



Thematic Analysis: European Approach for Quality

Assurance of Joint Programmes

August 2024

Prepared as part of the IMINQA project



Co-funded by
the European Union

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Introduction

The thematic analysis was intended to support the discussions within a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on the implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (further: the European Approach; EA). The PLA was organised as part of the IMINQA project in the framework of the Thematic Peer Group on Quality Assurance (QA) of the Bologna Follow-Up Group.

The analysis offers an overview of status quo in 2023 of the implementation efforts regarding the European Approach. The analysis also delves into the various national and institutional challenges as well as the complexities and opportunities associated with implementing the European Approach across the diverse national and institutional contexts in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The first draft of the thematic analysis was presented at the PLA session in September 2023. The group of PLA attendees consisted by approximately 30 representatives of different stakeholder groups (including ministries responsible for higher education, quality assurance agencies, higher education institutions (HEIs), stakeholder organisations¹), offered views on the findings, including reflections on the practical experiences with using the European Approach. The analysis incorporates them further in the text.

Sources for the analysis:

The primary source of information for the analysis are the data stored in the Database for External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR).² To start, information on the legal frameworks in 51 higher education systems across the EHEA concerning the adoption of the European Approach was gathered from the EQAR's Knowledge Base section.³ Secondly, data on the 25 reports covering joint programmes was extracted from the Database section. Seven additional reports on joint programmes reviewed using the European Approach have been added to ensure a more comprehensive approach to the analysis. The seven additional reports are expected to be published by NVAO (Netherlands), VLUHR QA and ZeVA on DEQAR in the foreseeable future.

Background information

In the Bucharest Communiqué (April 2012), Ministers for higher education agreed to allow EQAR-registered agencies to operate across the EHEA while complying with national requirements. The ministers further encouraged the development of joint programmes within the EHEA. Enabling recognition of quality assurance decisions on joint and double degree programmes was seen as one of the main tools to support these processes.

¹ The participants list can be found in annex II at p.20 of this document

² A number of reports have been directly collected from either the agencies or their website. EQAR has contacted these agencies, and they are currently in the process of publishing the results of joint programmes procedures with the European Approach into DEQAR. The published EA accreditation reports (by August 2023) can be consulted here <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/european-approach-cases/>

³ EQAR's Knowledge Base provides an updated overview of all EHEA member countries' legal frameworks and fulfillment of QA commitments. Information is collected and updated from each member state <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/country-information/>



These efforts resulted with the development of the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes adopted at the EHEA Ministerial conference in Yerevan in 2015.

The European Approach comprises two main elements: a set of standards and a procedure.⁴ The standards closely align with Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for the Quality Assurance of the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and incorporate the agreed EHEA tools, particularly the EHEA's Qualifications Framework (QF-EHEA) and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

The procedure, which is aligned with the ESG, can be used by any EQAR-registered agency whenever at least one consortium partner requires programme accreditation. In cases where all participating institutions have “self-accrediting” programme rights and only need external QA at institutional level, they may opt to use the standards of the European Approach within their internal QA arrangements.

The aim of the European Approach is to address the challenges posed by national QA criteria and varying accreditation processes in the EHEA. The objective is to implement the European Approach as prescribed without any additional (national) criteria or steps in the procedure.

This advanced vision of seamless connectivity between higher education institutions and QA systems is, however, often hindered with multiple administrative procedures, colliding criteria and different arrangements of academic programmes. Such circumstances could lead to uncertainties for the higher education institutions and potentially, making the planning and organisation of joint programmes particularly challenging. The paper further analyses some of them and offers ideas on overcoming them.

Status quo in 2023

DEQAR data shows that since the European Approach was introduced in 2015, there has been a small increase in the number of external QA procedures. Although some progress is evident in recent years (see Table 1), the number of external QA procedures using the European Approach remains quite low. As more systems move towards institutional level external QA, this might have an impact on the pace of increase of joint programme procedures (though this might be only one mitigating factor).

On a more positive note, the European Approach was employed in two thirds of the total number of international joint programme procedures carried out between 2016 and 2022. It is noteworthy that in some higher education systems, such as Austria, Belgium French Community and Germany, a large number of joint programmes are developed between higher education institutions within the same country, thus there was no need to employ the European Approach. The number of joint national programmes may however indicate an openness within the system for cross-institutional cooperation. It remains to be seen if such collaborations are to extend beyond the borders of the national higher education system.

