higher education institutions when producing their self-documentation file.”

The other responding agencies clarified the added value they foresaw extensively.

Figure 20. Clarification regarding the added value of a coordination point

Mutual learning and sharing good practice	47%
The promotion of cross-border accreditation	47%
Economies of scale	33%
Transparency and satisfying relevant national authorities	33%
Efficiency	20%
European dimension in quality assurance	13%

The two topmost added values mentioned by half of the responding agencies (47% each) are the facts that a coordination point would (1) contribute to mutual learning between agencies including the centralised sharing of good practices and experiences and (2) promote the use of accreditation results across borders.

One third of the responding agencies (33%) list economies of scale as an added value. This refers mainly to the fact that joining forces in a coordination point will increase the ability of individual agencies to deal with joint programmes. Efficiency is also mentioned as an added value by 20% of the agencies. This then refers to the potential to cope more smoothly with accreditation procedures.

One third of the responding agencies (33%) mention the increased transparency between agencies and the potential to satisfy all relevant national authorities about accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes as an added value of a coordination point. A mere 13% of the responding agencies point out that a coordination point would contribute to enhancing the European dimension in quality assurance.

To conclude, the quality assurance agencies were asked about their wish list for the proposed coordination point. The wish list refers to the kind of support or information they would consider helpful and relevant to receive from the coordination point. This was again an open question (without a list of options). Underneath, all the responses have been categorised in a table.

Figure 21. What kind of support/ information provided by a Coordination Point would you consider to be helpful and relevant? (“Wish list”)

Library of national requirements, legislations and regulations	80%
Good practices in the assessment of joint programmes	67%
Facilitator when assessing joint programmes and for cross-border recognition of accreditation	67%
List of all international joint programmes and relevant accreditation status/requirement	40%
Library of national higher education and quality assurance systems	33%
Information to facilitate recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes	13%

The responses of four out of five agencies (80%) can be categorised as a wish for a library of national requirements, legislations and regulations. Included in the responses are of

course references to the requirements for joint programme consortia and for the award of joint degrees. Two agencies propose not to limit this effort to the European Higher Education Area.

Two thirds (67%) of the agencies wish to be provided with information about good practices in the assessment of joint programmes. One of the agencies would like to see a list of ongoing procedures and applied methodologies.

The same amount of agencies (67%) want the coordination point to act as a facilitator when assessing joint programmes and/or as a facilitator for the cross-border recognition of accreditation results. Here, agencies also refer to the exchange of experienced (trained) experts. One of the elements proposed are joint programme contact persons at all quality assurance agencies.

According to 40% of the responding agencies, the coordination point should publish a list of all international joint programmes and relevant accreditation status/requirement. One third of the agencies' responses (33%) can be categorised as a wish for a library of national higher education and quality assurance systems (including mutual recognition agreements), while just 13% want the coordination point to present information that will facilitate the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes.

6. Conclusions

Judging from the high feedback-rate and the detailed answers to the survey's questions there definitively seems to be a demand amongst both the joint programmes and the QA agencies for a Coordination Point regarding joint programmes. A large proportion of the programme coordinators stated that they find

A large proportion of the programme coordinators stated that they find external QA of joint programmes challenging, and that they struggle to collect all the information required.

external QA of joint programmes challenging, and that they struggle to collect all the information required. The same goes for degree issues. The survey results also show that the coordinators mainly use national information sources when searching for information about external QA requirements for their joint programme. This contradicts somehow the

On the whole, a lack of information on an overarching/ European level is detectable.

otherwise international characteristics of the joint programmes. The agencies, too, use mainly national sources of information (agencies, ministries, ENIC/NARICs etc.). On the whole, a

lack of information on an overarching/ European level is detectable. For this reason, one main focus of the Coordination Point should be **the provision of information**: having a "knowledge base" on the quality assurance of joint programmes which contains information both targeted towards joint programmes and the QA agencies. Possible contents could be procedural guidelines (step-by-step procedures) how to develop a set of standards to be recognised by all involved QA agencies, recognition aspects, information on national accreditation requirements (of as many countries as possible) and a compilation of frequently asked questions. Furthermore, there should be the opportunity to ask concrete questions. The Coordination Point then should be able to forward these questions to the appropriate contact person.

The second focus of the Coordination Point should be **the coordination of single/joint accreditation procedures**. The Coordination Point should give advice to programmes and agencies on how to carry out a joint/single accreditation procedure, provide a methodology and have an exchange of good practices in this respect. The Coordination Point cannot carry out the actual procedures as this is linked to national competencies, but it can link programmes and agencies together and assist the process. It should compile a list of contacts within the agencies who already have some experience with the accreditation of joint programmes and who can function as mentors for others.

The surveys show that external support by a Coordination Point would be appreciated during the complete “life span” of a joint programme, but that the emphasis should be on the planning and starting phase of the programme.

Finally, when setting up the Coordination Point it is essential to clarify its role carefully. It is clear that the Coordination Point cannot meet all the needs the programme coordinators have put on

It is clear that the Coordination Point cannot meet all the needs the programme coordinators have put on the table.

the table. It cannot, and should not, take over the responsibilities of the ENIC- NARICs or provide services that are given by the EACEA such as guidance on implementation of Erasmus Mundus programmes. What it can do, however, **is to offer information which is relevant for joint programmes and to provide contacts between the programmes and the QA agencies**. The main focus of the Coordination Point should thus be on external QA of joint programmes from a European point of view.