⁴ See <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/> for the full text.



Year	No. of <u>national joint programme reviews</u>	No. of <u>international joint programme reviews (including EA)</u>	No of <u>EA reviews</u>
2016	5	2	1
2017	5	6	2
2018	7	3	3
2019	10	13	6
2020	27	2	2
2021	16	9	6
2022	5	6	6
2023/08	0	6	6
Total	75	47	32

Table 1. Number of EA procedures of the total joint programmes (JP) carried out within a year (DEQAR data, including 5 reports not yet uploaded, and 5 reports wrongly labelled in DEQAR, August 2023)

The chapters below look further into the state of play and the main challenges and opportunities for using the European Approach from three perspectives – higher education systems, higher education institutions and QA agencies.

Topic 1. Changes in legal frameworks to accommodate the European Approach

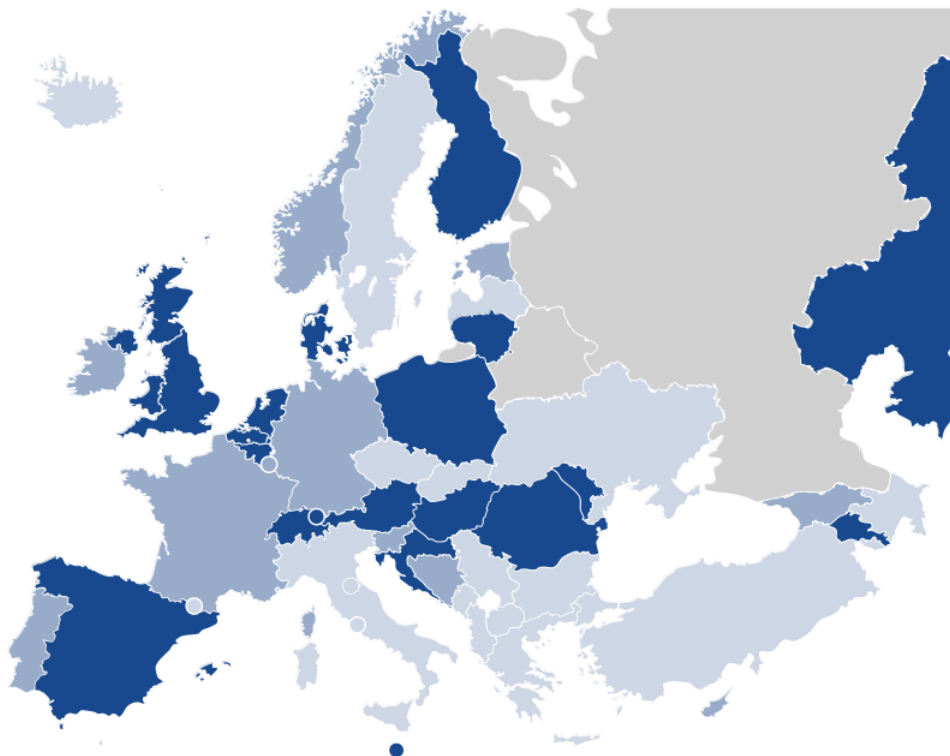
EQAR’s Knowledge Base (consulted in August 2023) shows that, merely 22 out of the 51 EHEA higher education systems⁵ have fully embraced the European Approach and that this methodology may be used by all higher education institutions (see Map 1). Looking at the particularities of the systems, since the adoption of the European Approach in 2015, at least 14 higher education systems that have a requirement for programme level accreditation (Austria, Belgium Flemish Community, Belgium French Community, Croatia, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Malta, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain) have amended their legislation to permit the use of the European Approach by some or all of their higher education institutions. On the other hand, 8 higher education systems where quality assurance is primarily undertaken at institutional level (Armenia, Denmark, Finland, UK Scotland, UK England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and Switzerland) have also endorsed the use of the European Approach by higher education institutions having “self-accrediting rights for programmes” or undertaking QA activities of voluntary nature.

Twelve more countries allow the European Approach to be employed, albeit only for certain institutions or under specific conditions, for example:

⁵ The counting follows the current list of 51 EHEA full (country/HE system) members, thus the above figures include Belgium - Flemish Community, Belgium – French Community and the higher education systems United Kingdom – England, United Kingdom – Scotland, United Kingdom – Wales and Northern Ireland. See: <https://ehea.info/page-full-members>

- In Estonia, the use of the European Approach is possible if the joint programme has previously undergone an assessment by an EQAR-registered agency. The other higher education institution partners have the right to implement programmes in the corresponding study programme group and academic cycle. HAKA, the Estonian national QA body will assess whether the eligibility criteria are met and that no substantial shortcomings have been identified in the assessment report.
- In Georgia, the draft agreement of institutions implementing the joint higher educational programme has to be 'pre-approved' by the national QA body NCEQE who will check the content and implementation of the joint programme, including whether the rules for awarding a joint academic degree and enrolment regulations are met.
- In Greece, joint programmes offered by Greek higher education institutions participating within the European University Alliance are expected to be reviewed following the European Approach, without any additional national criteria. Institutions that are not members of a European University Alliance are however required to undergo the regular programme accreditation for any joint programmes they may offer.

In 17 higher education systems, however, the use of the European Approach is not possible (see countries with light blue in Map 1) as a replacement of compulsory national or regional processes.



Map 1. HE systems where the European Approach for the QA of JP can be used according to the legal framework i.e., by all HEIs (dark blue), by some HEIs or can be used with conditions (medium blue) or by none of the HEIs (light blue).



Considering the uptake of the European Approach in different higher education systems, the DEQAR mapping (see Table 2) shows that the European Approach reviews, expectedly, have been most often employed by higher education institutions within countries where the legal framework makes it possible to replace a national procedure by the European Approach i.e., France (13 HEIs), Germany (12 HEIs), Spain (11 HEIs), Netherlands (6 HEIs), Portugal (5 HEIs), Austria and Belgium Flemish Community (both 4 HEIs).

In this regard, the adoption and recognition of decisions following the European Approach in one system can serve as incentive in the choice of partner institutions.

There have been examples of institutions in countries where the legal framework does not recognise the use of the European Approach (see light blue column in Table 2), being nevertheless able to employ this procedure on an individual, case-by-case agreement with their government or national quality assurance agency. However, such arrangements are exceptional, and do not indicate an openness of the legal framework.

While there are no incentives or mandates for the use of the European Approach by higher education institutions that have no requirement for a programme accreditation, DEQAR data shows that the approach (see Finland and UK) has been successfully employed through their internal quality management system.

<u>EQAR Knowledge Base</u> Legal framework availability of the EA	<u>Higher education system</u>	<u>No. of HEIs in the system with QA report in DEQAR</u>	<u>DEQAR data</u> No. of HEIs with JP reviews	<u>DEQAR data</u> No. of HEIs using EA
EA not available	Albania	4	2	1
EA not available	Andorra	0	0	0
EA not available	Azerbaijan	no data	3	0
EA not available	Bulgaria	49	No data	0
EA not available	Czech Republic	11	3	2
EA not available	Holy See	no data	No data	0
EA not available	Iceland	1	No data	0
EA not available	Italy	17	7	4
EA not available	Latvia	37	0	0
EA not available	Montenegro	7	No data	0
EA not available	North Macedonia	6	No data	1
EA not available	San Marino	no data	0	0
EA not available	Serbia	2	1	1
EA not available	Slovakia	2	No data	0
EA not available	Sweden	39	3	2
EA not available	Turkey	46	0	0
EA not available	Ukraine	17	0	0
Available except for double or multiple degrees	Germany	417	46	12
Available only for some HEIs	Bosnia and Herzegovina	4	2	1



Available only for some HEIs	Cyprus	41	6	0
Available only for some HEIs	Greece	12	6	1
Available only for some HEIs	Ireland	3	2	2
Available only for some HEIs	Luxembourg	3	0	0
Available only for some HEIs	Norway	42	3	3
Available with conditions	Estonia	17	2	1
Available with conditions	France	331	22	13
Available with conditions	Georgia	60	8	0
Available with conditions	Portugal	98	6	5
Available with conditions	Slovenia	45	2	2
Full availability	Armenia*	30	0	0
Available only for some HEIs	Austria	57	11	4
Full availability	Belgium/ Flemish Community	37	4	4
Full availability	Belgium/French Community	114	29	2
Full availability	Croatia	124	3	2
Full availability	Denmark	36	2	2
Full availability	Finland*	38	3	1
Full availability	Hungary	63	2	1
Full availability	Kazakhstan	135	0	0
Full availability	Liechtenstein	3	0	0
Full availability	Lithuania	39	2	1
Full availability	Malta	1	1	1
Full availability	Moldova	17	0	0
Full availability	Netherlands	no data	8	6
Full availability	Poland	370	3	3
Full availability	Romania	87	2	2
Full availability	Spain	751	13	11
Full availability	Switzerland*	56	2	0
Full availability	UK – England	73	3	1
Full availability	UK – Northern Ireland*	2	1	0
Full availability	UK – Wales*	18	0	0
Full availability	UK – Scotland*	10	0	0