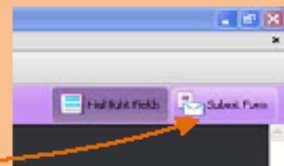
Annex 1: Programme coordinator's survey

About this form

The eForm is an interactive PDF form that requires Adobe Reader software to be installed on your computer for you to be able to complete and submit it. You can download a free copy here: <http://get.adobe.com/reader/otherversions/>.

You can fill in this eForm like you would fill in any other document on your computer. You do not need an internet connection when completing this form. When you choose to complete the survey at a later time, you can save this eForm by using the keyboard combination Ctrl+Shift+s or by clicking Save (as) in the File menu.

When you are ready, you can submit your answers by clicking on the **Submit Form** button in the top right menu of your Adobe Reader.



YOUR INSTITUTION

If you prefer to provide an anonymous return please complete Annex 1 to inform us about the number and distribution of partners in the joint programme

Your University: _____

Name of joint programme: _____

CONTACT PERSON

Full name: _____

Email address: _____

PART 1 –QUALITY ASSURANCE & RECOGNITION

Question 1.

Has your joint programme already undergone external quality assurance/accreditation procedures?

- No
- Yes

If yes, what kind of procedure?

- Several (national) procedures (*please specify below*)
- One single procedure covering the accreditation requirements of more than one involved country ("Joint procedure") (*please specify below*)
- A combination of the two procedures above (*please specify below*)

Question 2.

How were the requirements of external quality assurance and/or accreditation considered during the development of the programme?

- By individual Higher Education Institutions as required (e.g. by their national requirements)
- By the programme as a whole
- Other (*please specify below*)

Question 3.

At what stage of planning were the requirements of any external quality assurance/accreditation first specifically considered?

- Before the establishment of the programme
- After the start of the programme
- Have not been considered at all

If you have any comments, you can include comments here:

Question 4.

Which sources did you/the consortium consult to get information regarding external quality assurance/accreditation requirements and procedures?

Question 5.

How easy was it to identify the relevant external quality assurance/accreditation requirements for the joint programme?

- Easy
- Fairly easy
- With some difficulties (please clarify below)
- Difficult (please clarify below)

If `with some difficulties`, or `difficult`, what were the difficulties?

Question 6.

At what stage of planning and how were issues related to the recognition of your degrees considered?

- Before the establishment of the programme
- After the start of the programme
- Have not been considered at all

If you have any comments, you can include comments here:

PART 2 – ESTABLISHMENT OF A COORDINATION POINT FOR JOINT PROGRAMMES

Question 7.

At what stage of planning/running a joint programme would it be useful to get external support by a Coordination Point regarding external quality assurance/accreditation/recognition?

Question 8.

What kind of support/ information provided by a Coordination Point would you consider to be helpful and relevant? ("Wish list")

Question 9.

From your experience, which questions regarding quality assurance of joint programmes and recognition of degrees awarded by joint programmes have not been answered sufficiently during the process of establishing of your joint programme?

Question 10.

Would you be willing to participate in a pilot accreditation procedure (2012) in the framework of the JOQAR project?

- Yes (Please make sure that you have provided an e-mail address under contact details)
- No

Thank you for your cooperation!

If you want to return the survey anonymously, you are asked to fill in the annex below.

Use the submit button below or on top right corner of your Adobe Reader.

Annex 1 – only for those who return the questionnaire anonymously

Please provide factual information about the number and distribution of partners in the joint programme

- A. How many partners (Higher Education Institutions) are involved in the consortium providing the joint programme? _____
- B. In how many countries are the consortium's HEIs located? _____
- C. How many of those countries require _____
- i. Accreditation of the programme at the co-ordinating HE institution? _____
- Accreditation at any of the other HE institutions? _____
- ii. Accreditation of the co-ordinating HE institution? _____
- Accreditation of the partner HE institutions? _____

Annex 2: QA Agencies' survey



european consortium for accreditation



Your Agency

Name of your agency:

Contact person:

E-mail address:

Question

Does your agency have specific procedures in place when it comes to the accreditation of joint programmes?

- No
 Yes

Question

Has your agency already carried out accreditation procedures for joint programmes?

- No
 Yes

Question

Which sources did/would you consult to get information on accreditation requirements of other countries involved?

Question:

Would you consider it an added value to get information on a methodology and assistance for planning/carrying out single accreditation procedures for joint programmes?

- Yes
 No

Can you please clarify your response?

Question

What kind of support/ information provided by a Coordination Point would you consider to be helpful and relevant? ("Wish list")

Final question

In case your agency is planning to conduct an accreditation procedure of a joint programme in 2012 would you be interested to participate in a pilot in the framework of the JOQAR project?

- Yes
 No

Thank you for your cooperation!

All results will be made available on our website: www.eaconsortium.net

Use the button below to submit your filled in questionnaire by e-mail

Submit by email

Save Form As

Page 3 of 3

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