Table 2. Number of joint programme procedures, availability and use of European Approach (DEQAR data, August 2023)



The adoption of the European Approach at national level may, however, be challenging. As also highlighted by the participants at the PLA, even when the higher education systems are open for the HEIs to employ the European Approach, other 'surrounding aspects' may affect its implementation. For example, obstacles may be related to the practical aspects in the setting-up of a joint programme in first place (e.g. the differences in the study length and the agreement on the timeline of the joint programme, the form of the degree, the use of foreign teaching language, student admission processes, constraints to the financial or institutional flexibility in establishing such programmes etc). Another aspect is the division of tasks regarding evaluation and accreditation of joint programmes. In some systems, these two activities are separate and different bodies are responsible for different parts of the process. The legislative framework should take in consideration the awarding competences of all of the bodies involved in the process that extend to the remit of joined programmes.

On a more political note, enabling the use of the European approach could be perceived as a delicate trade-off between different policy goals. On one hand, implementing a tool for supporting international collaboration; on the other, maintaining the authority over the QA requirements.

Following the discussions in the PLA group, governments could explore some successful examples and ideas to further the development of joint programmes (and promote the use of the European Approach) such as:

- Providing financial incentives or funding to support higher education institutions offering joint programmes (where countries have adapted their legislation facilitating the use of the European Approach (EA)) (e.g. awarding lump sums that can cover the cost of the accreditation);
- Supporting the development of joint programmes as part of the national strategy for internationalisation;
- Promoting successful examples the use of EA use, such as the existing QA procedures that were carried out and encouraging open discussions about changing the existing policies and processes;
- Gathering insights from HEIs and QA agencies, acknowledge their valuable contributions in the implementation of the EA and provide space for debates and contribution to the improvement of the legislative framework.



Topic 2. The implementation of the European Approach with focus on higher education institutions

Development of joint programmes within the EHEA

Collaborative projects such as joint programmes may develop as a result of a previous cooperation between universities and require a diverse range of expertise in curriculum design, quality assurance, legal frameworks, admissions processes, student guidance, and marketing. The analysis of the 31 consortiums (whose reports are available in DEQAR) offering joint programmes reveals a wide range of disciplines and a large geographical area, covering 34 higher education systems, of which six are non-EHEA. The size of the consortium offering joint degrees ranges from two cooperating institutions⁶ to a joint effort of nine different HEIs⁷.

Traditionally, joint programmes make up a small proportion of the study programmes offered by HEIs. While there is no repository of existing joint programmes across the EHEA, the Erasmus Mundus catalogue reveals the operation of a total of 188 joint programmes at master level, within 36 of the EHEA member countries.⁸

The majority of joint programmes whose review reports are in DEQAR are at the level of the second cycle. This may be explained by a preference of setting up joint programmes for a shorter cycle (pragmatic reasoning) and the available financial incentives supporting such collaborations are through the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master grants. Bachelor programmes only account for 16% of the evaluated programmes in DEQAR, while reviews of joint programmes at Doctoral level account for 4%.

DEQAR data further show that only 0,18% of all reviewed programmes are joint programmes, and only 6% of the 3835 higher education institutions have undergone one or more joint programme accreditation processes (see Table 3), although the figure might be higher given that not all higher education systems require programme level accreditation (see also Table 1). The table below summarises the main DEQAR statistics.

⁶ E.g., the Epitech and the Deutsch-Italienischer Masterstudiengang Rechtswissenschaft from Germany and Italy

⁷ The PoSIG joint programmes by European University of Tirana, Fama College, Sarajevo School of Science and Technology, St. Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje, University for Business and Technology, University of Ljubljana, University of Salzburg, University of Sarajevo and University of Tirana from Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Slovenia and Austria, respectfully.

⁸ The ERASMUS+ 2021 report can be consulted at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ff16650b-7b6e-11ed-9887-01aa75ed71a1>



Key Statistics from DEQAR (until 09-2023)

www.deqar.eu

	Number	Percentage
Total no. of QA Reports in DEQAR	90 252	100%
At institutional level	2934	3,2%
At institutional/programme level	130	0,1%
At programme level	87135	96%
At joint programme level	159	0.18%
No. of HE institutions covered	3835	n/a

Table 3. Key statistics generated from DEQAR data (August 2023)

Review reports of joint programmes in DEQAR cover 231 HEIs within the EHEA and beyond. Most of the HEIs carrying out international joint programmes are based in Germany (30 HEIs), France (20 HEIs), Spain (9 HEIs), Austria (8 HEIs), Netherlands and Italy (both with 7 HEIs). Joint programme reviews with the European Approach are mainly intended and carried out within the EHEA. Expectedly so, the reviews covered HEIs based in 29 of the EHEA members countries, but also HEIs beyond the EHEA (such as Israel, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda and the United States).

In total, 92 HEIs based in the EHEA have undergone a review following the European Approach. The map below showcases their location.

The consulted review reports of joint programmes (reviewed with the European Approach) show that many of the HEIs have an extended experience in developing partnerships and setting up international programmes.





Map 2. HEIs reviewed following the European Approach within EHEA (August 2023). For a full display of each higher education institution consult the map in its dynamic form at: <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/>

The results of the analytical report of the IMPEA project (2020)⁹, several reports of the TPG C group (2019)¹⁰, self-reported studies¹¹ and the insights of the PLA in September 2023 brought about lengthy list of constraints on both systemic and institutional level for the implementation of the European Approach linked to:

- differences in the length of the external QA cycle or validity period;
- misalignment of qualifications across different higher education systems;
- language requirements for the review report and decision in order to conform with national administrative laws;
- lack of clear and structured guidelines on how to start, continue and end the external QA procedure;

⁹ IMPEA Analytical Report, The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint programmes in 2020 <http://impea.online/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Analytical-report.pdf>

¹⁰ Report of the Peer Learning Activity on the European Approach to the accreditation of joint programmes (2019, Limassol) https://www.ehea.info/Upload/TPG_C_QA_RO_MK_PLA_Report.pdf

¹¹ https://eua.eu/images/PS_B_jef_cox.pdf



- discrepancies in how different systems may define joint programmes, and thus the eligibility to use the EA, or differences in the overall purposes of accreditation of joint programmes etc.

On the other hand, the experiences shared in the PLA session regarding the use of the European Approach have also unveiled a multitude of commendable practices such as collaborative management and governance frameworks with partner institutions. These frameworks may encompass jointly appointed senior roles, bilateral steering committees, meetings among university leadership, and cooperative working groups, all designed to provide essential support for the running of joint programme QA procedures. Other commendable practices include the development of streamlined joint strategies to minimise redundant efforts, agreements on core practices for a smooth operation of the internal quality assurance system of the joint programme and agreed communication frameworks and timelines.

Some of the reported practical tools helping HEIs and QA agencies with the use of the European Approach, included the Knowledge Database of EQAR ¹² and the IMPEA toolkit.¹³

Insight into the outcomes of a joint programme reviews following the European Approach

According to the review reports in DEQAR, generally outcomes of a joint programme accreditation are positive (see Figure 1). They, however, might have a number of conditional accreditation requirements.

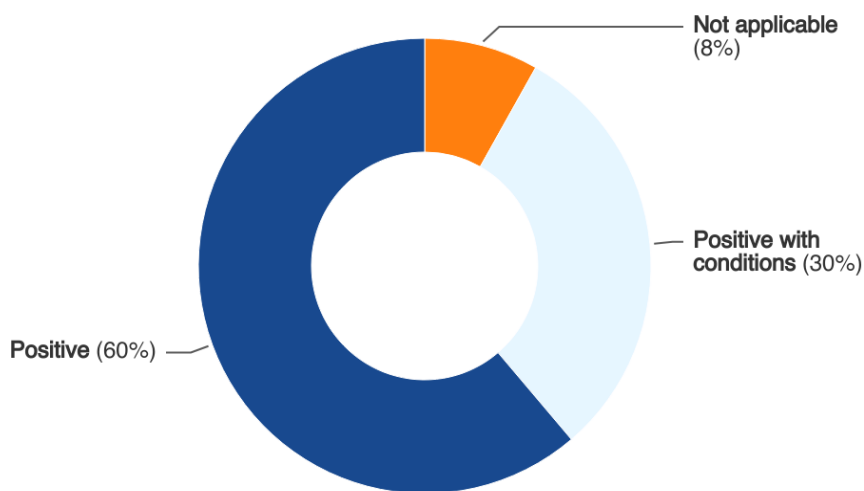


Figure 1: Outcomes of a joint programme accreditation with the European Approach (August 2023)

The review reports that resulted in a positive decision, but with conditions, indicate that some of the joint programmes may have some deficiencies related to e.g., effectively integrating elective courses for market relevance, in providing bridging courses for technical subjects before the start

¹² <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/national-implementation/>

¹³ <https://impea.eu/>

of modules, in implementing fair collaborative selection procedures of student applicants, in ensuring better alignment of the teaching schedule with the aims of the course, in publishing examination regulations for more transparency or in adjusting the curriculum for language proficiency. Brief analysis of the conditions shows that they are not related to the agreed standards of the European Approach (part B, standard 1 to 9), but rather to the details of the joint programme set up. It was out of the scope of the study to explore whether these conditions may be related to the requirements of the national QA frameworks, but should this be the case, it could be argued that the European Approach is less burdensome than the national requirements.



Topic 3. The implementation of the European Approach with focus on quality assurance agencies

Quality Assurance of joint programmes

According to the review reports provided by agencies contributing to DEQAR (August 2023), only 19 of 55 quality assurance agencies have reviewed a joint programme at some point. Agencies with the highest number of reviews of joint programmes are based in Germany (ASIIN, AQAS), Belgium French Community (AEQES), Cyprus (CYQAA) and Austria (AQ Austria). The low number of QA agencies reviewing joint programmes could be due to several factors such as legal constraints for performing such reviews, lack of requests for evaluating joined programmes, no priority in expanding the QA portfolio, financial and human resources constraints etc.

The table below showcases all of the agencies that have implemented the European Approach and puts into perspective the total number of joined programme reviews vis-a-vis the number of joined programme reviews following the European Approach.

QA agency	Number of national JP reviews	Number of JP evaluated with the EA	Total number of JP reviews
ACCUA (ES)	0	1	1
ACQUIN (DE)	0	1	1
AEQES (BE)	55	0	55
AHPGS (DE)	2	0	2
AQ Austria (AU)	6	2	8
AQAS (DE)	0	7	7
AQU (ES)	0	2	2
ASHE (HR)	0	1	1
ASIIN (DE)	41	24	65
CYQAA (CY)	9	2	11
EAEVE (AU)	0	2	2
HCERES (FR)	0	2	2
NCEQE (GE)	5	0	5
NVAO (FL)	0	4	4
NVAO (NL)	No data	4	No data
SQAA (SL)	1	0	1
Unibasq (ES)	0	3	3
VLUHR QA (BE)	0	3	3
ZEVA (DE)	0	2	2
Total	127	58	n/a

Table 5. EQAR-registered agency's review of joint programmes and of joint programmes with the European Approach

Implementation of the European Approach

While not all registered agencies carry out joint programme reviews, the data show that those that do, have some experience with using the European Approach. This being said, 15 out of 19



QA agencies that carry out joint programme reviews, have employed the European Approach (see Table 5).

The highest share of joint programme reviews with the European Approach has been carried out by ASIIN (24 reviews), NVAO FL & NVAO NL (8 reviews) and AQAS (7 reviews). Although the number is relatively low in comparison with the total number of reviews carried out by these agencies, the increase in application of the procedure may show a specialisation of these agencies in the use of the European Approach (see Table 3).

Looking further into the data, when choosing a QA agency for the review of a joint programme with the European Approach, higher education institutions have clear preference for agencies based within one of the countries involved in the programme consortium; no consortia chose an agency from a third country.

Several factors could influence the preparedness of the quality assurance agencies in evaluating and accrediting joint programs and use the European Approach. As argued before, flexible legislation that permits HEIs to collaborate and develop joint programmes and allows agencies to conduct reviews following the European Approach is important. This regulatory environment fosters HEIs partnerships and development of joint programs by reducing bureaucratic hurdles and encouraging innovation; hence creating demand for such reviews. Secondly, legislation that supports cross-border quality assurance and stimulates collaboration at the European level is another considerable factor¹⁴. Such policies not only ensure that joint programs meet the same standards across different countries but also promote internationalisation, cooperation and trust between quality assurance agencies and higher education systems. Lastly, in competitive quality assurance systems where multiple agencies operate simultaneously, there is a greater propensity for agencies to experiment with developing different methodologies and approaches, including evaluation of joined programmes and implementation of the European Approach.

Insight into the outcomes of the reviews following the European Approach

Little over half of the joint programme procedures are voluntary in nature i.e., a review that did not lead to a recognition of the decision as a replacement of the mandatory external QA procedure. This is not surprising, taking in consideration that more than half of the higher education systems in the EHEA do not recognise decisions made by cross-border/foreign agencies as part of the national external QA requirements or recognise them under own framework/requirements (see more in IMINQA PLA Thematic Analysis on Cross-Border Quality Assurance and Quality Assurance of Transnational Education)¹⁵.

While generally outcomes of a joint programme accreditation are positive (see Figure 1), they might come with a number of conditional accreditation requirements as outlined in Topic 2 of this

¹⁴ According to EQAR's map for higher education system openness to cross border QA, all of the countries where the QA agencies with the highest number of joined programme reviews are based at, score at the highest level. See: <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/cross-border-qa/mapping-system-openness-to-cbqa/>

¹⁵ Thematic Analysis on Cross-Border Quality Assurance and Quality Assurance of Transnational Education. See: https://ehea.info/Upload/PreparatoryThematicAnalysis_PLA2_IMINQA_new.pdf



analysis. While conditional requirements and decisions could serve for enhancement purposes of the quality of the joined programmes, it could also create additional burden in the recognition of the decision in systems in which there is no such outcome. Similar dilemmas may also occur with reviews conducted in systems in which the QA agency does not take a final decision or in which the review does not result with formal decision.

Both insights from the PLA group discussions and from the IMPEA study (2020), showcase that the workload of a review following the European Approach is considered comparable or slightly higher than an ordinary joint programme review, both for HEIs and QA agencies.

Some of the challenges in the implementation of the European Approach by agencies highlighted by the PLA participants were:

- access to adequate, comprehensive and reliable information regarding particular aspects of the higher education systems in which the partner institutions are based in;
- conflicting criteria and mismatched timelines between national quality assurance systems (especially when the review is undertaken jointly by two or more QA agencies);
- differences between external QA approaches, particularly in systems that are more accountability focused versus those that are more enhancement focused - for both HEIs and QA agencies, finding a balance between the two approaches was found to be difficult in some cases.
- restrictions on staff of publicly funded agencies in conducting activities outside the national QA framework

Reflections from participants experienced with the European Approach for quality assurance of joint programs highlight several key insights. Firstly, it is essential to prepare thoroughly before starting the review procedure, considering all details of the process and being open to a learning experience. Effective communication with the partner higher education institutions and other QA agencies prove crucial in overcoming cultural, practical, and political differences. Additionally, participants emphasised the importance of meticulously preparing the review process, taking into account resources, public procurement procedures, language issues, duration of site visits, time allocated for interviews, selection of interviewees, reporting matters, and additional workload.



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Annex I: Terminology¹⁶

Joint programmes typically feature a jointly developed and integrated curriculum and agreed-on credit recognition. Upon completion joint programmes may take the form of double/multiple degrees, joint degrees or joint qualification.

Joint degree: A single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme.

Multiple degree: Separate degrees awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme attesting to the successful completion of this programme. (If two degrees are awarded by two institutions, this is a 'double degree').

¹⁶ Source: https://impea.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/european_approach_background-2015.pdf



Annex II: Participants PLA 3 (13/09/2023)

Country	Ministry/organisation
Malta	MFHEA
Romania	ARACIS
Greece	HAHE
Poland	Ministry
Bulgaria	NEEA
Slovenia	NAKVIS
Spain	UNIBASQ
Iceland	Ministry
Ireland	QQI
France	Hcéres
Armenia	National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation
Sweden	ÜKA
Sweden	ÜKA
Germany	AQAS
The Netherlands	HEI (University of Groningen)
Belgium	HEI (CReF GT Qualité / ULiège)
Belgium	HEI (KULeuven)
Czech Republic	Ministry
Belgium	Ministry of Education and Training
Italy	ANVUR
Italy	ANVUR
Austria	AQ Austria
Belgium	ESU
Belgium	EQAR
Belgium	EQAR
Belgium	VLUHR QA
Belgium	VLUHR QA
Belgium	EQAR
Belgium	EQAR
Belgium	EQAR
Belgium	ENQA
Belgium	EUA
	BFUG secretariat
	European Commission

